

WHY **HOPE**, ALONE, IS NOT A STRATEGY FOR **HEALING**

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Clem clung to hope when the flood waters were rising. As the Mississippi river flooded over its banks, and the levy breached, Clem watch the water rush through his neighborhood drowning the homes around him. The waves of rushing water in its fury continued to rise, and two men in a row boat sailed Clem's way. They called out to Clem and asked him if he'd like to come aboard. "No, thanks," Clem shouted. "My God will save me. He climbed to the second story of his home as the waters washed the sides of his home and continued to rise. A speed boat came by and the driver called out to Clem to rescue him. Clem answered, "No thanks. My God will save me." Finally, in a desperate attempt, Clem climbed onto his roof to escape the rising flood water. A helicopter flew over and dropped a rope calling to Clem to hold on. "I'll be okay," Clem shouted, "My God will save me!" But, Clem drowned. At the Pearly Gates, St Peter asked him why he arrived so soon. Clem told his story and said, "I thought for sure my God would save me." St Peter was a little surprised, and responded... "What more did you want? We sent you a row boat, a speed boat and a helicopter?"

Clem's actions serve as a lesson about "hope." Hope is a positive attribute, don't ever think otherwise. We live our lives with hope, most often we hope for small things. But hope without some backup plan or some strategy may be disappointing and even threatening in times of crisis. In its simplest terms, hope is a wish or a desire. It doesn't make things happen all by itself. Hope must be developed, cultivated, and nurtured to benefit from all it has to offer.

When a loved one dies, we are encouraged to look for hope. I'm a great believer in hope. I've written dozens of articles about the pursuit of hope in grief. Only recently have I accepted that hope doesn't always come easy; and it often doesn't "just happen." Maybe we expect it will bop us on the head to notify us that it is present. But hope may not come with a symphony of trumpets to announce its arrival. Like many things in life (and just like healing grief), hope typically requires some action on our part. Hope is achieved through perseverance, self-direction, planning, and commitment. In grief, hope is ultimately found through a strategy of healing. Hope alone is not the strategy. Instead, it is the catalyst for making a difference in our lives.

Looking for Hope in the Wrong Places

During grief, we may feel empty and helpless. We've lost our zest for life. The world has changed and unless we can grasp something that can give us meaning and purpose, we may be vulnerable. We can choose to drown in our sorrow or pursue a strategy. Sometimes we may be looking for hope in all the wrong places:

Hope cannot be found:

- By placing blame on someone or something—believing that if we could substantiate the blame, we would have hope that things would get better.
- Expecting to be rescued. Maybe we expect others to come to our rescue and bail us out from the helplessness we feel. In truth, others can be our companions, but they can't do the required healing work for us.
- In speaking negatively about our circumstances in life. If we continue to seek sympathy or pity after a period of time, our family and friends may isolate themselves from us because they fear that nothing they can do will take away our sorrow.
- Expecting our family and friends to be responsible for our future happiness. Though they show us love and support, they can't heal our pain. It's up to us to reconcile with our regrets, guilt, and the anger that controls our grief.
- Expecting the wounds of the loss to be obliterated just through the passage of time. Time alone does not heal the pain. Without pursuing a healthy outlook for the future, our wounds will only fester and deteriorate our emotional and spiritual self.

What is an effective strategy for hope?

Progress is made when we self-motivate ourselves to seek answers, understanding, and healing. Choosing positive ways to take action will heal our grief.

How to find hope in all the right places

An effective strategy for hope comes from within. It begins with a desire to find a turning point after the death of your loved one that allows you to accept the challenges handed to you and honor your life and your loved one by making a difference.

Each of us has the ability to find hope that is unique to each of us, individually, when we are motivated to actively move beyond the pain we feel. It begins with the mindset that "things" need to change. I remember thinking, after the death of our son, "I can't go on like this anymore. Wallowing in my grief will only make me miserable. I won't allow it to destroy my relationship with my husband and family." This was the initial strategy for hope for me.

Another strategy for finding hope may be to honor with purpose your loved one's life. Consider what he or she was passionate about. What was his or her personal "cause?" Then continue the "cause" or passion as a tribute. For example, perhaps your loved one cared for animals. Volunteer at the Humane Society. Or maybe cancer caused the death. Do a walk for cancer. Perhaps a flower garden was his or her passion...allow yourself to bloom in the beauty of a garden. Determine what you can do to carry on the purpose and memories of your loved one's life.

A strategy for hope is grief education. Learn all that you can about what you are going through. Understand the ramifications of allowing grief to control your life.

Recreate who you are and who you were meant to be. We are changed by significant grief experiences. Sometimes our world before isn't the kind of world we want to live in after the death. We discover more meaningful relationships, opportunities, and possibilities that can change us into someone we never dreamed we could be. I never dreamed I would write or talk publicly to people. And even if I did, talking about death and grief was the furthest thing from my mind.

Share your healing with others. Telling your story and sharing your grief journey with another bereaved person can aid them through the dark days of abandonment and fear. We all need someone to put a hand on our shoulder and say, "You can make it through this. How can I help?" Oh, what hope you give!

Giving back and sharing your compassion and empathy with those who need it. The world is hurting in so many ways, not just the death of a loved one. Many people need support, comforting, understanding, and maybe just someone to talk to. Kids and youth need to be understood. The elderly need to be acknowledged for their contributions and made to feel worthy in every stage of their lives. Food shelters require stocking. The poor and the sick need guidance to resources and healing. Lend a helping hand.

Reconnect and value family and friends. Family should be our focus in our recovery. The importance of our roots to our biological family and strengthening the ties that bind us to extended and “chosen” family will always be home base. Mend fences. Build bridges. The power of love in a circle of family and friends can be the strongest source of hope.

Faith, of course, is our greatest source for hope. It’s the power that reaches beyond the ability to understand, and simply trust. When we believe that “this too shall pass”, we step off into the abyss of the unknown with the power and ability to fly.

The Power of Hope:

I believe in the power of HOPE. I believe that through our grief everyone has the ability to find hope.

I believe hope is found in

- saying yes instead of no;
- loving the concept of living; dying can wait;
- turning the sad memories, to stories of the living soul;
- forgiving the unforgivable, not planning for revenge;
- counting your blessings; not your challenges;
- mending relationships instead of replacing them;
- saying, “I’ll always remember”, not “I’ll never stop missing you;”
- getting up, instead of laying down;
- giving in gracefully, when you have nothing to gain;
- letting go, when you can’t change the outcome;
- looking for the miracle; not just waiting for it to happen;
- strengthening your spiritual self, not being angry at God for your lack of faith;
- counting your steps forward; not the ones that sometimes drift back;
- saying, “what next?” instead of “why me?”

Hope begins your journey. Believe in it. Trust in it. Imagine it. Build a strategy! Feel the energy! Allow yourself to be enveloped with its radiant embrace. You have begun. You will see dignity and grace in others. Compassion in the human touch. Faith in a power far greater than you. Peace in the order of all things. Wonder in the roads not traveled. Promise in what is yet to be.

