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GRIEF NOT AS AN ILLNESS BUT AS A RESPONSE TO INJURY

Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D., C.T.

www.centerforloss.com

**SAVE
the DATE!**

When we hear the word “grief”, we tend to think of death. Grief is what we feel after someone we love dies. But this understanding of grief is far too narrow. Actually, grief is what we think and feel whenever something we value is harmed or taken away. And so, we grieve after divorce. We grieve when we are diagnosed with cancer. We grieve when our children grow up and move away. We grieve all the time, because life is replete with transitions and losses.

When we experience a traumatic event, we also suffer losses. What those losses are depends on the circumstances of the event. We may lose someone we care about. We may lose some aspect of our health. We may lose our home or belongings. We may lose our trust in others. And we open lose our sense of safety and predictability in the world around us. This is to name just a few of the myriad losses that may make themselves known (consciously or subconsciously) in the aftermath of a traumatic event.

As with all loss, the many losses caused by a traumatic event naturally engender grief. We cannot help but grieve after a traumatic event. Everything we think and feel inside about the event, in fact, is our grief.

In this book I talk a lot about grief, and it is this broader understanding of the word “grief” that I ask you to bring to bear on this chapter and all those that follow.

I myself became overtly aware of the concept of grief many years ago. As a teenager who had come to experience my own life losses, I set out to discover the principles that help people heal in grief. I earned a master's degree in psychology and then a doctorate. I completed my internship in clinical psychology at the Mayo Clinic. During these years, I also began to counsel bereaved families, so that I could learn up close from griever and those who care for them.

To my dismay, I discovered that the majority of caregiving models for grief counselors were intertwined with the medical model of mental health care. They commonly portrayed grief as an illness that with proper assessment, diagnosis, and treatment can be cured. This paradigm dictates that we as caregivers, having studied and absorbed a body of knowledge and become experts, are responsible for “curing” our “patients.” I beg to differ.

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GRIEF NOT AS AN ILLNESS...

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The language we use to describe the practice of grief support exposes our attitudes and beliefs about counseling as well as determines our practices. Because numerous historical roots of psychotherapy are deeply grounded in the medical model, because the medical model appears more scientific than other alternatives, and because the economics of practice are interfaced in a healthcare delivery system that requires diagnostic codes, the natural tendency has been to adopt medical-model language.

But as I familiarized myself with the nomenclature used in counseling people in grief, especially following death loss, I was taken aback: symptoms of pathology, disorders, diagnosis, and treatments. In my own search to learn so I could teach, I found that these more clinical, medical-model approaches have limitations that are profound and far-reaching.

At bottom, I discovered that our current models desperately needed what we could refer to as a “supplement of the soul.” It seemed glaringly obvious to me that as fellow travelers in the journey into grief, we needed more life-giving, hope-filled models that incorporated not only the mind and body, but more important, the soul and the spirit. I found myself resonating more with the writings of people like Ram Dass, Stephen Levine, Victor Frankl, James Hillman, Tomas Moore, and Carl Jung.

Actually it was Carl Jung’s writing that helped me understand that every psychological struggle is ultimately a matter of spirituality. In the end, when we as human beings mourn the many losses we encounter in life, we must (re)discover hope and meaning to go on living our to-



morrows. Whether we like it or not, loss launches us on spiritual journeys of the heart and soul.

Our clinical understanding of grief all too often conveys that the end result of grief is a series of completed tasks and extinguished pain. I discovered that many mental health caregivers, in attempting to make a science of grief, had compartmentalized extremely complex emotions with neat clinical labels.

Our clinical understanding of grief all too often uses a “recovery” or “resolution” definition to suggest a return to “normalcy.” Recovery, as understood by some grievors and caregivers alike, is erroneously seen as an absolute, a perfect state of re-establishment. We seem to want to go around any so-called “negative” moods and emotions quickly and efficiently. Yet, it occurred to me that if our role as caregivers is to first observe the soul as it is (a difficult task in many settings), then we need to abolish what I call the “resolution wish.”

Our clinical understanding of grief for some is based on the model of crisis theory that purports that a person’s life is in a state of homeostatic balance, then something “bad” comes along and knocks the person out of balance. Caregivers are taught intervention goals to reestablish the prior state of homeostasis and a return to “normal” functioning. There is only one major problem with this theory: it doesn’t work. Why? Because a person’s life is changed forever by significant loss. We are transformed by grief and do not return to prior states of “normal” based on interventions by outside forces.

Our clinical understanding of grief all too often pathologizes normal experiences. Traditional mental health care has focused the majority of attention on the diagnosis and treatment of pathologies, and in the quest for “fixes,” little attention has been paid to the nature of emotional or spiritual health.

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NAN ZASTROW
Co-Founder,
Wings – A Grief Education Ministry

Like all experiences in life, I find they teach me something about dealing with grief. After 20 plus years of facilitating grief education and grief support, you would think by now, I had all the answers, knew all the shortcuts, and could tolerate one more “grief” experience of my own.

Grief is what we think or feel when something we value is harmed or taken away from us. This can be a person, a relationship, a “thing”, or something physical, spiritual, or mental. We most commonly think of the word “grief” as it refers to the death of someone loved. The truth is... we experience a variety of losses in life: big losses, little losses, short-term losses, long-term losses, tangible and intangible losses, and even inconvenient losses. Each has its own challenge and its own impact on our lives.

I recently experienced (and still am experiencing) an inconvenient loss. Inconvenient because even though I was in the right time and the right place, I wasn't prepared for the impact. It's inconvenient because even though it was a conscious choice, it disrupted a perfectly sane and acceptable daily life. My loss had the ability to mess with my once orderly, active, convenient, and wonderful life! And like any loss can do, it brought challenges. (Please understand I am showing a parallel to loss of a loved one, but in no way

AN INCONVENIENT LOSS—WAKING UP TO THE CHALLENGE

wish to discount the incredible loss of a loved one.)

In January, I had a total knee replacement (TKR)—a totally inconvenient loss. The surgery went well. The surgeon was phenomenal. But I wasn't prepared for the length and depth of recovery. Doesn't that sound like grief? Once again my grief experience echoed the principles I try to teach others after losing a loved one. The problem is when a grief experience (of any kind) is happening to you, you forget all



the common sense suggestions and start over right from the beginning to logically deal with your new loss (in my case...my inconvenient loss). You remind yourself that you know how to cope, and you just need to fall back on the knowledge you have acquired along the way. In support of the well-known cliché “It's easier said, than done.”

There are three primary principles I try to teach other people in our groups experiencing grief from the death of

a loved one that were challenging me personally, in my recent less painful loss experience:

1. Patience
2. Perseverance through obstacles
3. Education and support

Patience

Patience, or lack of, while recovering from the loss of a loved one doesn't have a “beginning” or an “ending.” It's seems continuous, often far reaching past months and years. It's covered with expectations that supersede reality and border on wishful thinking. It feels like time goes so slowly, yet we don't want it to pass us by so quickly that we miss other good things in life. We want the pain we feel and the emptiness to just go away.

Others often grow impatient with us by witnessing our self-imposed defeat. They, too, expect that our misery should have “passed” by now, and we should be putting our loss behind us. We wish that things could be like the used to be before the pain. We hope for miracles, wish for confirmations, and beg for peace from the obsession of our loss. Tomorrow just has to be a better day.

Patience is truly a virtue. Some people are born with it. Some develop it through great discipline. For some of us, it takes a lifetime.

Perseverance through the Obstacles

Every grief or loss experience has obstacles. It doesn't make any difference how well prepared we may be either physically or mentally.

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GOOD GRIEF...LESSONS I'VE LEARNED FROM GRIEVING

By: Marjorie L. Faes

For many years, I lead a fairly charmed life as far as death goes. Then, in 2013 my father died. He was 88, I was 51. He passed away peacefully at home surrounded by family. It was, overall, a good death.

Shortly after my father's death, many people said "Well, that was a pretty good run". I used to say that too when an elderly person died. Now, I know better. Because as nice as those words are meant to be, when I heard them they irritated me.

*"Fountain of sorrow,
fountain of light,
You've known that
hollow sound of your
own steps in flight
You've had to hide
sometimes, but now
you're all right.*

Lyrics from "Fountain of Sorrow" – by Jackson Browne

Why? Because they seem to imply that I shouldn't be devastated because he lived a long life. Of course, I get it. I get this isn't the tragedy of losing him, at say 30. But, the head knows one thing, the heart another.

This "aha moment", a surprising lesson in semantics, marked the beginning of many lessons I was to learn about grieving. No one can ever be prepared for the



heartache and grief that follows the death of a loved one.

But, sometimes, a little insight on what you may encounter can be helpful. The following are five heartfelt lessons I've learned along the way.

1) Surrender to surreal. Immediately after the news of my father's death, my life became, in a word, surreal. Even though his death was expected, I still couldn't believe it when the end came. As the black hearse pulled into the driveway of my childhood home, I felt like I was watching a scene from a bad movie, one I couldn't turn off. The subsequent phone calls and

funeral arrangements became a blur. My grief was a raw open wound. I didn't know how I'd ever get through it or when it would end. The pain did lessen, but it took months.

2) Expect the unexpected. Oh, the surprises you may get as other express their grief. It's like there's a weird "Murphy's Law of Grieving" as some of the people you expect to be there for you aren't, and some who you don't expect to be, are. Until the time comes, you won't know who is who.

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GOOD GRIEF...LESSONS I'VE LEARNED FROM GRIEVING

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It's a real eye opener. But some surprises are lovely. I was deeply moved by kind words and sentiments from former friends and acquaintances of my father, especially those I never knew. If there's an immediate plus side to grieving, this is it. You never know who will come out of the woodwork to express their sorrow and share in your grief.

3) The mind/body connection. When you are ill, doctors tell you to listen to your body. The same is true when you are grieving. At first, my daily routine was completely out of whack, I had to make myself remember to drink, eat and sleep. But I did eventually listen to my body. Grieving is hard enough without getting physically sick as well. When I did finally start to eat, drink and sleep more routinely, I knew, on some basic level, that I was on my way to healing. And the first time a good friend made me laugh really hard, I knew I had turned some sort of corner in the grieving process not just physically but emotionally as well.

4) Time heals. A cliché that's partly true. Time doesn't heal all wounds but it does take the sting away. The loss is always there. There will never be a time when I don't miss my father when I think of him or talk about him. There will always be a hole in my heart that no one but him can fill. But, as time goes by, the rawness becomes less and less. Some days I can speak of my grief openly and some days I can't.

It's an odd thing with time, though. The more it goes by, the more I accept his death but I miss him more as it's longer since I've last seen him.

5) Compassion 101. The death of a loved one brings on a crash course in grief. Since my father's death I've experienced a range of new and painful emotions. I've had overwhelming sadness and cried a river of tears. I've felt the fear of not knowing if and when the pain will subside. I've been surprised at how my grief can surface at unexpected times. Now that I know these things, I can't pretend I don't. I can no longer look the other way when I see someone else's grief. But I can sympathize and show compassion. It's one of the finest lessons I've learned from the grieving process.

In the end, we're all on this journey of life together. So, let's be kind and compassionate to one another especially during times of grief.

Marjorie Faes is a freelance writer with a variety of interests. She has written for Bas Bleu, Church Educator, Five, SHARE (cancer support), Spirit of Change, Stroke Connection, The Buffalo News, The Family Digest, Today's Caregiver, Western New York Family and the National Aphasia Association. Marjorie and her husband reside in East Amherst, New York.

HE WAS GOD'S GIFT TO ME
FOR A SHORT WHILE...

What I miss about Ollie.

*I miss holding his hands in
worship services.*

*I miss his hugs and kiss
every day.*

*I miss his wit – which was
always so amazing to me*

*I miss talking to him when my
life has concerns or challenges*

*Miss those driving trips to
Wisconsin and back to Illinois*

*Miss preparing your favorite
meal*

*Miss your arms hugging me
at night and keeping me
warm*

*Miss going out to dinner as
a couple*

*Miss my flowers you always
gave me on our anniversary*

*Miss the encouragement and
affirmations you always
gave me*

*I miss him telling me that
"I Love You"*

*Miss grocery shopping
with you*

*Miss you helping me with
cleaning and washing dishes*

*You are the best and God
knew that you were all I
needed*

*– Submitted by Ruth Whitlow
about Ollie, her husband*

Some of the obstacles are natural emotional reactions to the loss, itself, like anger, guilt, regrets. We vehemently protest why this happened to us.

Perseverance during difficult times is a personal challenge and unique to every individual. Simply stated it is the desire to get through the immediate crisis and maintain a reasonably positive attitude. Something within us saves us from giving into the sorrow we feel. We could easily lose our focus, our strength and our desire to deal with the ambiguous feelings that overwhelm us. Secondary losses create obstacles that may delay our grief. Rather than meeting the obstacles head on, we either avoid them allowing them to fester, or we allow someone else to deal with the details and later regret decisions made. Enlisting a trusted confidante is a great option for dealing with such uncertainty. Then, we are more likely to invest in a “I can do it!” attitude which is fundamental to perseverance.

Support and Education

A common coping mechanism after loss is finding support from others who've had a similar experience and researching everything we can find out about our own feelings and interpretation of our loss. While we sometimes want to shelter ourselves from others knowing what we've just experienced, inside we are eager to talk to someone who can confirm that what we feel is not so different after all. We bond with those “in the same boat” and then feel a sense of safety sharing our unspoken fears. We don't want to appear different or left-out. We want to demonstrate an “in control” attitude even when it hurts.

After the many losses in my life, and especially the most challenging and painful—the death of our son—I wanted to know everything I could about dealing with grief. It took several years to get my emotions and forward thinking under control. It would have been easy to give in to defeat and let the world go on around me. Instead, my husband and I sought out everything we could find that could educate us about the journey we were taking, its roadblocks, consequences, and inevitable changed future.

Each of these principles are like the “golden rule” of healing grief. They are key to shortening the duration of our misery. They predict a favorable outcome when managed.

My TKR became an almost daily reminder of all the twists and turns of grief. There were days with tears. Days with “if onlys” and “sudda, wudda, cuddas.” There were times I was frustrated, felt abandoned by family and friends, and my patience grew thin. I wanted to be “normal” again. I reminded myself of all the people with bigger problems. That immediately puts things into perspective.

Grievers remember what it was like before their loss –and even though we are coached to expect a “new normal” we can't seem to put the restless thoughts of the past behind us. That mystery word “acceptance” surfaces in my brain. I think I've accepted the change, but inside my conflicting emotions challenge my patience and perseverance. I keep telling myself, “I can do it. I know I can.”

Any grief experience is inconvenient. We treasure the goodness of life and the act of living it fully engaged. Any loss creates a setback—and causes us to suspend, re-evaluate, and develop a new plan in

our mind for “life after.” Remember, grief is the loss of something valued... and though it can't be changed, life can be good again. I've heard countless people tell me, in time, “you'll be so glad you had it (TKR) done.” The death of a loved one—your life changing event—can have positive outcomes also. Though it's hard to see the bright side now, with positive grief work, faith, and perseverance a new normal can also be a satisfying way of life. True grief—the loss of someone loved—reminds us to be grateful for that one special person who shared our lives and created memories that will linger and console.

How to Connect with Wings:

- Email: nanwings1@gmail.com
- Postal: P.O. Box 1051, Wausau, WI 54401
- Phone: 715.845.4159
- Follow the EVENTS calendar posted at the website wingsgrief.org
- Subscribe to the free online Eletter sent quarterly.
- Order a Free copy of Grief Digest at www.centeringcorp.com
- Visit Wings on Facebook





W Grief Tip:

Accept there's a lot you don't know.

When we experience the loss of a loved one our world is shaken, our lives are instantly changed forever. Questions keep us awake at night, challenge us in broad daylight, and test everything we believe to be true.

**Who am I now? What is the purpose of life?
Why did this happen to me?**

The only answer to getting beyond this incredible mystery in our grief, is to accept that some things we can't control. Some answers we may never know. But even if we did know the answers, it likely wouldn't change anything.

GRIEF NOT AS AN ILLNESS...

Continued from page 2

As Dr. Martin Seligman, a former president of the American Psychological Association, observed, "The exclusive focus on pathology that has dominated so much of our discipline results in a model of the human being lacking the positive features that make life worth living."

Our clinical understanding of grief all too often privatizes grief as an isolated, individual experience. Mourning, by nature of its definition—"a shared social response to loss"—must be viewed in the broader context of social and family perspectives. (In fact, the person often

perceived as "not doing well" in grief is usually the one who is trying to get help for the family system.)

Eventually, instead of thinking of grief as an illness, I came to understand it as a response to an injury that affects all aspects of our being—physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual. Loss is a psychic blow that often affects our bodies, our feelings, our relationships, our thoughts, and our very souls. And like a purely physical injury, the injury caused by loss must be examined and tended to for optimum healing to unfold.

What is the difference between an illness and an injury? Illness is an intrinsic, internal going-awry. It is a malfunction. It is a disorder. Injury, on the other hand, is the result of an external blow to an internal system. It is the effect of an outside action.

Grief is the response to an injury caused by loss. So, too, I believe, is post-traumatic stress.

Join us at our public seminars featuring Dr. Wolfelt and his extensive knowledge on this subject.

Understanding Grief Spring Seminar 2016

SAVE the DATE

Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D. (Seminar Presenter)

Internationally known author, educator, counselor and thanatologist

Dr. Wolfelt is the recipient of the Association for Death Education and Counseling's Death Educator Award, he serves as the Director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition (www.centerforloss.com) in Fort Collins, Colorado. He is also a faculty member of the University of Colorado Medical School's Department of Family Medicine. Dr. Wolfelt is a popular media resource who regularly provides his expertise to many top-tier television shows, newspapers, and magazines. He is the author of more than fifty best-selling books on grief and loss.

Dr. Wolfelt's compassionate messages about healing grief—based on his own personal losses as well as his experiences supporting children, teens, adults and families over the last three decades—speak not only to the intellect but to the hearts of all who hear him.



SEMINAR ONE

Exploring Critical Questions When Someone Dies

Tuesday, May 10, 2016 | 7:00 – 9:00 pm
Free of charge and open to the public

When loss enters your life, you are faced with many choices. The questions you ask and the choices you make will determine whether you become among the "living dead" or go on to live until you die. The capacity to love requires the need to mourn when someone loved dies. At this seminar, you will find answers to eight critical questions that will help you clarify your experiences and encourage you to make choices that honor your transformation from grief and loss to healing. These questions will be covered in the content of this seminar.

Both seminars will be held at:

Holiday Inn & Suites - Cedar Creek
1000 Imperial Avenue, Rothschild, WI

For more information or a program brochure contact:

Wings—a Grief Education Ministry
Nan or Gary Zastrow 715.845.4159
Or Aspirus Comfort Care and Hospice Services
Amy Kitsembel 715.847.2703

Professional CEU's available for both programs.

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SEMINAR TWO

Post-Traumatic Stress (PTSD) – A Wound that May Be Healed What do PTSD and traumatic grief have in common?

Wednesday, May 11, 2016 | 9:00 am – Noon | Fee: \$60

When we experience a traumatic event, something significant and often sudden, violent and horrible that is outside of our control happens to us. We are injured bodily or our psyches are injured in a way that creates multiple symptoms that are fear-based. These symptoms are the hallmarks of post-traumatic stress (PTSD) such as extreme anxiety, nightmares, and flashbacks. What if post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is really grief set in motion from a traumatic event? How can new research change how it is "treated"?

PTSD has recently gained national attention for our war veterans. But PTSD can result from a variety of traumatic incidents including (but not limited to) rape, torture, suicide, homicide, child abuse, kidnapping, chemical overdose, crashes, and natural disasters. Some experiences are single events and others ongoing. Mourning is the missing piece to the puzzle of healing PTSD.

If you've been diagnosed with PTSD, care about someone who has, or if you provide counseling to those suffering from traumatic loss, this seminar will help you understand "trauma processing" and offer hope for recovery. Whether the traumatic experience was recent or in the distant past, Dr. Wolfelt's information will unlock the secret to living life fully again. This informative seminar will help you explore PTSD and traumatic grief, not as a "disorder", but instead as a normal and necessary response to abnormal events.

Presented by:



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Support for this project was provided through the B.A. Esther Greenheck Foundation.



Reader Feedback



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

REGRETS ARE OFTEN FELT AS SOMETHING WE WISHED WE WOULD HAVE SAID OR DID BEFORE OUR LOVED ONE DIED. HOWEVER, IN MOST INSTANCES OUR LOVED ONE REALLY KNEW WHAT WE FELT. IT IS NEVER TOO LATE TO SAY THE THINGS YOU WANT TO SAY AS IT HELPS HEAL YOUR GRIEF. IF YOU HAD 5 MINUTES WITH YOUR LOVED ONE, WHAT WOULD YOU TELL HIM OR HER? WHAT CAN YOU SHARE WITH OTHERS WHO MIGHT BE DEALING WITH REGRETS?

I'd like 5 minutes with my mother who died by suicide.

I think, just for my own benefit, I'd first yell at her a little. I've always had a hard time getting to the anger phase that everyone else in my family kind of resides in. I think she robbed me of that, because I've always felt nothing but sympathy for her. I've always felt this anger place in my soul that just didn't have anywhere to go, because the cause of it was dead so I just buried it with my mom.

After about 1 minute of a little vitriol, I think I'd blanket her in forgiveness and make sure she knew I turned out ok even after the tragedy of her death.

After about 1 minute of that, I would spend the next precious 3 minutes hearing from her about the afterlife, hoping it was good, hoping it was peaceful.

Ginny, Atlanta, GA

When my 15-year-old daughter Nina died (and we had a beautiful relationship), I thought about the two times she asked me to take her somewhere, but I had a migraine headache and told her that it was close enough for her to walk or ride her bike and I wouldn't take her. BOTH times she ended up getting hurt - one time where she actually broke her collarbone hitting a bump and flying over the

handlebars!. That has bothered me ever since, and that was over two decades ago. I finally came to believe that if she were here today she would shrug her shoulders and laugh a little, telling me that with my headache it was more dangerous for me to try to drive with the medications I had to take, and wonder why I was still conflicted about that. I know this is all true, but sometimes it still nags at me because I cannot tell her in person...

Cathy, St Paul, MN

My regret is that I didn't see more clearly the pain Chad was feeling with the turn of events in his life and his relationship with Jenny. As every mother feels, she should have known. Regrets are wishes. I wish I could have said "good-bye", could have hugged him one more time, and could have changed the decision that took his life. Bottom line, But I know that Chad didn't mean to hurt us and that he loved us very much.

Nan, Wausau, WI

I never thought my son would die before me. With his murder in China, there are several regrets.

I wish I could have told him more often how much I loved him. I wish I could

have said how proud I was of his achievements. He was already changing the world in so many positive ways. I try to honor his memory doing things I think he would have been proud of - helping at risk students, sending packages to our military, and providing grief counseling for the military and other homicide survivors.

Maxine, North Hollywood, CA

I would tell my son that I love him no matter what he said, was, believed, or did, including choosing to die by suicide. I have come to accept that that was his path and that being his mother and having this experience is part of mine. I choose to live without regret because I believe that things have unfolded as exactly as they should and there are no mistakes in this world, even if it sometimes doesn't make sense to me on a human level. Of course, I am sorry he's gone, but gratitude allows me to see the positives that have come into my life not only in spite of his death, but even because of his death. Gratitude also shines a light on the time I did have with him and that can never be taken away from me.

Stephanie, Wausau, WI

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WHAT DO YOU THINK...
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I have gone over a few regrets many times in my mind and felt awful. But then I realize that my husband already knew how I felt at the time and had already forgiven me. Even though I know this, I have to remind myself of his love and forgiveness each time. It does make more sense with time and I can release the guilt.

Ann, Wausau, WI

While time does not make the sense of loss of a loved one go away, it does make the pain become less acute as we work our way through the grieving process. Working our way through the grieving process is a unique process for each of us as we handle our grieving. Our lives will never be the same with the loss of a loved one but new vistas will be opened to us. How we accept new situations will determine in large part how we will move forward with our grieving. Family and friends are critical to addressing the grieving process; my faith in the Almighty is for me of the utmost importance to my handling of grieving.

Realizing how we might have handled situations differently after the loss of our loved can be difficult to deal with. “Redos” are not possible but dealing with past mistakes that have taken place can be addressed in part by striving to do better with opportunities that are presented to us everyday as we go forward. Striving to be compassionate, patient, and understanding is a way to help us to ameliorate the regret of past mistakes. Do not be too harsh with yourself as you deal with past regrets; rather, realize that they occurred and that you work to be a better person in the future.

David, Wausau, WI



If you allow
regrets to
control your life,
you will have
tomorrows full
of more regrets.

My father lived almost 10 years following a massive stroke. The event was a real wake up call. It taught me that life can change on a dime and the future is uncertain for all of us. Throughout those years I frequently told my Dad how much I loved him and what a great father he was. I did the best I could in helping with his care. He knew from my words and actions that he was loved and going to be missed. So, when he died, I had no regrets. But I was lucky. I had the luxury of time to get it right with my father. A sudden death is a different story.

I know I'd regret it if I hadn't said those things to my father before he died. But I'd

like to think that I wouldn't beat myself up over it. Actions speak louder than words and from our many years together I know he knew how I felt about him. Still, it would hurt to have left things unsaid. So my advice to anyone with someone who is dying would be this: Be sure to tell them that you love them. Share with them how they have influenced and changed your life. And, let them know they'll be missed. Even if someone is mentally challenged or unable to hear, I'd say it anyway. You never know what gets through and you'll be glad you did.

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WHAT DO YOU THINK...

Continued from page 10

If your loved one has already died, then the best advice I can offer is this: try not to beat yourself up over things you might've said or done. If you had a good relationship, then that's all that really matters. They already knew what was in your heart and mind just by you being you.

Marjorie, East Amherst, New York

I guess my biggest regret concerns wishing I had not said something, rather than having not said enough. Several years before my father's passing I expressed an opinion on politics that I knew he would not agree with, but that I felt strongly about. I was polite and what I said was very mild, but he never forgave me for that and we never talked comfortably



again. Although I apologized many times, it always stood between us. It was not that important. I wish I'd just stayed quiet about my opinion.

Anonymous

When my husband, Lee died six years ago I had few regrets. We had been blessed with thirty years together and had a wonderful marriage. My main regret at the time of his death and still today is that I did not treasure him. I wish I had told him far more often how much I appreciated and loved him, and what a great husband and father he was. It is easy to take our loved ones for granted, even be irritated and annoyed by little things we so wish we could see and hear again.

Reflecting on these thoughts, I realize this regret has helped me to grow. Now, when I hear my daughters' voices on the phone, hold my little grandson, or enjoy a laugh with friends, I try to pause, thank God for them, and treasure them in my heart.

Debbie, Baldwin, WI

FOR OUR NEXT ISSUE: What do you think?

The Value of Face-to-Face Communication – In today's world, we are all plugged into to social media, chat lines, Internet articles and a variety of other resources to share our emotions. None of these provide face-to-face relationships with the people who offer their opinions of how to deal with the emotional crises in our lives. While these may be instant responses to our immediate need, they lack the intimacy of telling one's story (experience). Face-to-face communication verifies shared experiences in the reflection of one's eyes, the timbre of their voice, and the love that emanates from their soul when they talk about their loved one who died. What value have you found in face-to-face contact in support groups, seminar/workshops, or presentations on grief?

Send your response to nanwings1@gmail.com . Please limit your feedback to about 250-300 words.

Would you like to share your story or poem?

If you would like to submit a short story, poem, or article, we welcome it. The material does not need to be original, but if it isn't, please include the author or credits that can be printed along with the material. We are looking for articles that inspire the bereaved, teach, and offer hope which is the focus of our ministry of Wings—a Grief Education Ministry. Poems or material may be submitted In memory of your special loved one.

