



Issues –2-19

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## IN THE BEGINNING...YOUR PAIN

Nothing could have prepared you for this! The raw pain, the frayed nerve endings, the sense of unreality. Bereavement shoves you into a surreal new world, issues your membership in an elite club of wounded souls.

You may wonder in the early days just exactly how you are going to survive this devastating blow. The answer? By breathing. That's all you need to know in the beginning... just keep on breathing and some time will pass, and you will survive, day-by-day. The process will take care of the rest.

Grief takes time, and we each take our own needed amount of it. There is no timetable, and contrary to what you may have believed before, there is no neat orderly progression through the "stages of grief".

That being said, grief is a process, and there is only one way to make it through that process... directly. You cannot avoid grief or go around it. You live through it and it eventually stops. Directly through the hell known as grief is the most direct route to peaceful acceptance... and back to life.

You may be tempted in the beginning to avoid the pain whatever way you can... drugs, alcohol, overeating, excessive diversions. Drugs and alcohol may numb the pain temporarily, but this short-term relief puts you at grave risk for continued substance abuse. And the reality is, self-medication prevents the healthy resolution of grief. It may help you escape for a short while, but it impairs the bereavement process overall.

Grief is painful... but it's supposed to be! Dealing with the pain of grief directly, and naturally, is the best way to resolve it. Are you using short-term fixes or escapes to deal with your grief?

Alcohol or drugs, excessive reading or TV watching, overeating, excessive shopping or exercise, working too much. Admit it to yourself and commit to ridding yourself of these destructive excessive habits which sabotage the normal grief process. They make things more difficult in the long run.

BACK TO LIFE !

YOUR PERSONAL GUIDEBOOK TO GRIEF RECOVERY

[www.recover-from-grief.com](http://www.recover-from-grief.com)



## Quotes of the Month

*“The journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step”*

*(Chinese Proverb)*

*“Do all you can, with what you have, in the time you have, in the place where you are.”*

*(Nkosi Johnson)*

*Born with HIV and died when he was 12 years old.*

*“Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing there is a field. I'll meet you there.”*

*(Rumi)*

## Touchstone

### Postcards-by

#### Deacon Dan McGrath

(Note: My wife died Oct. 23, 2015 these postcard reflection were written following her death)

When I was a small boy, I went with my sisters to see the movie “Alice in Wonderland.” I had nightmares for days afterwards.

There was something about going down a rabbit hole and being stuck in a strange place that terrified me. To this day I don’t like that story and there is something about that rabbit hole that still frightens me.

One of the metaphors that has been used to describe grief after the loss of a loved one is feeling as if you have fallen down a deep, dark hole having no idea how to find your way back to normal again. For me this was an understatement to say the least. The fear and anxiety I had as a child responding to a movie seemed to be with me all over again though far more severe and painful.

In her book, “Rising Strong,” Brene Brown talks about this experience and its place in healing:

*“Day two, or whatever that middle space is for your own process, is when you’re in the dark. The door has closed behind you. You’re too far in to turn around and not close enough to the end to see the light. It’s not only a dark and vulnerable time, but also one that’s often turbulent. People find all kinds of creative ways to resist the dark. What sucks about day two is it’s a non-negotiable part of the process. Experience and success don’t give you easy passage through. They only grant you a little grace, a grace that whispers. This is part of the process. Stay the course. The middle is messy but it’s also where the magic happens.”*

My late wife, Carol, loved the “Alice in Wonderland” story. Like Alice, Carol was highly imaginative and creative. She was never the sort who feared to go down the rabbit hole where she would find new worlds of extraordinary adventures. Her bravery to move forward, no matter what the unknown might bring, was something that I and others admired about her.

Reflecting to the last days of Carol’s illness I realized that she wanted her suffering to be over; that she too

was in the rabbit hole. Like Alice, Carol always had the courage to face whatever her story would bring. Even then she knew that just ahead was where the light and magic would happen. This has brought me great comfort despite my pain.

Falling down and getting lost in the darkness of the rabbit hole are hard images of grief. Grief itself is hard. Sorrow seems to sap our souls of strength and resolve. But there is no way around it. Staying the course has been terrifying but ultimately given me comfort and grace filled moments. Stay the course. In the end, in the messiness of it all, is where the “magic,” the healing, happens.

## Touchstone

### Take care of your body

In the beginning, you may be so preoccupied with your grief and pain that you neglect the basic activities of daily living. You may have to remind yourself to bathe, do the laundry, eat and even command yourself to go to bed at night. It will get better as time goes on.

You may have to force yourself to eat in the beginning, but it is important that you do take care of that body. You might not really care right now, but you will need it later.

**Get some exercise**, even a short walk in the evening will help clear your mind and stave off depression. Fill the kitchen with healthy foods. Cheeses, yogurt, cereals, fruits and salads will be fairly easy for you to tolerate and provide some good nutrition. Grief expends a lot of energy. Taking care of your health will help to ease you through the grief.

**Taking care of your basic hygiene** and household chores is important to help you maintain your dignity. It will not be easy at first. Nothing seems important compared to the death of your loved one. But it is important that you keep on with your daily routine, keep yourself and your environment clean, and take care of your body. These tasks will provide some much needed structure to your day. And it gives you something you can actually have control over! Day-to-day life will get easier, you can count on it. **You will survive. Give yourself permission to live!**

"You're entirely bonkers.  
But I'll tell you a secret.  
All the best people are."

—Lewis Carroll



**Touchstone**  
**Book of the Month Suggestion**

**When Things Fall Apart**  
***Heart Advice for Difficult Times***

PEMA CHÖDRÖN

*Fear is a natural reaction to moving closer to the truth.*

EMBARKING on the spiritual journey is like getting into a very small boat and setting out on the ocean to search for unknown lands. With wholehearted practice comes inspiration, but sooner or later we will also encounter fear. For all we know, when we get to the horizon, we are going to drop off the edge of the world. Like all explorers, we are drawn to discover what's waiting out there without knowing yet if we have the courage to face it.

**Touchstone**  
**Signs & Symptoms of Grief**

By Jennie Wright, RN, GC-C Registered Nurse Certified Grief Counselor

In the beginning, bereavement can subject you to a bewildering array of symptoms. Some of them may be really scary, cause high anxiety, and even cause you to doubt your own sanity!

It's a wonder you don't "lose it" permanently, given the trauma to your psyche this tragic event has caused. Just know that most anything you experience is a normal occurrence during grief. No, you are not going crazy... just grieving. You may feel helpless and wonder if you can survive alone without your loved one. Just remember that you managed okay before he or she entered your life, and, although it's not going to be easy, you will manage.

You may feel overwhelmed at first, but this will pass. Hang in there.

Of course, you will have periods of intense sadness. It's okay to cry at these times, encouraged, even. Crying does release some of the pent-up emotions of grief. It's okay to cry alone sometimes, but it will help you more to find someone who will let you cry in front of them, and offer you support when it happens.

This is not a time to worry about the effects of your emotional outpouring on others. Don't worry that it might be undignified, or embarrassing, or inappropriate. Crying is a satisfying release and a direct route through bereavement... it is not a sign of weakness, but of wisdom.

Get ready for the ultimate emotional roller-coaster ride of your life! As long as your grief is "dynamic", always changing, moving, unpredictable, and fluid, it is progressing normally. Grief is a moving, growing, breathing thing, whose main purpose, it seems, is to keep you off balance. Just when you think you have reached and conquered a "stage" of grief, your pain comes back 10-fold to smack you down. Believe it or not, that's okay. It's only when you get stuck, when your grief stagnates and stalls out... when you go through weeks and months where you don't feel you are progressing; that's when things have gone awry.

Have you experienced some of these signs or symptoms? Exhaustion or restlessness, body aches and pains, insomnia or over-sleeping, appetite disturbances, headaches, anxiety-related chest pressure or shortness of breath, spiritual or religious doubts, relief (and guilt), helplessness, forgetfulness, unable to concentrate, irritable, short tempered, can't remember things about your lost one, afraid you will forget him or her, imagining that you hear, feel, smell your beloved, or see her in a crowd, carrying around a memento of him or her, feeling that he or she "is with you" or "talks to you" sometimes, obsessed with thoughts of your dear one, vivid dreams of him or her, or dreaming they are still alive.

**Don't panic!**

**These are all normal reactions during grief!**



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### Touchstone

#### **Book Suggestions**

- ⇒ Healing After Loss-Martha Witmore Hickman
- ⇒ When Things Fall Apart-Pema Chodron
- ⇒ Rising Strong-Brene Brown
- ⇒ Grief One Day at a Time-Alan Wolfelt

### Touchstone

#### **Website Suggestions**

- ⇒ [www.postcardreflection.blogspot.com](http://www.postcardreflection.blogspot.com)
- ⇒ [www.recover-from-grief.com](http://www.recover-from-grief.com)
- ⇒ [www.mirandamacpherson.com](http://www.mirandamacpherson.com)
- ⇒ [www.helpguide.org/articles/grief-loss/coping-with-grief-and-loss](http://www.helpguide.org/articles/grief-loss/coping-with-grief-and-loss)

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