

Healing with Haven

March 2007

Am I Making Progress?

By Elaine E. Stillwell, M.A., M.S., Rockville Centre, NY elainestillwell@worldnet.att.net

Volume 4 No. 3 "Reprinted with permission from © Grief Digest, Centering Corporation, Omaha, Nebraska, 402-553-1200".

As bereaved people who are walking the grief journey, we sometimes wonder if we are really moving forward or are we stuck on some issues? Is our pain diminishing a little or is it still excruciating? Are we able to deal with the roller-coaster emotions or are we still hiding under the covers? Do we feel our strength returning or do we continue to feel drained by the exhaustion of grief? Do we enjoy some flickering rays of joy that lighten our burdens or are we still wrapped in the darkness of a heavy heart?

Maybe this is a good time to take inventory to see exactly where we stand in doing the hard work of grief. This might be a good time to evaluate how we are handling our grief. We can memorize the things that are helping us, discard those things that are dragging us down, and list the areas we need to work on to have a meaningful life again.

Annually, each year since my two eldest children, twenty-one-year-old, Denis, and nineteen-year-old, Peggy, died in the same automobile accident, I found it helpful to check how I was doing. It gave me a chance to set some new goals and to appreciate the hurdles I had mastered. We all feel better when we know we have accomplished something. And sometimes that's enough to keep us moving in the right direction. Do yourself a favor and see if you have any areas of the heart that need nurturing by reviewing this basic checklist:

Express Yourself: Tell the story of your loved one. Repeating it over and over again makes your heart grasp the loss and helps you feel the magic of saying

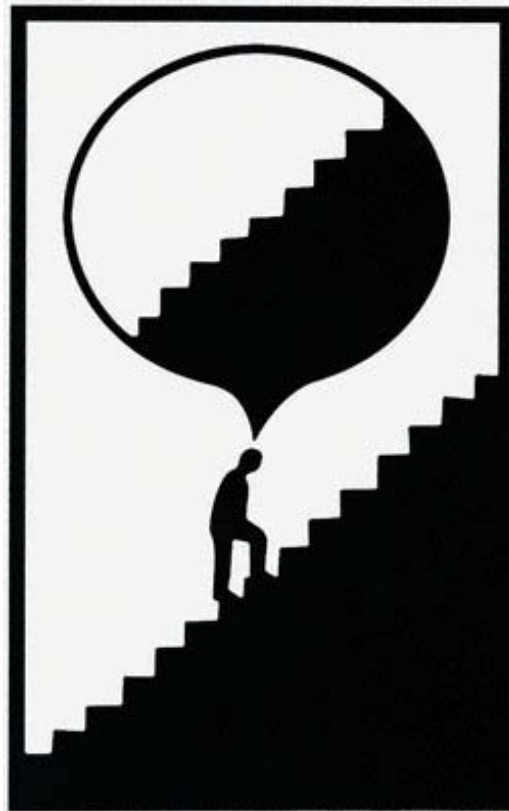
his or her name, making sure people remember your loved one. Share your stories of your loved one and encourage others to add theirs, letting people know that it is music to your ears to hear that special name. Nobody wants a loved one erased from memory, so keep talking.

Tell the world how you feel; don't spare them by saying "fine." They need to learn about the roller-coaster ride of grief so they can appreciate the challenges we face and how much we need them to be "loving listeners." Surround yourself with loving people who make no demands and give you permission to grieve for as long as it takes. Share with them the "ups and downs" we deal with each day.

Tell your family and friends what helps and what hurts. They are not mind readers and probably believe some of the myths that are prevalent about grief. We need to educate them, too, every time we discover what helps us and what knocks us down. It takes time for us to discover exactly what we need.

Find yourself: Read those books. This is what helped me the most, learning what others did to survive. Sharing their wisdom gave

a jump start to my heart, inspiring me to feel I could survive too. Discussing various passages of helpful books and magazines with my husband and daughter made me feel like we were all in a lifeboat together struggling to survive as we clung to each other. We can invite books in when we want their company and we can close their covers when we don't. They make no demands on us and can offer a ray of hope.



"We can exhaust ourselves in our efforts to try to find a way to live life to the fullest and make a way for the pain and the full life to coexist."

Continued on next page....

....Continued from previous page

Write down your thoughts: Taking a few minutes a day or each week to jot down our thoughts in a notebook or on our computer describing how we feel gives us a roadmap to understand what gives us hope, what sends us in a downward spiral and what makes us get up in the morning. It's a great tool to unload all those comments and situations that upset or devastate us instead of taking out our frustration on some innocent party or even on ourselves. It is especially powerful when we look back later and see how we have grown in processing our grief, or where we are stuck and need to seek help for certain challenges. Spelling and grammar do not matter since we are the only ones reading it. We can use our own code or shorthand recording our heart's message, which alerts us to feelings that need our attention.

Smell the roses: Sometimes we just need time for ourselves and sacred space to process all our feelings and to find what is meaningful to us as we create our "new normal." In this fast-paced world in which we live, it helps to just put the brakes on and slow down and "be still." Finding a favorite place to reflect, to meditate, to read favorite passages and prayers, to look at pictures or to listen to soothing music, can renew our spirits and nurture our souls. At a time when our world has turned upside down, taking time to "smell the roses" and get our bearings, can be the best medicine for our broken hearts.

My recliner became my "thinking chair" each day as I returned from work allowing me time to feel my way through the maze of grief. An hour later, when my husband gently inquired, "What time is dinner?" I left my sacred space and came back to reality with a little more serenity in my heart.

Allow yourself time: Allow time for healing. We all grieve differently; there is no timetable. Men and women are on different grief planets. We need to listen to our hearts, and we don't want to be rushed in our grieving. We need to feel the pain to understand the joy that our loved ones brought to our lives.

We can exhaust ourselves in our efforts to try to find a way to live life to the fullest and make a way for the pain and the full life to coexist. It's like going to a party with a toothache. The real healing is when we accept that the pain is always there, a lifelong

longing. Continual trails of what works and what doesn't help us to reconstruct our new lives, but this takes precious time. Grief work is not done overnight. We want to get back on track again. We might have an altered destination, new insights, new traveling companions and new reason for being on the trip at all. These are the lessons that time teaches us.

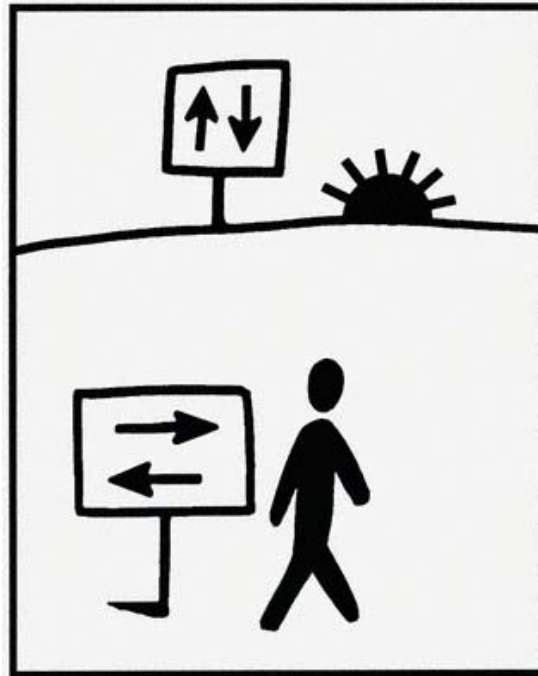
Cry: Healthy grieving involves crying, affording us a positive release of all those feelings that accumulate inside of us rather than bundling them up to explode in a negative way later. Cry unashamedly, and teach those around you that it's okay; it's a blessed release, a cleansing of all the tension that builds up inside of

us. I tried to keep my tears in check all day at work but the floodgates opened once I was home in my own "safeness." It was helpful to give myself permission to cry as much as I needed and to have a husband whom I called "my blotter" as he acknowledged my tears with a hug and a loving word.

Pamper yourself: This is a time to take good care of yourself, not out of selfishness but rather out of wisdom. We can't help anyone else if we are falling apart, overtired, angry, frustrated and confused. We have to put our own health needs first before we can help others. Eating healthy, getting enough rest, developing a workable structured day, setting realistic goals for ourselves and finding those

things that give us a moment's peace make it possible for us to enjoy a good book, a relaxing movie, a favorite CD, a walk on the beach, a stroll with the dog, a trip to the gym, a bubble bath, a new recipe or going out for dinner with a friend. When we are in "survival mode," we have nothing to give, so let others pamper you, helping you to get back on your feet. Ironically, they need to help us as much as we need their help! So, let the pampering begin!

Treat yourself: Establish a daily routine that works for you. It could be the old routine you used to follow or an entirely different one that helps you meet the new needs for your grieving heart. Going back to work (teaching third grade) three weeks after gave me structure, a busy day and little children who needed me. However, you might need more time, and that's all right. Some people need six months to just get off the couch or to "move forward" as the uninitiated would say. You do what helps you or what you can afford to



"Now is the time to pull out all the stops and to get busy helping your heart. Make today count."

Continued on next page....

....Continued from previous page

do.

Discover activities that give you a moment's peace. Sometimes depending on activities that always gave us enjoyment come to our rescue. Crocheting, cooking, gardening, fishing, traveling, playing golf, tennis or the piano, watching a baseball or football game can allow us to escape the pain for a few minutes. We are grateful for a few minutes of peace and distraction. We might even discover some new outlets for relaxing as we are grieving.

Many of us find running to the gym is a big help. We can yell, scream, kick, jump, punch and bounce. Others turn to nature and walk the beach, hike nature trails, bird watch or plant a garden. Some spend hours making scrapbooks, sewing quilts, collecting angels, writing poems or joining causes.

I collected angels and was consumed with the passion of gifting my relatives and friends with these beautiful creatures inscribed with my children's names and dates so everyone would remember Peggy and Denis as they decorated their Christmas tree each year. Many devote hours to scholarships, foundations, memorial runs, picnics, tournaments or concerts, all dedicated in memory in their loved ones.

It helped my heart a lot to know that the "Peggy and Denis" college scholarship we set up was helping young people realize their dreams, the dreams that my children were not able to complete. So find the niche that speaks to your heart and helps you keep your loved one's name out there in front of the world.

Grade yourself: Am I making progress? Did you discover that you were doing some things really well? Did you find that there were also some areas definitely in need of your immediate attention? Now is the time to pull out all the stops and to get busy helping your heart. Make today count. Face those challenges. Take those baby steps, climb over those grief hurdles and feel the exhilaration of knowing "I am making progress!" 🏠

Changing Your Perspective

(Anonymous)

An aging Hindu master grew tired of his apprentice complaining, and so, one morning, sent him for some salt. When the apprentice returned, the master instructed the unhappy young man to put a handful of salt in a glass of water and then to drink it.

"How does it taste?" the master asked.

"Bitter," spat the apprentice.

The master chuckled and then asked the young man to take the same handful of salt and put it in the lake. The two walked in silence to the nearby lake, and the apprentice swirled his handful of salt in the water, the old man said, "Now drink from the lake."

As the water dripped down the young man's chin, the master asked, "How does it taste?"

"Fresh," remarked the apprentice.

"Do you taste the salt?" asked the master.

"No," said the young man.

At this, the master sat beside this serious young man who so reminded him of himself and took his hands, offering,

"The pain of life is pure salt; no more, no less. The amount of pain in life remains the same, exactly the same. But the amount of bitterness we taste depends on the container we put the pain in. So when you are in pain, the only thing you can do is enlarge your sense of things...stop being a glass. Become a lake." 🏠



Grief & Loss Seminar Series



The next seminar will be held April 26th from 3pm-4:30pm @ 2895 Temple Ave, Signal Hill. The focus of this seminar will be anger as energy. Light refreshments will be served. For more information please contact Tina Stephenitch at 562-426-7500 ext 406. This event is free and open to the community.

Make a Difference in Someone's life

Do you have a few hours a week to listen, give support, or assist in the office? Haven Hospice is seeking people who would like to give some of their time visiting patients, helping in the office or doing community outreach. If you are interested in this rewarding opportunity, or know anyone who maybe interested in volunteering their time, please contact Tina Stephenitch, Volunteer Coordinator (562) 426-7500 ext 406 for more information.

Help us keep our mailing list current!

Are you moving and still wish to receive Healing with Haven? Or perhaps you no longer wish to receive our monthly newsletter? Please, call Tina Stephenitch at (562) 426-7500 ext 406.

Individual/Group Support

As many of you may already know, Haven Hospice offers individual support and group support to all people in the community who are going through the difficult journey of bereavement. For more information on our groups or to make an appointment for individual support please contact Tina Stephenitch, Bereavement Coordinator at (562) 426-7500 ext 406



Haven Hospice™

2895 Temple Ave
Signal Hill, CA 90755

Call toll-free at (877) 366-4466

