

Sally A Smolen, RSM, MSN, PhD
Transformative Grief Specialist

“Good Grief!” is an expression most people would quickly associate with Charlie Brown, the forlorn character who appears in the now-classic PEANUTS comic strip. Although Charlie Brown is an unlikely poster child, his pitifully sad character and outbursts of exasperation can offer us a glimpse into the human experience of loss and grief.

Losing someone we love can evoke a sadness of profound dimensions, an emotionally charged experience we call grief. The loss can be someone or something we cherish; the cause can be death or non-death related. Whatever the circumstances, we encounter grief because who/what we have lost is significant to us. We feel deprived, and the greater the significance, the greater the grief can be.

Is there such a thing as “good grief”? I believe there is, although I would describe it as “the transformative potential of grief.” Grief can be an inspiring teacher; but, just as sitting in a classroom will not result in learning, so too simply enduring the moments of grief will not bring about growth. As heart-wrenching as these moments may be, grief needs to be explored as fully as possible in order to come through and gain a new sense of wholeness.

Professor John M Schneider developed the Theory of Transformative Grief describing it as a discovery process. We enter the process as if we were explorers in search of treasures. **We search through all we have lost, to see what remains, and to find what is possible.** We go in-and-out of this process not step-by-step, but more in a back-and-forth manner that takes us more deeply into our experience.

Years ago, when families lived nearby for generations and neighbors often became extended family, our social networks were available to us with relative ease. Today, our society is markedly mobile, families are scattered, and neighbors may not know each other. Exploring “good grief” allows one to create opportunities that offer grieving people additional ways to strengthen their inner resources, enhance their social support, and activate their potential for transformation.

Sally will be co-leading a *Retreat for Those Who Grieve* at Manresa Jesuit Retreat House April 1-3, 2016.

Call the Manresa office at (248) 644-4933, ext 10 to register or for further information.
https://www.manresa-sj.org/bro_160403_grief.pdf