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THE NECESSARY WORK OF GRIEF: What's Love Got to Do With It?

By Patrick Dean, Director, Wisconsin Grief Education Center

Dear Readers,

I welcome the opportunity to continue the conversation we began last month in this newsletter. As you may recall, I will be coming to your community in April to talk about the journey that comes to all people at different times in their lives. I am talking about the universal experience that we call grief. While many people view grief as an "enemy", I have a somewhat different perspective. While honoring the many difficult and often overwhelming challenges that comprise the experience of grief, I have come to view grief as an "ally", an emotional space where we are encouraged to do the work of our grief through an external process known as mourning. It is in the sharing of our losses and obstacles that we find community and perspectives that allow us to face the struggle in the company of the wisdom of others who have struggled before - and found ways to come through the journey of grief to a new and different emotional space that our grief demands of us.

If anyone ever tells you that time heals all wounds, or in any other well-intended way attempts to minimize the very real pain that grief is, send them on their way while telling yourself that no doubt they meant well - but just don't "get it." The work of grief is some of the hardest work you will ever do, but I am here to tell you that after listening to thousands of bereaved people over the past two decades, I know it can be done. Yet many people naturally become stuck in their grief, feeling more distant and more isolated with the passing of the months and the years. This is especially true when the mourner feels that every one else has moved on, and the longing for the person missing in their life becomes all the more acute when no one mentions the name or remembers important dates as you work to re-integrate your evolving self back into the mainstream of life.

What does love have to do with your grief? Well, in a word - everything. When our attempts to reconfigure a past relationship in light of a loved one's death are met with silence or distraction, we can find ourselves becoming bitter at a time when we really want and need to become better. When I talk about becoming "better" I do not mean you are "over" the death of your loved one and will nevermore be affected and feel the

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EDITOR'S JOURNAL

Which is more difficult – sudden death or expected death?



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

Our Spring Seminar this year will explore a common question-- which is more difficult: sudden death or expected death? This question is often debated, but truly has only one answer. And that is--that depends. It depends upon the circumstances and many other factors. It also begs to question: "in comparison to what?" In other words, you can't judge. Only your personal opinion can make an assumptive guess. And, that is just what it is: your personal opinion.

Gary and I have experienced 6 sudden deaths and one notable anticipatory (expected) death of our family and a close friend. The highly impacted sudden deaths of Chad and his fiancé by suicide (in separate incidents) were the most stressful sudden deaths that we remember of the six. Gary's dad died with Alzheimer's (an expected death, at some point) after a lingering illness and an extended period of time in a nursing home. Each of these deaths were difficult; and each affected us emotionally in different ways. When we speak of them, we speak of their uniqueness and how each period of grieving was different from

each other. It would be unfair to compare one against the other.

Sudden death may be described as unexpected loss caused by accident, homicide, suicide, heart attack, natural disaster etc. Anticipatory Grief (expected death) is a loss caused by a medical condition that occurs over a period of time.

In each case, life is changed by the loss. When death does occur, the bereaved person begins sorting through the details; the shock, whether immediate or delayed; and the status of one's relationship to the deceased at the time of parting. These are the immediate factors that impact the intensity of one's grief.

Determining our reaction: As we sort through the details, we place ourselves in the position of justifying our reaction to the death. We may quickly evaluate if we feel guilt. We assess what we know and what we don't know about the death. Could we have done something different? Could we have prevented this death from occurring? Could we have been better prepared throughout our life for this very moment? We wish to evaluate our responsibilities to the person that died.

The shock of the death may affect the intensity of grief. Shock may come immediately or it may be delayed. In the instance of Chad's death, the phone call

and the policeman at the front door were substantial elements for immediate shock. There is nothing that could have prepared us for that moment. In the event of expected death, we may have lived within the bubble of denial for months and even years before the death of a loved one occurs. We are always waiting for the miracle or change of events that would bring our loved one back to us, whole and healthy again. While Gary's dad struggled with Alzheimer's disease, we hoped that upon one of those visits, we would see him with lucid moments of memory. When the bubble bursts and death occurs, we may face shock that this actually, truly happened...our loved one died.

Even more critical in weighing the depth of one's grief, is the relationship we had with our loved one prior to death. Was the relationship harmonious and beautiful up to the final moment? Or were there words of love we never said and should have said, that we regret? Was there a moment of impatience or anger that wasn't explained away before we could make peace with each other? Were we okay with saying good bye in that nano second before life turned to death?

While this is the short version of the personal factors that affect

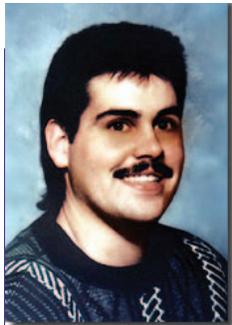
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Which is more difficult ...

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how we feel about sudden death versus expected death, there are many levels of emotional feelings we need to process as we begin the work of healing from the pain of our loss. It isn't worth a lively debate about my situation is harder than yours. We each have begun a journey that will awaken many sleeping thoughts about death, grief, and dying.

Our Spring Seminars this year will address Grief, Mourning and Healing and help you focus on making your journey a progressive one that leads forward, without getting stuck. Understanding grief helps us accept and move to a new level of normal. This is the most important outcome of all. Please join us at one or both of our seminars. See the details with this ELetter.



*Because he lived,
I will remember,
Because I remember,
he will never die.*

Chad E. Zastrow

December 4, 1971–April 16, 1993

The Walking Wounded

Dedicated to all those who grieve
the loss of someone they love.

By: Rose M. Trosper, August 2009 • trosper622@gmail.com

∞

They enter into the sanctuary
lost and sad with hollow eyes.

Seeking shelter, comfort and understanding,
their loss is raw, painful and beyond human endurance.

For those who still "have"
comprehending this new reality is all but impossible.

They silently wonder if I can understand this pain.
Let me gently echo those burning thoughts and questions.

How do you tenderly put away all of your memories
and forget the halcyon days before loss?

How do you explain the abyss of void
that now exists within your heart, down to the very core?

"Give it time" is the frequent mantra of friends and family.

Those words ring endlessly and yet fall on deaf ears.

Time has no meaning when grief moves into a life.

Time.... is both a savior and a tormenter.

Those beautiful souls will never be forgotten.

They live on in precious memories forever.

Their beauty, their smile, their laughter....all the wonder
will never fade just because they are gone from your sight.

The walking wounded enter into the sanctuary
lost and sad with hollow eyes.

Looking for a tiny ray of hope, the promise of understanding
and the solace of treasured memories.

Welcome, my weary friend.

Welcome to a place where you can honor, remember,
and share your stories of a life so beautiful
and the memories that live within your heart.

You are safe here . . .

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Finding Pearls

An Inspirational Story

by Forest Rain, from Israel

Where do you find pearls? They are in the muck at the bottom of the ocean, created in response to an irritation, a grain of sand or possibly an infection.

There is a cashier in my grocery store named Pearl. Pearls are beautiful. She is not. You could easily call her ugly. She is rather unattractive, middle aged with buck teeth. Uneducated and just a little too loud.

Do you pay attention to the cashier at your grocery store? I assume that most people don't. They are just one more station in the midst of errands and tasks that need to be completed... Right?

A while back I went to the grocery store. What happened there is so small it is hardly worth mentioning... then again a pearl is created in reaction to something like a grain of sand...

It was a few days before the Passover holiday and the grocery store was packed.

Looking for the fastest check-out line, I picked Pearl. She works fast.

Pearl was in the midst of a conversation with an elderly Russian man in front of me in line. She was explaining that he was entitled to choose a discounted product from a special section in the store. He thanked her but explained that he would pass on the discount. He said that his legs don't work well, that it would take him a long time to walk to the area dedicated to discounts. It would hold up the line and annoy everyone.

Before he completed his thought Pearl responded: "I'll go instead of you! What do you want?"



The man replied: "No never mind, don't worry about the discount."

He didn't want to be given personal, unusual service because his body was weak.

Somehow Pearl instinctively knew what he wanted – gefilte fish for the upcoming Passover holiday. In an instant she figured out how to solve the problem. The people behind me were buying gefilte fish. After quickly verifying with the man that it was ok, Pearl swiped through the gefilte fish that the couple behind me were buying. The old man then had the fish on his bill. He could pay, pack his groceries and then go get his own fish - at his own pace. In an instant Pearl enabled the man to save the money the discount entitled him to receive, without holding up the other customers AND preserve his dignity.

All this took place so swiftly that the couple behind me was not sure exactly what had happened. They were immigrants from America and their Hebrew was not very good. Seeing their confusion, I explained what Pearl had done. The husband, choked up, said: "That is the good of Israel, the heart".

Translating, I explained to Pearl that they were moved by her kindness. At first she wasn't sure what we were talking about. She's used to herself and that is just the way she is. All the time.

Israel has taught me to look at the heart of matters big and small. It is always the heart that counts...

The cashier at my grocery store is like many others in this country – the exterior may be tough, even coarse but that is just the outer shell. Inside is a true Pearl.

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.

What's Love ...

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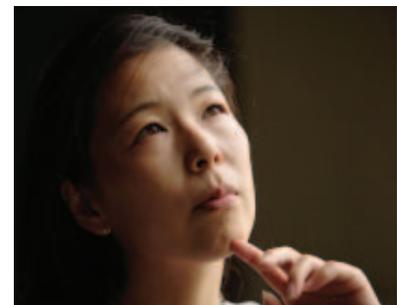
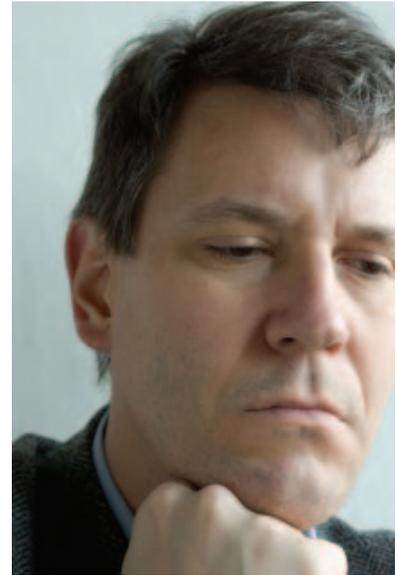
tug of tears that can be a lifelong part of this experience of grief. I am talking about finding that oft sought but hard-to-find place of learning new ways to feel and heal from the devastation that came to visit your life ... and perhaps has taken up residence with no signs of ever leaving. This is when we can become stuck. We're not sure what to think, feel, or do with ourselves. The ultimate gift of hope and healing seems ever more distant. When we remember our loved one, our thoughts return to their death and absence, and we can begin to define them only by our grief. We fear a future without them, and so we fix our sight on the past, afraid that if we look ahead or forward we may lose sight of and connection to our loved ones. We have become strangers to the love that defined us before our loss.

We could talk for hours about this very understandable place so many people find themselves in, and as a matter of fact that is exactly what we are going to do in April. I really hope you will summon the courage and curiosity to come to the evening presentation on April 14th, and/or the daytime presentation on April 15th to join the presentation about how and why normal people can become stuck following the abnormal absence of a life without their loved ones present. More important than learning about how and why people become stuck, we will talk about how to move through and past the chaos and inertia that defines being "stuck."

Let's talk again – I'll be in your neighborhood, soon. Like any good neighbor, I'm coming to say hello, to share a couple of stories of loss and life, and to listen to you. It will be a beautiful day in the neighborhood; won't you be my neighbor?

My best, until we meet -

Patrick Dean, Director
Wisconsin Grief Education Center



Be Good to Yourself – A Care Tip

To everything there is a season . . .

Grieving is often compared to the four seasons. Each is unique. Spring reminds us of a time of healing and hope in the process of grief. Like the buds on the tree, new growth springs forth anxious to blossom. Birds return and sing new songs of hope.

Like spring, we are changed by grief. When we do our grief work, we transition from who we were to someone different than before. We grow. We blossom. In time, we sing new songs of hope.



If your grief is just beginning –and it is spring—you may not feel ready yet. Be assured that another spring will come. Your time to grow will come. The seasons are predictable. Healing from grief is predictable, if we diligently do our grief work.



Heavenly Humor

Two priests died at the same time and met Saint Peter at the Pearly Gates.

St. Peter said, "I'd like to get you guys in now, but our computer's down. You will have to go back to Earth for about a week, but you can't go back as priests. What'll it be?"

The first priest says, "I've always wanted to be an eagle, soaring above the Rocky Mountains."

"So be it," says St. Peter, and off flies the first priest.

The second priest mulls this over for a moment and asks, "Will any of this week 'count' St. Peter?"

"No. I told you, the computer's down, there's no way we can keep track of what you are doing."

"In that case" says the second priest, "I've always wanted to be a Stud."

"So be it" says St. Peter, and the second priest disappears.

A week goes by, the computer is fixed, and the Lord tells St. Peter to recall the two priests..

"Will you have any trouble locating them?", He asks.

"The first one should be easy," says St. Peter. "He's somewhere over the Rockies, flying with the eagles. But the second one could prove to be more difficult."

"Why?", asks the Lord.

"He's on a snow tire, somewhere in Minnesota."

Understanding Grief Spring 2011 Seminar

Presented by Wings - a Grief Education Ministry



Patrick Vernon Dean

Patrick Vernon Dean, M.Ed., CT, founder and director of the Wisconsin Grief Education Center since 1988, works with clients on issues related to grief, loss, and healing. Dean served as a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing for police, fire, and emergency medical personnel. He has also served as a specialist with the district attorney's Crisis Response Unit in Milwaukee, providing on-scene crisis intervention to families following homicide and other violent crime.

A community seminar for grieving families

Grief, Mourning, and Healing— How to avoid getting stuck

Thursday, April 14, 2011  7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

Free of charge and open to the public

Both seminars will be held at

The Plaza Hotel & Suites

201 North 17th Avenue,
Wausau, WI



For information or a
program brochure contact:

Nan Zastrow 715.845.4159

or

Amy Kitsemel 715.847.2703

CEU's applied for both programs:

- WI Department of Regulation and Licensing
- IACET (International Association for Continued Education)

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Grief and mourning are two distinct phases in the experience of loss. The aftermath from a loss that has been anticipated is significantly different than the journey for survivors of loss that comes suddenly and unexpectedly. We will explore dimensions of healing and benchmarks of progress, and we will also examine ways and why people can become stuck, and how best to be supportive at these important times.

A Seminar for Clergy, Hospice, and Others Who Care for the Bereaved

Getting Unstuck: What's Love Got To Do With It?

Friday, April 15, 2011  9:00 am – 12:00 noon

Cost: \$40

In this seminar, learn how to help your clients or yourself move from chaos to connection in an upside-down world when all seems lost. Grief experiences are critically different for the mourner who experiences anticipated loss versus the trauma of sudden loss. Complex grief issues may result when the natural order of life events is disturbed. We'll explore the unique characteristics that challenge survivors. Learn what must happen to move forward towards healing instead of getting "stuck" or suspended in a hopeless state.