

We are all Different in our Grief

- Nancy Stoker Ludt

When my son, Jerome, died twenty-four years ago, I had no way of knowing what lay ahead of me. I knew only one thing—that I did not believe I could survive without that precious eleven-year-old little boy.

I began attending a newly formed self-help group for bereaved parents and unbeknownst to me, my life began a steady, but intermittent, uphill climb. There were times of utter despair—more than I wish to divulge—and times of gratitude for those who remained. The “climb” was more of a “motivated stumble.”

Two years after Jerry’s death, I began facilitating this same group, and I have continued for the past twenty-two years. Over the years, I have made many observations that I never could have seen while I was mired in the tragedy of early grief. The biggest and perhaps most powerful observation for me has been how different we all are in our grieving process. Not only are we different from each other, but as the years pass, we change in what we thought “last year,” “last month,” and “two years ago.”

It has been an incredible journey for me, and some of the lessons that have passed through my life I wish I had known *during* the process, not just in looking back and recollecting them from memories. I would like to think that some of the experiences I have learned may benefit those who are attending a support group during the early stages of their grief.

We are very different in our expressions of grief, and in any given group of fifteen grievers, will be found fifteen different ways of coping. None of them are right or wrong for anyone else. As we share in our meetings every week, I am acutely aware of how each person differs from the rest, despite the similarities of their losses.

One says, “I just can’t stop eating; I want to fill this vacancy since my loved one died.” Another says, “I can’t eat a thing; I am repulsed by all food.” Someone else comments, “I must keep moving and working. Busy is the only answer for me, and with that comes exhaustion and sleep. It works!” But their opposite replies, “I just can’t do anything except sit and stare into space. I am totally unmotivated and exhausted without lifting a finger.”

Then we hear, “I cannot sleep. I am awake twenty hours a day and have a fitful four hours of sleep each night.” To which a different member replies, “I sleep all the time. I have found I can sleep eighteen hours a day if left unattended. It’s all that gets me through this.”

Do any of these grieverers have the right answer for the rest of us? I think not. Each of us must do what is best for us. Some must dwell on the death and the days prior to the death. Some find that horrifying, and they cannot think of it at all. Just as each of our beloved ones were so different, so is the manner in which we must grieve for them.

It is very important that we all understand that what each of us says in group is only pertinent to ourselves, and the rest of us can take it with us or leave it behind. It's just "put out on the table" for the sake of expression and in the hope it will be healing for us—if it helps another along the way, all the better.

One of the most amazing issues that I have discovered is how we can so strongly believe that "we will never..." and in two years, we are doing just that thing we thought would be impossible. Grief changes us, and we change in grief. What seems incomprehensible today is a possibility next year. This seems incredible, and even though it appears to be a contradiction, as a twenty-four-year veteran, trust me! It isn't.

It is important to not judge the actions, motives, thoughts and beliefs of others, because we have all lost someone we dearly loved. However, we have not all lost "this particular beloved person."



The fabric of life
is a blend of love, friendship
and experience.