



Issues -6-19

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Quotes of the Month

“Our grief, though naturally difficult, is a source of energy within us. When we outwardly mourn, we unleash this amazing healing force.”
Alan Wolfelt

“Never be afraid to fall apart, because it is an opportunity to rebuild yourself the way you wish you had been all along.”
Rae Smith

“Keep on going, and the chances are that you will stumble on something, perhaps when you are least expecting it. I never heard of anyone ever stumbling on something sitting down.”
Charles F. Kettering

Touchstone—Sharing Grief

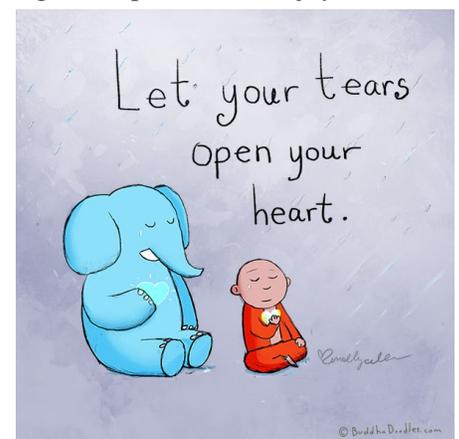
BY MADISYN TAYLOR—www.dailyom.com

Grief is part of the human experience, and sharing our vulnerability helps create truly close bonds.

When we experience something that causes us to feel shock and sadness, we may feel the urge to withdraw from life. It may seem like remaining withdrawn will keep us protected from the world, but during these times it is important to reach out to those trusted and precious people who care about us the most. Even with our best information and reasoning, we never know when someone else's experience or perspective can give us additional information that we need. The universe speaks to us through many channels, and when we open ourselves up to receive its messages, we also receive nurturing care from a loving partner in life's journey.

Grief is part of the human experience, and sharing our vulnerability is what creates truly close bonds in our relationships. Opening ourselves up in this way gets to the core of our being, past all of our defenses and prejudices. When life seems to crack the outer shell of our world, we are both raw and fresh at the same time. It is then that we discover who is truly willing to walk with us through life. We also see that some of those sent to us may not be the ones we expected to see. Regardless, we learn to trust in the universe, in others, in our own strength and resilience, and in the wisdom of life itself.

Sharing grief allows us to ease our burden by letting someone else help carry it. This helps us process our own inner thoughts and feelings through the filter of a trusted and beloved someone. We may feel guilty or selfish, as if we are unloading on someone who has their own challenges. Although, if we think about it, we know we would do the same for them, and their protests would seem pointless. Remember that not sharing feelings with others denies them the opportunity to feel. We may be the messenger sent by the universe for their benefit, and it is on this mission that we have been sent. By sharing our hopes and fears, joys and pains with another person, we accept the universe's gifts of wisdom and loving care.



Touchstone

Postcards-by

Deacon Dan McGrath

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

Recently, a commercial showed a new Cadillac driving slowly through a downtown area while people look on. At the end a spokesperson says, “*Those who dare...dare greatly!*” The phrase “daring greatly” actually comes from a speech that Theodore Roosevelt made in April 1910, titled “*The Man in the Arena.*”

“It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly ...who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly.”

It is hard for me to get my head around the reality that Carol has been dead for six months. It seems like it was just the other day that I was filling out forms, tracking the people who were coming in and out of our house to care for her, making sure she was comfortable and her medications were being taken on time, along with the everyday care required as she became less and less capable.

I am a “checklist” kind of person, and Carol and I had been through so many health episodes in the past that at first I felt that this stroke was just another bump in the road. She would recover, with some more health residue to deal with, but as in the past she and we would survive this.

In many ways, we both got into the arena to fight knowing there would be falls. I thought that, as in the past, we would get up to fight on again. But the stroke was too much to overcome, and Carol died. I was not prepared for this kind of ending, and for a while after Carol died, I was my own worst critic and felt that I had failed in her care. For me, being Carol’s caregiver was the hardest and best job I ever had. Yet so much of the time was spent reacting to situations as they arose, sometimes prepared (go to checklist)... sometimes not (what do I do now?)

As time went on, I felt that things were out of control most of the time. Having family, friends and caregivers around helped, but in the end the caregiving really did overwhelm me. Then bearing the weight of grief after Carol died only compounded my feelings of failure and loss. I wish I could say that things are better, but to be honest, they really are not. I still struggle every day and it’s hard to keep moving forward.

One Sunday at mass, as I sat in the back row, I started looking around at all those in front of me. I was overwhelmed by how many stories of loss I could connect with. Over my many years as a pastoral administrator, I have been privileged and honored to walk with many people as they have dealt with death and loss. Husbands, wives, sons and daughters, grandparents, brothers and sisters...the list of connecting stories of those in front of me went on and on. It occurred to me, sitting in the back row, looking out at all who had gathered there on a Sunday, that the great equalizer and connector for all of us is the stories of our loss. It is also within those stories where we hope to find the courage to get back up and move forward.

Bene’ Brown wrote in her book, “*Rising Strong.*” “*We wade into the brackish delta with open hearts and minds because we’ve come to learn that the wisdom in the stories of our falls make us braver.*”

Another favorite author of mine, Joseph Campbell, said it this way: “*It is by going down into the abyss that we recover the treasures of life. Where you stumble...there lies your treasure.*”

Ram Dass said it best for me: “*We’re all just walking each other home.*”

Getting into the arena with death is hard, and in the end, we all fall and fail. But as I looked around the church that Sunday I came to realize that although grief never ends, it is survivable. So many of us have gotten back up and continue to move forward. I thank you for your faith and hope, but most of all for daring greatly to survive. I’m in good company.

Touchstone-Guilt

“Make the most of your regrets; never smother your sorrow, but tend and cherish it till it comes to have a separate and integral interest. To regret deeply is to live afresh.” ~Henry David Thoreau

Guilt is another strong emotion that is almost always woven into the rich tapestry of bereavement. And, like anger, you might not even be aware that it is there! Why would you suffer from guilt if you are well aware that you didn't actually cause the death?

There are two main things that may cause regret or guilt during bereavement:

*Guilt that you didn't do enough or do the right things to prevent the death or suffering in your loved one.

*Guilt that you didn't "finish business" with your loved one before they died.



First, you may feel guilty that something you did or didn't do contributed to the death or pain your loved one suffered. You may feel that you:

- *Should have taken symptoms more seriously.*
- *Should have taken them to the doctor or hospital sooner.*
- *Should not have allowed the operation.*
- *Should have done more to alleviate their pain.*
- *Should have intervened or changed the medical care being given.*
- *Should not have allowed them to go to the event where the accident occurred.*
- *Should have done something that would have prevented the accident.*

The list goes on and on... What ifs... Could haves... Should haves... If only you could turn back the clock!

It's perfectly normal in your grief to have regrets or feel guilty about the death of your loved one. There is a remedy for this. **Read on.**

Secondly, you may feel guilty about "unfinished business" with your loved one. This can be simple, or quite a complicated issue. You may regret that you:

- *Didn't get a chance to say goodbye.*
- *Weren't with them when they died.*
- *Didn't say "I love you" before you parted for the last time.*
- *Didn't forgive him or her for something they did. *Didn't make up from an argument before they died. *Never said things to them that you should have. *Weren't good or kind enough to them.*
- *Had some negative feelings or judgments about him or her.*
- *Actually feel relieved that a long illness or conflicted relationship has ended in death.*

Any of this sound familiar?

What to do about all this regret and guilt? You have enough pain and devastation without adding to it with guilty feelings, so guilt must eventually be dealt with.

There are two steps you can take in dealing with guilt during your bereavement:

- *Reality testing
- *Forgiving yourself

The first step is to "reality test" your guilt. Most guilt is irrational, and doesn't hold up under reality testing. And this is how it's done: **First** figure out exactly how you think you "wronged" your lost beloved. Example: "I should not have let her go to the party". Next, try to figure out exactly how what you did caused the death. Did the fact that you let her

go actually cause her death? No, it didn't. The reality is that the death occurred totally separate from your decision, and is unrelated. The reality is that you did nothing wrong, nothing at all to cause the death. You have no logical reason to feel guilty. That's reality testing.

Another example: "I should have made him quit smoking years ago". Who's decision was it to keep on smoking, and who ultimately was the cause of the illness and death? It was not your decision. You did not cause his death. His own decision to continue with an unhealthy habit did. That's the reality of it. Once again, reality testing releases you from true guilt.

FORGIVENESS

The second part of the release of regret and self-guilt is forgiveness. This is necessary when it becomes clear to you that you really did in some way cause the death or increase the pain/suffering of your loved one. The guilt is real to some degree. In cases like this, you may become mired in a complicated grief, and may well need professional counseling in order to sort it all out and release the heavy burdens of your guilt. Just remember that no matter how responsible you may have been in causing the death, every life deserves to be salvaged. And you are still alive. Whether you ultimately need psychotherapy or decide to "go it alone", the remedy for genuine guilt is forgiveness.

When you are ready, ask for forgiveness from your lost loved one. Ask them to understand that you are only human and you have limitations. **You did the best you could under the circumstances.** There really was little you could have done differently without the benefit of a crystal ball.

Acknowledge the guilt, realize how unreasonable and non-productive it is, and then let it go.

A word of warning here: Don't ask for forgiveness either for yourself, or forgive your loved one, until you are truly ready for it. If you try to force it too early, the act of forgiveness will not be sincere, and the whole exercise will only increase your frustration. Give it plenty of time. When the time is right, you will be able to sincerely forgive yourself or others.

Note: If over time, you find your guilty feelings increasing rather than decreasing, you are obsessing about it, or you are just consumed with guilt, please seek out professional counseling. You will not be able to heal from this on your own.



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Book Suggestions

- ⇒ A Grace Disguised-*How the Soul Grows Through Loss*, Jerry Sittser
- ⇒ When Breath Becomes Air, Paul Kalanithi
- ⇒ My Grandfathers Blessings, Rachel Naomi Remen M.D.

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Website Suggestions

- ⇒ www.postcardreflection.blogspot.com
- ⇒ www.griefnet.org/
- ⇒ www.dailyom.com

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