



Issues -11-20

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**Check out our updated website:**

[www.seniorsolutionsmontana.com](http://www.seniorsolutionsmontana.com)

The Bereavement Link has all the past Touchstone Issues...you can download and send to a friend.

## Quotes of the Month

*"Whenever we are between here and there, whenever one thing has ended and we're waiting for the next to thing to begin, whenever we're tempted to distract ourselves or look for and escape route, we can instead let ourselves be open, curious, tentative, vulnerable."*  
(Pema Chodron)

*"Ever tired. Ever failed, No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better."*  
(Samuel Beckett)

*It is a sobering thought that the finest act of love you can perform is not an act of service but an act of contemplation, of seeing. When you serve people, you help, support, comfort, alleviate pain. When you see them in their inner beauty and goodness, you transform and create."*  
(Anthony de Mello SJ)

## Touchstone

### SAYING GOODBYE “

*The world is round and the place which may seem like the end may also be the beginning.” ~Ivy Baker Priest*

Are you tired of grieving? \* Are you ready to get your life back? Do you want your freedom? Is it time for a final farewell? Most people are not ready for this step until at least a year has passed since the death. And the exact time cannot be pinpointed, either. Don't even consider this step toward freedom from bereavement until the time is right, or it won't work. And only YOU will know when you are truly ready for it.

### PURPOSES FOR THE GOODBYE LETTER:

\*Take care of unfinished business with your lost loved one. \*Say things to him or her that you always wanted to say but never did. \*Forgive him or her. \*Apologize for things you did wrong. \*Ask for a blessing from him or her to get on with your life.

### WHAT TO WRITE?

It is best in an exercise like this to be honest, and address both the good and the bad in your relationship. Here are some things you might want to say in your goodbye letter to your lost loved one:

**THE GOOD:** \*I loved you for... \*These things I miss the most about you... \*Thanks for... \*I appreciated... \*I was so proud of you for... \*I will never forget...

**THE BAD:** \*Things I don't miss about you... \*I was ashamed of you for... \*I wish this could've been different or better in our relationship... \*I know that some of the problem was MY fault... \*But part of it was YOUR fault, too...

**REGRETS:** \*Things I wish I had (or hadn't) said to you... \*Things I wish I had (or hadn't) done to you... \*I am sad because I have had to let go of this dream because you died...

**COMPLETE YOUR LETTER:** \*I love you and miss you, but I have to let you go now. \*Please give me your blessing as I return to my life without you. \*Goodbye.

A word about forgiveness: When you truly forgive someone (in any situation), you don't condone their behavior, you are simply ceasing to feel resentment against the offender for it. You are done with the pain the wrong caused you, and you are releasing the resentment.

Forgiveness has nothing to do with the other person. It has everything to do with YOU. And sincere forgiveness will set you free.

**NOW WHERE DO I MAIL IT?** Of course, you can't. But your letter does need to be "delivered". Most grief counselors agree that the most effective way to do this is by reading it aloud in the presence of another person. This method lends an air of finality and closure, and somehow makes it more "official". Make sure the "witness" you choose is safe and can be trusted with this most private part of you. Not someone emotionally involved, like a close friend or family member. A good choice would be an impartial counselor or clergyman. If you find that you just cannot read your letter to someone else, consider these alternatives, but remember to read the letter OUT LOUD to your loved one. (This is important): \*Make a trip to the cemetery or site of the scattering of ashes. Read the letter out loud to your lost one. \*Go to a peaceful and private outdoor setting. Read it to the sky. \*After the reading, burn it and send smoke signals to your beloved. \*Read it out loud then bury it in the good earth. Ashes to ashes.

BACK TO LIFE ! YOUR PERSONAL GUIDEBOOK TO GRIEF RECOVERY

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## Touchstone

*Postcards-by-Deacon Dan McGrath*

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

Fall was Carol's favorite time of year. When we used to travel to Missoula to see her doctor, we'd always stop on Higgins Street to pick up big maple leaves that were in their full fall colors as they fell onto the ground. She would bring them home and press them between old newspapers until they dried out.

It is interesting that we use the word "turn" to describe the leaves during the fall. The fact is, they really don't turn a different color. Because there's less light during the day, chlorophyll breaks down and the green color disappears, then the yellow to orange colors become visible and give the leaves part of their fall splendor. In short, the colors were always there, but because the green is so dominant during the summer, it hides the other colors and we can't see them.

Grief and recovery are a lot like leaves. Following

death, grief seems to dominate every thought and every place that you are in life. The only color you can see and feel is seen through the fog of despair and hopelessness.

During Carol's long illness I found grief hard to see most of the time. Busy with caregiving and checklists, I denied that death was coming, always thinking that we would make it through this setback one more time. But Carol's death knocked me to the ground.

I came across an anonymous saying the other day. "*I believe the hardest part of healing after you've lost someone you love, is to recover the 'you' that went away with them.*"

At this stage of my journey with grief I find this to be so true. After forty-six years of Dan and Carol, or Carol and Dan, it's hard to get my head around just "Dan." There are days when he seems so foreign to me. It's like coming home and finding a new person living in your house that you have never met, let alone invited to stay. But stay he will. Needless to say the phrase "beside myself" has new meaning and feeling these days.

Leaves turning in the fall is a good metaphor to reflect on these days as I continue my healing journey since Carol's death. Sitting in the quiet sanctuary of my deck each morning, I consider the idea that the green, dominant color of grief seems to be the only feeling following the death of a loved one. It holds hostage every thought, space and situation.

But as I look at all the colors of the East Ridge mountain range, I'm reminded that within the dominant feeling of grief also lies the beauty of the true remaining colors of my life. Within the darkness of grief, we can begin to allow the beauty of ourselves to blossom forward.

If we lean in and examine our surroundings, we begin to see, within grief, the colors of recovery and restoration. While examining my life I have found the grace of a loving and caring family, a kind community, new friends who have reached out to me and new relationships that I have discovered in caring and reaching out to others with support and kindness.

Within the first year after Carol died, I spent many hours reflecting on how to continue to move forward in my life. I have often been asked what I plan to do. As we were talking about the future a few weeks ago, my therapist mentioned that what I was reflecting on sounded more like “vocation” rather than “what I am going to do next.”

Quaker Parker Palmer wrote in his book, *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*,

*“The word vocation itself is rooted in the Latin for ‘voice.’ Vocation does not mean a goal that I pursue. It means a calling that I hear.”*

Deacon Dan and a “Postcard from Carol”

### Touchstone

#### Using Defense Mechanisms in Grief

Defense mechanisms refer to behaviors used to protect oneself from unpleasant thoughts and emotions like guilt, anger, shame, and jealousy. Some people find these yucky emotions so unacceptable that they will unconsciously employ defense mechanisms to prevent themselves from ever having to acknowledge or experience them.

Sigmund Freud first proposed the concept of ‘defense mechanisms’ as an element of his influential theory of personality. For those of you who took Psych 101, think back to the Id, Ego, and Superego in which all elements, with the exception of the ego, reside in the unconscious. Since their introduction, the concept of defense mechanisms has been expanded quite a bit, and they are still used today to try to understand certain behavioral patterns. Defense mechanisms are common, we all use them from time to time, often without realizing. Let’s take a look at a few common defense mechanisms to see if any look familiar to you.

**Denial:** Denial is used to avoid acknowledging an unpleasant truth or reality; usually, because the reality is painful or threatening. In grief, we often hear ‘denial’ mentioned in the context of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross’ Five Stages of Grief. However, there is no end to the ways that a person can use denial in their grief. For example, by saying and believing things like – “I don’t need help.” “I’m fine.” “I don’t have a problem.” “Nothing needs to change” or “I’m over it.”

**Regression:** Who hasn’t had a good grief temper tantrum? I know I have. When a person uses regression they revert to an earlier stage of development and display what might look like immature and insecure behavior. A person engaging in regression in their grief might shut down or withdraw, become clingy with family and friends, or act childish.

**Projection:** Projection is when a person has thoughts and feelings that they believe are unacceptable, so instead of acknowledging them, they attribute them to someone else. For example, let’s say I’m mad at my husband, but I don’t want to admit that I’m mad so instead I project my feelings onto him by saying, “I know you’re mad at me. Why are you mad at me?”

**Displacement:** Displacement is when a person has thoughts and emotions towards someone or something, but instead of directing them towards the appropriate source, they take them out on another person or object. This defense mechanism is often used when a person is unable to express their emotions towards the actual source because it would be ineffectual or have negative consequences. Quite often grieving people have very strong feelings towards things like faith, illness, death, grief, the person who died, or the person they blame for the death. In many of these instances, they can’t take their emotions out on the source, so instead, they displace them onto someone else.

**Intellectualization:** When a person is confronted with painful or frightening emotions, they might try to intellectualize them, rather than actually experience them. In this way, they avoid making contact with their feelings by examining them from an arm’s length away.

**Undoing:** When a person has behaved negatively towards someone or had unpleasant thoughts about that person, they may feel guilt. Afterward, they may try and undo their actions by engaging in opposite actions or thoughts. For example, if I said something hurtful to my best friend I may feel guilty and try to balance things out by paying her four compliments.

**Sublimation:** Sublimation is when a person channels their painful and threatening experiences into positive, or acceptable, outlets. We see examples of sublimation in grief time and time again when people use their experiences to create, educate, advocate, and support. Source: ([www.whatsyourgrief.com](http://www.whatsyourgrief.com))



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### Touchstone

#### **Book Suggestions**

- ⇒ Welcome the Unwelcome-Pema Chödrön,
- ⇒ No Mud, No Lotus-Thich Nhat Hanh
- ⇒ That Good Night-“Sunita Puri

### Touchstone

#### **Website Suggestions**

- ⇒ [www.postcardreflection.blogspot.com](http://www.postcardreflection.blogspot.com)
- ⇒ [www.seniorsolutionsmontana.com](http://www.seniorsolutionsmontana.com)
- ⇒ [www.whatsyourgrief.com/](http://www.whatsyourgrief.com/)

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