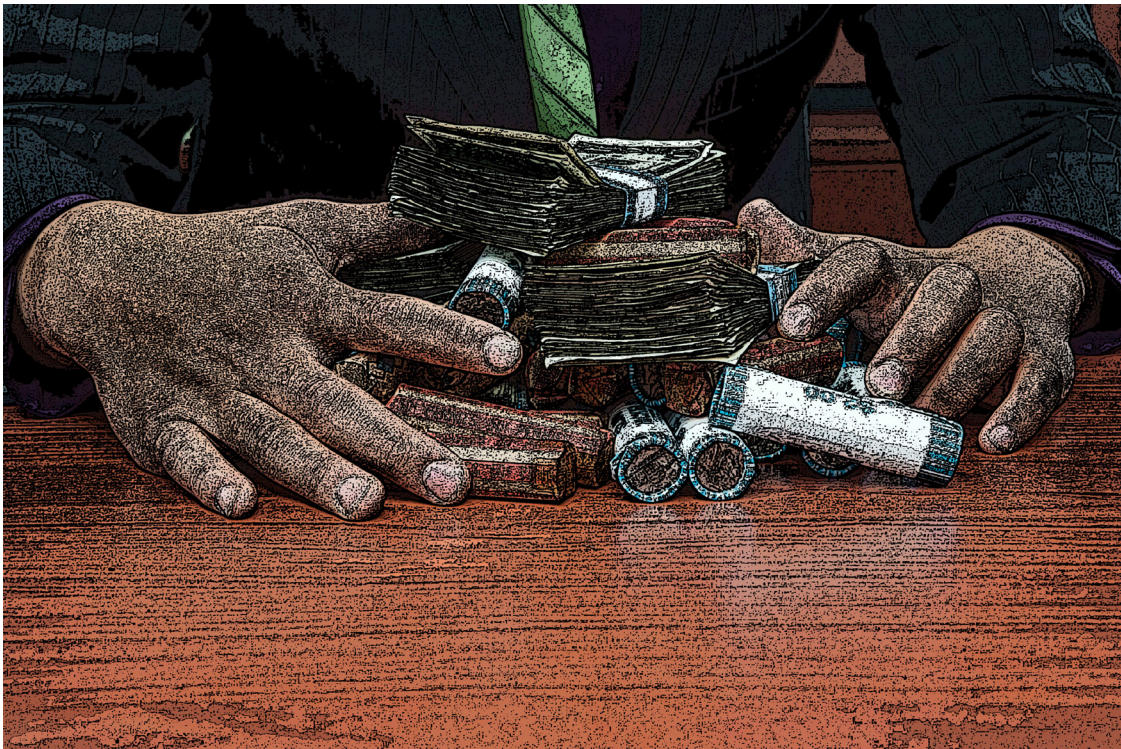


# Pay Now or Pay Later... *it's a choice*

By Nan Zastrow



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We purposely followed the shiny, big, brown, new Ram Truck with all its expensive chrome and trimmings. We were on a mission to help someone avoid a motor vehicle fine. The license plate on the truck was already four months past expiration and that comes with a hefty fine if the driver is stopped by an officer. We wanted to inform the driver, who may have been unaware, so he could take action.

From experience, we knew the cost. Someone stopped us not too long ago to let us know our plates didn't have a valid sticker. Fortunately, we had paid for new plates, but never received the stickers. We had proof of payment, and the person who notified us gave us the opportunity to correct the situation before it became a problem. So we thought it would be nice to "pay it forward" in this instance.

The pricy Ram truck drove through a Walgreens parking lot, around a building (with restricted access) trying to avoid turning back...and we followed! Then, through a green light, down a side street and it disappeared temporarily. I think the driver thought we were stalking him! We followed his path as best but a stop light interrupted our pursuit. We were about to give up when we again spotted the vehicle parked in a Panera restaurant parking lot. My husband, Gary, got out of the car and went to the passenger window where the driver's friend sat. Gary told the young woman, "I just wanted to let you know that your license plates are expired so you don't get a fine." The woman responded, "We know that. We really don't care. We are "big" people, and we can handle it."

Who would have guessed such a response? One never knows. When Gary told me what she said, I chuckled and remarked.... “All you can do is try to help someone. Doesn’t mean they are going to accept the invitation.”

You can relate a lot of life analogies to grief. This was a good example. People can ride around in circles and know they need some kind of support or help, but aren’t really willing to seek it out or accept it. They trust that they can handle the situation on their own.

Grief is a stubborn emotion. It will continue to plague you until you do something about it. The more you ignore it, the more it will demand your attention. Until the reality finally smacks you in the face...and you know it’s time to deal with it. The price you may pay at that point imposes even greater emotional trauma, self-doubts, and a series of problems.

Unresolved (prolonged or chronic) or delayed grief may be the culprit of other life difficulties that plague you months or years later. Upon your own realization or with the help of an experienced counselor, you begin to relate some of your current problems to the death of a significant person in your life that you, perhaps, did not grieve fully or grieve at all. You may have chosen to put aside grieving because you were too busy, too hurt, or too overwhelmed.

It’s the penalty a bereaved person pays for ignoring the normal grieving process. Delayed grief can interfere with everyday life responsibilities, relationships, social commitments, and future happiness. Behavior is often altered and your family and friends may notice a “difference” in you. Unresolved grief can lead to depression, mental anguish, social withdrawal, and an inability to find joy in anything in life. You become a different person, but not in a positive way.

Sometimes giving in to your subconscious thoughts to learn, understand, and accept support during grief feels intimidating and very humbling. Each of us believes that we have the power within us to walk the path alone. We may think that grief will go away all by itself—without intervention. That can be true for some people—depending upon the individual’s ability and desire to do his or her grief work on his or her own time. True grief work is essential to healing. Also, not all grief bears the same intensity. Numerous factors contribute to the depth of grief....such as relationship, cause of death, faith factors, and many more. When a death is not deemed as a significant figure in a person’s life; is not traumatic; or does not touch your daily life; grief work may be simpler, less formal, and of shorter duration. However, significant loss requires significant grief work.

Unresolved grief can affect children, teens or adults. It typically interferes with one’s ability to handle day-to-day responsibilities. The individual may be unsure about their feelings towards the person who died and sometimes even feel personal guilt for the death. Symptoms of unresolved or delayed grief may include these:

- Refusal to talk about the loss, denying loss, or minimizing connection to the person who died
- Avoid people, places, activities, memories connected to the person
- Act as though nothing has changed
- Preoccupied with the memory of the person who died
- Preoccupied with work, a hobby, or another diversion
- Addiction to alcohol, smoking, medication, sleeping pills, food
- Isolation, depression, avoids social situations
- Demonstrates new risky behavior
- Anger not validated or specific
- Chronic pain or illnesses without biological cause
- Exaggerated emotions to the loss

The good news is even unresolved grief can be treated through counseling, self-motivation to confront and cope with conflicting emotions/thoughts. Working through the process of feelings and giving voice to your relationship, your miscommunications, or your personal needs to understand the changes as a result of loss are key to healing. Even “big” people sometimes need help.

Like the occupants in that shiny Ram truck with an attitude...you have a choice. You can choose to take the necessary steps to live in peace and harmony (with your loss), or you can pay the penalty when it catches up with you.

“Hold onto the love, not the loss.”

