



*From Mourning  
to Morning*

*Getting Through the Journey*

✦ 2017 Lemley - Revised Edition 2021

**From Mourning to Morning**

Hard copy books are obtainable from:

Dodie Lemley

1201 Doe Run

Marble Falls, TX 78654

**PDF** from:

[dodiejl@gmail.com](mailto:dodiejl@gmail.com)

(Text) 512-626-1874

There is no charge for the books, however donations are appreciated to cover cost and postage.

Printed @

**Printworks**

314 Main

Marble Falls, TX. 78654

830-693-3024



*Dear Daddy,*

*When you and Mother temporarily separated I was only nine and thought I would never see you again. I buried my feelings, grieved alone and tried to be strong. I learned to cope in all the wrong ways. Thus, when you died, I sat on the bed with a gun thinking, in a split second I can end this pain. I saw no hope.*

*Then on Memorial Day, I awoke thinking about the many lives you touched and realized I had to do something to honor your many sacrifices. Thus, I began writing **Honor Thy Father**. And as a result, I began to heal.*

*Writing that booklet was an "action" step. For some, writing may not be their turning point, which is why I put together this manual. But I do want others to find relief from their grief. I want others to know there is hope, even if they can't see it now.*

*I still cry when I hear someone sing "The Lord's Prayer." You sang it so beautifully for so many funerals. I still remember us floating around in our fishing tubes. I can hear your jitterbug plopping across the glassy water and I miss you terribly.*

*In 1949, you sacrificed your happiness because of your love for me. And over the years you sacrificed so much of your life because of your love for me. Now, because of my love for you, I'll pass what I've learned from this journey to others.*

*Thank you for our family and the lessons you taught me in order for me to have the life I've lived. I love you and I'm still that child in your favorite song, "Daddy's Little Girl."*

## In the Beginning

In the beginning you wish it was the end of pain, reiterating thoughts, long nights, guilt, weariness, anger, fear. You may want to hear his voice once more. Smell breakfast as you shave. See him receive that precious diploma. Feel her tiny fingers touch your face. Taste the sweetness of a goodnight kiss. Read the letter that she's coming home. Stroke his lined brow that tells many stories. You undoubtedly will be...

Physically Drained. Mentally Confused.  
Emotionally Bankrupt. Spiritually Wanting.

*"Why doesn't my spouse understand how I grieve?"* When will the tears stop? Will I forget what she looked like? How will I get through the day? What if I fall apart in public?

In the beginning, many want to be home. Those on 9/11 sure did. Home may be a penthouse or a basement. Doesn't matter. Home is familiar.

From mourning to morning is a journey. There will be forks, detours, roadblocks, but we can get **through** this journey, not over it. We can reach resolution, not closure.

When the Lincolns' lost their boy Willie, Mary withdrew into silence and Abe spent every Thursday grieving in Willie's room. The country also battled with bereavement during the Civil War, which changed the way in which we grieve forever.

If you're a believer, you want to know where God was when you're loved one died. If you're not a believer, the death of your loved one confirms your belief—there is no God.

One father, after knowing his son died in the World Trade Center said, *"It just ripped the prayers right off my lips."*

Maybe you're a 21<sup>st</sup> Century griever, on fast forward and expecting instant relief for your instant grief because you're used to instant gratification.

In the beginning the future looks hopeless because we feel helpless. Hope is about the future and it's altered forever.

Are you beginning your journey with extra baggage? Divorced? Single parent? Molested as a child? Caught in the abuse cycle? Wounded? Veteran? Unemployed? Multiple losses? PTSD?

We have learned many incorrect ways to grieve and it will take time, patience, courage and effort. When my father died, I was a lost sheep, defenseless. I was short-sighted; had no sense of direction, thin-skinned and fearful. Everything was out of balance, out of control, out of focus and I was totally unprepared. I did not return to work for the next

ten months. However, black-cloud days did become blue-sky mornings and you can have those mornings, too.

In this material, we will address everything from the funeral to the future and do this in the most practical way possible. We are aware that our society has changed dramatically and there is very little time to deal with our grief, but it is not impossible to find healing and reach resolution. The most important thing we can say is that your beginning does not have to be the end of your life. Different? Yes. It will never be normal, but it can be a new normal.

## What'll I Do?



Nothing. Lean back. Relax. Take a deep breath. Hold it. Now exhale. In the movie, *"Sleepless in Seattle,"* Tom Hanks is asked by a radio host, *"What are you going to do?"* His wife had passed away and he was still struggling with his loss. His answer sounds familiar.

*"I'm going to get out of bed every morning and breathe in and out all day long. And after a while I won't have to remind myself to get out of bed every morning and breathe in and out..."*

To "do" anything in the beginning seems nearly impossible. It takes courage, which is best described by Bill Clark as, *"...doing something that you don't want to do, or are afraid to do, because it's the right thing to do, needs to be done or helps someone else."*

When we grieve, all four areas of our being are affected. Physically. Mentally. Emotionally. Spiritually. And when one aspect is affected, it affects the other three. For example, when we grieve, we slump, which compresses the lungs, reduces oxygen, toxins build and mental processes slow. We're confused and our emotions overflow, which dampens our spiritual being. All systems are on overload.

Americans are all for "wrapping things up," and we do what we think others want us to do. We're like a cast sheep—on our backs and can't get up. We need a shepherd to get us upright. We need a listener.

Do get in touch with someone that can help you through your journey; someone you can trust. Confidentiality is very important.

When my father died I had several friends that helped a great deal. But one friend turned out to be my confidant. Peggy listened to me go over the same story and issues again and again. She was awesome.

Recently, two individuals have said their confidant was someone they could trust, but not necessarily someone that was particularly close.

Develop a schedule. Ritual is very important, even if you can't do all of the ones we suggest here. And be consistent. Ritual gives a sense of order.

### **Half-Steps**

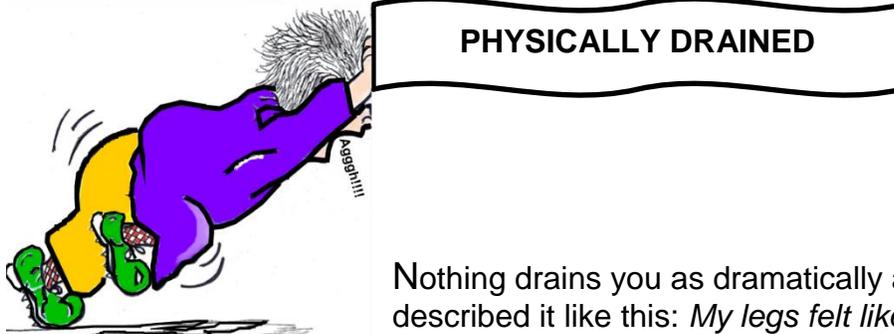
- Set the alarm and get up earlier than usual.
- Put on your makeup or shave. Don't stay in your pajamas.
- Eat a healthy breakfast at the table, without the television.
- Take a short walk. Look up at the sky.
- Drink a glass of water or sip throughout the day.
- Talk to someone. Don't isolate yourself entirely.
- Ask questions and don't settle for simple answers.
- Do not try to be strong.
- Rest. You don't have to "take care of" others. You need to take care of yourself first.
- Ask someone to help you. For example, "*Would you go through my mail this week and pull out the bills?*"
- Pace yourself.
- Take short breaks from your grief and don't feel guilty about doing that. A soak in the tub. An ice cream cone. Put these breaks in the schedule.

It's just as important for men to have a schedule as it is for women. Although men try to cope with the facts of a loss, they process their feelings in a different way. "Do" works for men because they want to fix it, but "it" can't be fixed. They'll shut down communication quicker and stay shut down. Men need a confidant, too, and other men.

My parents had a baby some time before I was born, and he is buried somewhere in Ohio. I just recently learned of this still-born. For the next fifty years Mother grieved alone, as Dad told her they would never talk about it again. She only shared this pain with a neighbor girl.

How devastating this was for my parents. After learning of this loss I was emailing with a classmate, who then told me that my father shared the death of this boy with him. Neither of them was able to share any feelings with me regarding any loss or hurt. They were a product of the '30's, and bereavement meant don't share, stay busy, grieve alone and appear strong. Today we're more outwardly expressive, but unfortunately we expect instant relief.

As Meg Woodson says, "*Only grieving will relieve your grief; only feeling your pain will lessen the feeling of it.*"



Nothing drains you as dramatically as grief. One griever described it like this: *My legs felt like they were tied with lead weights, and someone was standing on my chest, while searing pain shot through my abdomen.*

When scientist, Naomi Eisenberger conducted a study on pain and loss, she discovered that both were located in the same part of the brain. Thus, when pain shot through my friend's abdomen, it really was pain and not some psychosomatic symptom.

It's important for us to understand what is happening to our bodies. Each element has to be healed in order to heal those other three aspects of our being.

We may be tired, sleepy, sleepless, nervous, nauseous, irritable and over-sensitive to noises than would not generally be irritating. We may have headaches, ulcers, cramps, diarrhea, indigestion, arthritis, high blood pressure, tight throat, dry mouth, shallow breathing and a change in vision, hearing, taste and smell.

Normally, we breathe in and out 22,000 times a day. But when we grieve we slump, causing the chest to compress against the abdomen. So, we really need to take deep breaths throughout the day.

Ground Zero on 9/11/2001 was an inferno at 1,200 degrees. The toxins were a mixture of tiny particles of glass, sulfur and chemicals. Although these toxins were physical, they still hampered the workers recovery from the grief they were experiencing.

And although this is a physical illustration, I want to emphasize the need for us to detoxify our bodies when we grieve. We take in toxins through the food, water and the air we breathe. Our liver and lymph nodes filter these toxins and then are eliminated through the urine. Therefore, it's essential that we drink lot of water. Grief causes the blood circulation to slow, which traps toxins. Thus, we need to release these poisons and drinking water throughout the day will help do this.

We suggest getting a massage. A massage increases absorption of carbohydrates, removes toxins and uric acid; brings blood and oxygen to joints and improves elimination. We need to treat our bodies like a priceless vessel, even though we feel like an antique.

Eliminate caffeine and sodas, as this slows an already slow metabolism. This includes tea, as it has Tinactin and contributes to arthritis.



Exercise. Go for a brisk walk. Do leg lifts in bed and isometric exercises, such as pushing your arm against your opposite hand. Even light exercise releases endorphins, which is essential to the system and aids in relaxation.

Cry. Tears we shed from peeling onions have a different chemistry than the tears we have from crying. They're vital to releasing emotions and toxins. And don't be concerned about whether you'll ever stop crying. You will, but now is not the time. You have tear ducts for a reason.

Eating alone or cooking for one is hard. Take it one meal at a time, even if you don't finish the meal. It will get better and easier.

Touching is important. When workers at Ground Zero greeted one another, they always took their gloves off. Hug those who grieve. However, some people don't like to be touched and if this is you, let people know you don't want to be touched.

We also need a certain amount of space. Our comfort zone is an imaginary circle around us. Therefore, gently tell others if they are invading your space.

Try to go to bed at the same time every night. Set your alarm to get up at the same time every morning, preferably earlier than usual. It's easy to sleep in.

We are responsible for our own bodies, as much as we would like to ignore the above suggestions. But all play important roles in moving us through our journey. Even if you only do two things listed here, you're taking responsibility for your relief from grief.

## Mentally Confusing



Normally we make 15,000 decisions per second. In addition, we will make 76 major decisions and numerous other decisions when someone dies. Thus, when we're physically drained, emotionally bankrupt, and spiritually wanting, decisions are harder than ever to make. If you do only two things suggested here, you're taking responsibility.

Keep in mind that it's impossible to think two thoughts at one time. Yet, when we grieve, all of those thoughts seem to crowd into each other until we're so frustrated we become depressed. It seems impossible to turn off those thoughts, but they will pass.

Our minds form pictures. We reiterate. "*Their faces. I'll never forget their faces.*" NY Firefighter. Pictures are also sometimes exaggerated. That's normal, but it adds to our

anxiety. For almost two years I could not get the pictures out of my mind regarding my dad's death.

Teenagers, until they're twenty, struggle with decisions because the frontal lobe of the brain is not fully developed. Add grief and the process is complicated.

- Don't let others pressure you into making a decision.
- Make several small decisions a day.
- Take responsibility for your decisions.
- Do not make big decisions too quickly.

Disasters are instantly televised or on the internet, viewing many disturbing pictures over and over. We can easily become preoccupied with the crises and have difficulty thinking about anything else.

Preoccupation is our way of trying to absorb the enormity of the event; re-establish control and acquire a sense of understanding. However, when you're grieving turn off the television, radio, your cell phone and don't get on the internet. You're just reinforcing negative thoughts.

We may be forgetful and have difficulty concentrating. As someone said, "*Unsettling reactions are normal ways of trying to deal with abnormal situations.*"

Don't be too hard on yourself. You're trying to balance everyday responsibilities with a multitude of bereavement activities.

Also, our personalities affect our decisions. The laid-back personality already has problems making decisions. Easy going, Peaceful Phil won't suddenly make the seating chart for the funeral.

Likewise, Controlling Chester isn't likely to give up the reins telling everyone what to do and how to do it. He may be confused, but taking control gives him a sense of control.

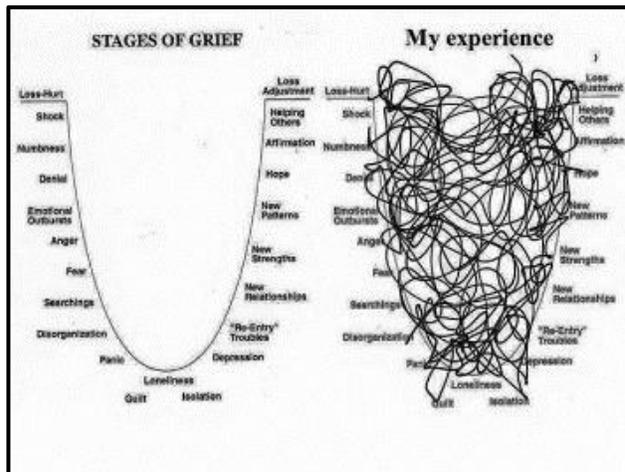
On the other hand, Melancholy Mel is sensitive and deep, thus analyzes decisions and his or her pictures may be more vivid.

Fun Freda is often forgetful and sometimes confused; so although she means well, the fun has gone out of her life. She may be even more depressed than Mel because she can't sort out her feelings and this loss.

Also, men think so differently from women. Men are in the moment, whereas women are looking ahead. This is not a criticism. Many times women need the men to take care of things we're simply not equipped to handle at this time. I believe we were created differently so that there is a balance.

How do we sort these confusing thoughts? How do we make sense out of something that makes no sense at all? There are no pat answers. Take it slowly. Make a list of the necessary “To do’s” for one day only.

## Emotionally Bankrupt



*“No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear.” C.S. Lewis*

When someone dies, the feelings come in waves, and no one knows how they feel or how anyone else feels.

Feelings. People sing about them. Advertisers promote them. Alcoholics numb them. Teenagers rebel against them. Preachers inspire them. And Americans suppress and compartmentalize them.

We became **conditioned to control**. *“Keep a stiff upper lip.”* Just *“get over it.”* *“Don’t let others see you grieve.”*

For example, by the time a child is fifteen he’s received more than 23,000 reinforcements telling him it’s not acceptable to show sad feelings. It’s okay to feel good about something positive, but it’s not okay to feel bad about something sad.

As babies, it’s “normal” to express our feelings, but as adults it’s considered abnormal. It’s all right to yell at the umpire, but heaven forbid we should yell at the viewing. So what do we do with these feelings? We bury them, numb them or find ways to deal with them later. We adopt a Scarlett O’Hara attitude, *“I’ll think about that tomorrow.”*

At some point buried feelings will surface. The price is high and it may be in a variety of forms, such as arthritis or headaches. The list is endless.

Buried feelings are dismissed feelings. They don’t exist. And buried feelings can lock us into the world of (*holics*) anonymous. In other words, any one of the numerous addictive traps which divert our pain.

The irony is that we buy books and go to lectures on how to “get in touch” with our feelings, but Americans may be more out of touch with their feelings than anyone else in the world. In addition, this is becoming an even greater problem due to i-phone addiction. We need each other and we need to see facial expressions. We mimic others facial movements. However, by communicating via phones, we are losing our ability to express our feelings. Even Botox is limiting emotional response.

Looks can be deceiving. *“Did you see how well Mabel is holding up?” “I just talked to Billy’s teacher and she says he seems to be fine.” “You know Horace is at the veterans’ home and I’m sure he talks to other veterans.*

### **Get those feelings on the outside!**

- Beat on a pillow.
- Rig up a boxing bag...fill a pillow case with sawdust and sand. Hit it with all you’ve got and until you’re exhausted. Do this every day. People think they’re going to lose control, but lose control of what? I had one client who beat the dickens out of a bag. She was slow to start, as she felt silly. However, once she got started, she let it all out. You might want to do this with a confidant watching.
- This is a good family exercise. One family went into the backyard once a week and five years later they said it was the best thing they ever did. They were learning to appropriately release their emotions on the outside.
- Break ice cubes. Tear up newspapers. Watch a sad movie. Read a sad book.
- Have a time when you go into your room. Put on music that makes you cry. Set the alarm for thirty minutes. The next day do the same thing and set your alarm for twenty-five minutes. Each day the time is five minutes shorter. This is a very healing exercise.

*“Have you ever felt like your world was collapsing, but you were able to put on such a good act that no one could see it?” Dale Evans*

Celebrities Roy Rogers and Dale Evans lost a total of three children to illness or accident. Yet when Roy passed away, Dale said, *“As hard as all of those losses were, and each child was a different loss, I found that losing Roy was the most difficult.”*

### **SPIRITUALLY WANTING**



Death severs our spiritual nerves. When the physical presence is gone, so is the light. Words like “consumed” and “overwhelmed” are part of our everyday language. We question our own existence. We question God’s existence, then sometimes feel guilty for doing so.

*“Nothing is comforting! Peace? Solace? I feel so empty.”* To be spiritually wanting is hard to explain unless you’ve experienced it. Something is missing, yet we can’t describe it. That’s why this long-day’s journey into night is so incredibly difficult.

How do we fill that hollow feeling? Support group? Counseling? The Bible? A spiritual leader? Prayer? This part of the journey is very personal as we come from different belief systems.



**Having lost three children, author and grief Specialist, Marilyn Heavilin, encourages us  
“When in despair, hug a bear.”**

## **Cuddles the Bear**

By Marsha Donahue

Cuddles, the bear, is always there,  
to ease my fears away.  
Such comfort I get, from my overstuffed pet,  
everything’s gonna be okay.

He knows I’m sad, sometimes I’m mad,  
it’s okay to feel what I’m feeling.  
He doesn’t judge or hold a grudge,  
his calm and peace are healing.

I hold him tight all through the night,  
he doesn’t mind if I snore.  
He listens with care to the secrets I share,  
he won’t interrupt or ignore.

Or, we can just sit, he won’t care a bit,  
we can stare at the sky up above.  
He stays by my side, I’ve nothing to hide,  
he gives unconditional love.

When Cuddles is near, I’ve little to fear,  
I’m feeling my hope getting stronger.  
Faith and fun puts doubt on the run,  
and my list of thanks is longer.

I share my treats, especially sweets.  
I feel so very blessed.  
When I offer him cake, a sniff’s all he takes,  
and I get to have all the rest.

I’ll try not to worry or get in a hurry,  
time will dull my pain.  
While the hurt goes away, something else will stay,  
the memories of good remain.

Life’s not so scary with my buddy who’s hairy,  
he helps me get through my sorrow.  
His presence is dear, his message is clear,  
“Things will be even better tomorrow.”

## A Mother's Story

Several years ago, one of my best friends was scuba diving with her family. She, along with her husband and older son, watched while their 17-year-old son, his best friend and a friend of the family went for the first dive. Before too long, they sensed something was wrong when the boys did not surface. What began as a blue-sky morning turned into a very black-cloud day when it became apparent that none of the three divers were coming up. The bodies were recovered, but they never knew what caused the tragedy. The following is how this mother survived her tragic loss.

\*\*\*\*\*

I went to two different counselors at two different stages of my grief. All I did was tell my story over and over, as I bawled my eyes out. There was nothing wrong with that, however, I feel that real solace for me came from talking to someone who had also experienced the same grief.

I'm not talking about just grief. I'm saying the same grief. The feelings Dodie had when her father died were different from the way I felt losing a child. And when I voiced these feelings to other mothers who had lost a child, it was comforting to know they felt the same way.

For some, a small group such as our "Children Remembered" is good, while others prefer a larger group such as "Compassionate Friends." I do believe each individual needs to find the group that provides the comfort they need. There's nothing wrong with trying out as many groups or avenues as necessary. The important thing is to keep trying. Don't give up and isolate yourself.

Two of the hardest things for me to do were going to the grocery store and paying bills. At the store I'd see my son's favorite cereal and fall apart.

When I paid bills, I would look at the date and think, Matthew was alive on that date. I felt I was going crazy, but other mother's in our group had similar fears, which was comforting in a sense.

Many times in our groups a mother will ask, "*How do I face this graduation?*" or answer the question, "*How do I help my husband?*" We each have slightly different solutions, but we each have had the same questions. The worst question is "*How many children do you have?*" But the resounding answer always includes our children who died.

Our group meets once a month and the mother's are at different times in their loss. These time-frames are helpful, because the younger ones can see that there is survival and life after loss. These losses span from a few months to many years.

But most importantly, a group offers you time to leave the rat race of life and have an hour or two to relax and to just talk about, remember and share your loved ones memories with others who care.

One positive aspect of the group is to hear our loved one's name. Although friends and family don't mean to hurt the bereaved, they are afraid of saying the person's name and often stop talking about them.

My other concern was that I was afraid of totally losing my son if I stopped grieving. When I could talk about him, he was always there beside me until I read this poem. It was the first thing that actually spoke to me and helped me move into the first steps of a new normal.

### Give What's Left of Me Away

Now that I'm gone  
Remember me with a smile and laughter.  
And if you need to cry,  
Cry with your brother or sister  
Who walks in grief beside you.

And when you need me,  
Put your arms around anyone  
And give to them  
What you need to give to me.

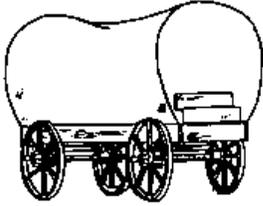
There are so many  
Who need so much.  
I want to leave you something,  
Something much better  
Than words or sounds.

Look for me in the people  
I've known and loved or helped  
In some special way.  
Let me live in your heart  
As well as your mind.

You can love me most by letting your love  
Reach out to our loved ones  
By embracing them  
And living in their love.

Love does not die, people do.  
So, when all that's left of me is love,  
Give me away as best you can. UNKNOWN

## Way Back When



As a nation, we've always had difficulty expressing our feelings when a loved one dies. However, prior to the Civil War, we were a rural country where everyone witnessed life and death on a daily basis. We saw the cycle of life with animals such as watching a cow give birth and being present when one died. Hence, this process was familiar to us when a family member died.

Many families had what was called a "Wake." The body was on view, often in the home, for as long as a week. Family members and friends came to pay their last respects. These individuals would then sit with the body in case he or she "woke up."

Everyone worked their way through the passing. When the storm clouds moved in, they rode the waves of grief until the skies returned to blue.



Women were, and still are, natural caretakers. Children were seen and were heard. They learned how to grieve by example.

Grandpa and others shared stories and remembrances, which helped all to process the loss. The living cared for the dead. There was a type of infrastructure or support system within and among the family and friends.

Most people lived until they were in their late thirties. In the rural areas, approximately 15 people died per 1,000. The death rate among children was high. Siblings saw siblings die. But a war, lasting four years, was about to change all of that.

When the Civil War erupted in 1860, the face of mourning changed dramatically. No one was prepared for the vast number of deaths. Family fought family. Battlefields were hundreds of miles from home towns. Identification was a challenge.

Some burials were in mass graves. Some deceased were never buried. Decomposition was horrific. Prisoners were treated crudely and cruelly. Disease took more lives than bullets. Arrangements were made by those who "undertook" the task. Thus, undertaking became a business.

Embalming was necessary, as the body begins to decay within 24 hours. It was possible to ship a body in an ice-packed coffin, but costly. Not all undertakers were ethical and some became millionaires.

This war indirectly forced us to bury or ignore our feelings when a loved one died. Many families learned of the soldier's death from a list tacked to a building. Some never saw the deceased again. Others received the body weeks later.

Morticians didn't necessarily know the victims. As the casualties mounted, men took over the aftercare role. But men process their feelings with a "fix it" approach, which is

not wrong, but simply their makeup. Mourning went from the home to the funeral home. A eulogy given by local pastors became comments by the mortician.

What was open and shared was now closed and isolated. We grieved alone, buried our feelings, moved at a faster pace and relinquished the support system that saw us through.

Comrades attempted to care for the deceased if they were victors. However, if they were losers, the burial duty of the enemy was not respectful.

By the War's end, some 600,000 soldiers died; the most costly in human sacrifice of any other war in our history. Prisoners, who died at Andersonville Prison, were laid in a hole covered with prison dirt, their name pinned to their clothes and a marker was placed at the head. No family member wanted to have loved ones buried on "foreign" soil.

Following WWII in 1945, mourning changed again. As manufacturing escalated during the war, many more factories were built, which led to America becoming more urban.

By the 1950's, the extended family was still within driving distance. Ladies of the church prepared meals for the family of the deceased and friends brought casseroles to the house.

However, grieving took another turn with the introduction of the highway system. Motels sprang up. Fast food drive-ins sprouted. People moved.

The post WWII American wanted to leave the horrors and difficulties of the war behind. They had more money and opportunities. Thus, they essentially "got out of Dodge." They wanted to see the country they fought for, and they had the cars to do this.

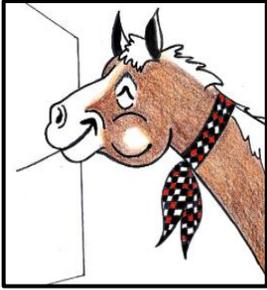
Therefore, when Grandma died, many of her extended family was miles from her home town. The support system changed as distance and cost prohibited some from attending the funeral. The aftercare was not available.

As a result, children were not as involved in the bereavement process. Mourning rituals that were already confined to a brief viewing, a formal funeral, and a sparse graveside service, became even more of a "get over it" concept.

A war divided the family in one century. A highway divided them in the next. The face of grief changed the face of a nation. And now we have the internet and cell phones, which have positive aspects, but these technologies have eliminated a lot of verbal communication and we lack the skills to orally tell people how we feel or to console.

Once we entered the cell phone era, mourning changed even more dramatically. Families don't eat together and often don't talk to each other without the phone in their hand. And again there's little eye contact and less emotion. As a result, people in general know less and less how to grieve and cope with their feelings.

## Writing



The first thing I hear when we speak of writing is, “*I’m not a writer.*” Good! You have a distinct advantage. You will write from the heart.

Let’s begin with a spiral notebook; which is yours and only yours. Keep it well hidden. No one, and we mean no one, is ever going to read this journal. If you do not keep this private, you will not be as free to write what you need to write.

Forget grammar, punctuation, spelling, and paragraphing. As a writer once said, “*writing is talking on paper.*” You may be as slow as a snail. Who cares? This is your time. Write at your own pace.

Don’t worry about how you say it or in what order the thoughts come. You’re writing about your pain, guilt, fears, anger, frustrations, regrets, memories and joys, etc. You’re not writing to become a writer. You’re taking an action to help you through your journey.

How do you start your journal? You might begin with the Who, What, When, Where and Why.

- What is the hardest moment for you?
- What questions would you like for someone to answer?
- What do you miss the most about your loved one?
- What I wish I had said or had not said.
- What I wish we had done or had not done.
- Ways in which your loved one lives on in you.
- Ways I keep my memories of you alive.
- How has your family reacted since your loss?
- What difficulties have you and your family experienced.
- What have been important milestones in the relationship between you and your loved one?
- Describe anything unfinished.
- Describe what happened in the first minutes, hours, days when you learned of the loss. Can you remember people who were helpful or not helpful?
- Describe aspects of your loved ones illness and everything surrounding that.
- Don’t forget to write about the good times, too!

Write something every day, even if it’s one sentence. In addition, journaling is for men as well as women and children. We all need to write something whenever we can fit it into our hectic schedules. This is part of the ritual, which helps to process the pain.

Carry a small notebook. When you're waiting in a doctor's office, before a ball game starts, at the mall, etc., jot down some ideas you would like to write about later. Make use of these "waiting" times.

+++++

### Other Forms of Writing

*"A miracle occurs when people bravely write their stories to share with the world. In the process of writing them, they are reconnected with that which is lost. In reading of their stories, others are connected to them. And in that connection everyone feels less alone. Each gain a little more strength for living their life and navigating their way through the challenges and over the hurdles of this journey called grieving."* Jack Canfield

Let's say you want to write a simple story to honor your loved one. First "drain your brain." For example, you've read a book and are going to write a report. First, verbally tell everything you can remember. Once verbalized, put what you just said on paper. Again—no order or grammar, etc. Just put it down. After you've written everything, go through and organize it. You will be amazed at how much you recall and how easy it comes once restrictions are eliminated.

I am doing that at this moment. As I write this paper, I put down everything I can think of as fast as I can write. It makes little sense to anyone else, but I'll organize it later. I may write as many as ten pages of material and reduce it to a scant two pages.

When my father died, I was frozen in my grief for six months. I didn't write, talk, read or pray. One day I turned on the television and two men were discussing their book on the Oprah Winfrey show, Silent Grief, survivors of parental suicide. That show inspired me to write. Thus, I wrote something I could send to his friends and family. I drained my brain. Took action for the first time and I began to heal.

Some may ask, *"But I have no one to give this writing to, so why bother to write something if no one reads it?"* This isn't about recipients. The goal is to help us heal.

Other suggestions with regard to writing:

- Write letters to your loved one.
- Make a scrapbook of memories. Each family member or friend can add their personal touch to it, which is a way for the family to develop communication regarding the loss. I made picture albums for my mother. To sit in a nursing home miles away from me was difficult. Those albums meant more than anything else to my mom, because she could remember good times with our family.
- Write thoughts, prayers or scriptures on filing cards. Put them where you can see them, in your car, on your dresser. We want to reprogram the mind to think on positive, inspiring and comforting things.
- One bereaved lady accumulated sayings her mother often used and framed them. Another griever put quotes and expressions on placemats. The children were involved in the project, which helped everyone to cope.

## Conquering Occasions



Occasions can be one of the most difficult parts of our journey. You may wonder if you're going to have a real meltdown or simply break into little pieces and never recover. This may be during the funeral or attending church and even at someone else's funeral.

A practical suggestion: Carry something like a paperclip. When the emotions begin to arise, press so that you have to shift your thoughts to what you are doing or the discomfort. There is nothing wrong with this little action. One President did this because he was such a tender-hearted man and he knew he didn't want to break down during the occasion. I've done this many times and so has my friend who lost her son. We both know we could become hysterical and we don't want to do that. We're not burying our feelings here. We're simply controlling them and can let them go when we get home. Remember, **you can't think two thoughts at one time.**

During anniversaries, holidays, etc. others expectations of us are unbelievably high and nearly impossible to meet. Some bereaved want to skip the whole thing. Others want to numb their way through it. Yet others feel an enormous sense of guilt, which makes no sense. The following are from those who have faced these days and survived.

Christmas may be the toughest of all. It is the longest, as it begins Christmas Day and ends on New Year's. That's a long time to smile when all you want to do is scream. You may want to cry several days prior to Christmas Day. It's okay. You're free to grieve in any way you wish. But it's very important for you to get those emotions on the outside.

Plan ahead what you're going to do that day. Don't be caught off guard. That throws us into personal conflict. Maybe you want to spend the day in a motel or leave town for several days. Do what is best for you! Maybe you'd like to place a wreath on the grave. Decide in advance what you're going to do.

If you choose not to go to a party or dinner, then do so. Others have a way of laying a lot of guilt on us with comments such as, "*Oh, it will do you good to be around family.*" You don't owe them an explanation. They have no idea what you're going through, even if they've been through it themselves.

We don't know others feelings! Simply tell them, "*Thank you for the invitation, but I've already made plans.*" You have? Yes, I hope you have. Those plans may be staying at home and watching a movie you enjoyed with your loved one. **You do not have to tell them what those plans are.**

So often we think we have to explain ourselves. We don't. You want to stand firm and if you get into a litany of explanations, you can be trapped into doing what you don't want

to do. We're people pleasers by nature. But the only one you want to please at this time is you.

On the other hand, family and friends may avoid us. This is extremely painful. "They" don't want their Christmas spoiled or they don't know what to say or do with you, so they do nothing.

Maybe you have a loving family and they would be willing to have a family moment in which they remember the loved one. For a family and even friends to take time to cry together over the loss can be precious time. It helps all to get through it.

Several years following my father's death, I called a church and asked them if they knew of a family who would have a scarce Christmas. I didn't give my name. For two days, I rounded up food, gifts, toys, practical items etc. On Christmas Eve I put the boxes on their porch, rang the bell and ducked around the corner out of sight. I heard squealing and marveling over the goodies. I cried all the way home, but not for Dad, for the joy of giving anonymously, which my father would have done.

If you decide to have a tree, put it in a different room. Maybe you're of a different faith or no faith. Start a new tradition. Nothing will ever be the same, but you can make new memories. Regardless, there is a holiday season, which you cannot escape. Consider helping others. Trust me, it will help you.

Another occasion is the anniversary of the loved one's death, or of your wedding day, a birth, or... There are many different types of occasions and the above suggestions are useful for any of them. These plans are for guys, too!!

Recently, a friend of mine lost her brother and I called her to express my sympathy. I was so pleased to learn that she had cancelled all of her appointments and activities for the day. She was going to stay in her pajamas, no makeup and do exactly what she wanted to do. She gave herself time to grieve, to cry if she chose to do that.

She didn't feel guilty or that she had to live up to anyone else's standard or expectations. She was going to be with her grief and take time for herself. It wasn't a specific occasion, but she re-emphasized the point that she was independent of others and would do whatever she felt she needed to do to help her through her journey.

*"We know that we will heal. But not quickly. And not easily. And never totally."*  
Meg Woodsen

Many who grieve think about their loss. Others think about doing something about the grief. And then there are those who take action and do something to help them heal. Healing requires action, and there are a number of ways to do that. One may write; another may put in a garden, volunteer or help others to heal.

# Honor Thy Father

A Memorial Testimony



By his daughter,  
Doris Jean Lemley  
Memorial Day  
May 30, 1989  
DEDICATION

On the morning of October 29, 1988, I screamed through hysterical sobs when I received the call that my father had died. It was the blackest day of my life.

Arriving in Woodward, Oklahoma on Monday, I had two days to take care of all the necessary details and his belongings, before returning to California. Due to the brevity of time, my mother, a friend and the mortician held a graveside service. It was my mother's birthday and I grieved that we couldn't have a funeral for the man who gave so much to the people in our hometown. As a result, I felt compelled to do something for the many friends and family who were unable to express their grief and pay their respects.

I, therefore, dedicate this memorial book to them in hope and prayer that his memory will live on. It is also my way of saying "thank you" to the numerous people who loved my father and unselfishly gave of their time, labor and friendship over the 79 years of his life.



## THE "GENTLE" MAN

My father, Stanley Melvin Eugene "Gene" Lemley, was born on August 16, 1909 in Parkersburg, West Virginia to Joseph and Margaret Lemley. Eleven children were born to my grandparents. At some point, Daddy lost sight in his right eye, but most people never knew it, as he participated in many sports, including bowling and fishing.

His mother was a warm and loving person who worked hard to raise her large family. She was very artistic, as was my father.

Dad fondly recalled the many times he went fishing with his father, an activity that was later to become his favorite sport.

When he completed his ninth year in school, he dropped out and went to work to support his family. My grandparents had divorced, and the whole family struggled to keep bread on the table, living for a period of time on nothing but cereal and water. He was very achievement oriented, and it was difficult for him to relinquish school. However, he did what he had to do and went to work.

One of his first jobs was in a grocery store. Later, he was a men's clothing salesman. This employment was perfect for him in many ways, as he always prided himself in well-made clothes. I think there was also an underlying motivation. As a child, he was embarrassed to wear his father's shoes to school. Being well-dressed fed his self-esteem, which was hurt by the absence of his father.

Dad was a well-rounded person in spite of his educational handicap. He only recently confided in me that his "dream" was to become a champion ice skater, but that took time and money, and he had neither. He was good in mathematics and working with his hands. He taught both of us to play chess when I was ten and it took me ten years before I could beat him.

Dad was proud of his good physical health and his self-discipline to push away from the table before he was full.



In 1931, he met my mother, Marie Edith Gingery, and they were married in New Castle, Pennsylvania. They both loved to dance, go to movies, play cards, and garden. Eventually, they bought a lovely, two-bedroom home, in what was then the suburbs of Akron, Ohio. After nine years of marriage, I came along on December 1, 1940.

One year later, on December 7, 1941, Pearl Harbor was bombed. World War II was upon us, and Dad attempted to enlist. He was told to circle numbers on a card and he would then be classified. He followed the instructions, handed in the card, and waited. In a few moments the girl in charge told him he couldn't join the Army – he had unknowingly classified himself as dead. After the laughter subsided, it was determined that his impaired vision was a drawback, and he needed to stay home to support his family. But he always said he really wanted to serve his country in a more significant way.

Leaving his job as a clothing salesman, he went to work for the Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company. He took someone's place that had gone overseas. He commented that all he did was run around with a clipboard and didn't have the slightest idea of what he was supposed to be doing.

During those next five years, I remember him lifting me above his head, soaring near the ceiling as we played "airplane." Crawling into his lap before he even had a chance to read the front page, he read the Sunday funny papers to me. It was as exciting as any Christmas morning, with the exception of a tree and packages.



One Halloween he unintentionally frightened me so badly, I lost my voice. It was dark, and across the street from our house was the wood's. He began telling me about the wicked witch in a black robe who lived in that forest and was brewing something in a big kettle. When mother came to the door and said he was wanted on the phone, he said he'd be right back.

As I stood desperately trying to see that witch, he came out the kitchen door and began walking up the gravel driveway behind me. My mind jumped from the woods to crunching footsteps, and I knew the witch was coming to grab me! I screamed in terror. Of course, he grabbed me and held me in his strong arms, repeatedly saying how sorry he was and he would never frighten me again.

Dad was gentle but firm, which was apparent when he gave me my first and only spanking at the tender age of four. He told me not to go down to the end of the block

and get into the Poke Berries because they were poisonous. However, his warnings fell on deaf ears as I wandered down to the berry patch late one afternoon.

Shortly after I arrived, he came home from work. Rounding the corner, he spotted me and stopped the car. As he came toward me, I twisted my arms behind my back, knowing I was in trouble. In a very serious, low voice he asked, "*Doris, have you been eating those poke berries?*" Innocently I replied, "*No sir,*" totally unaware that my face, dress, and hands were stained in vivid blue. He took me home, cleaned me up and proceeded to paddle me, pointing out that the spanking was not for going to the corner, or eating the berries, but for lying to him. Needless to say, I never lied to him again, not even when I cut off the leg of his ladder with the power mower and leveled his newly planted peach tree.

As the war drew to a close, Dad was going to lose his job at the factory. One day he was eating at a lunch counter and struck up a conversation with the man sitting next to him about the best way to grow strawberries. During this conversation, he was surprised to learn that the man lived only a block down the street from him. The results of meeting Everett McClain, his wife, Marian and their daughter, Patti, would change all of our lives forever.

Within the year, the war ended and fortunately, the man my dad replaced at Goodyear returned to his job. When Everett told Daddy that he was moving to Alva, Oklahoma, and there was a café for sale, Dad jumped at the chance to own his own business. Thus, the McClain's and my family moved to Oklahoma, resulting in a life-long, cherished friendship.

Dad didn't know a thing about running a café, but he learned. Good help was hard to find and he worked many, many nights until midnight. It was nerve-racking and back-breaking. During those years he became president of the Chamber of Commerce, joined the Country Club, and he and Mom enjoyed square dancing.

A friend of Mother's from Ohio, Joyce Lindsay, went to work at the café. My Aunt Alice came for visits, and between she and Joyce, I learned to swim – an activity that would be important later in life.

In 1948, my parents temporarily separated. Mother and I moved back to Ohio. However, within the next six months, Daddy sold the café, came for his family and we returned to Oklahoma. He formed a partnership and went into the dry cleaning business. Once again, he knew nothing about dry cleaning, but he learned. However, his partner took advantage of him, so Dad pulled out of the business and purchased a rundown cleaning shop in Mooreland, Oklahoma.

I spent that summer with him, working on the opening of the Royal Cleaners. Mother held down the fort in Alva until Dad was able to rent a house.

It was during that summer that I really got to know him and see the characteristics that he was to exemplify the rest of his life. Thus, these traits led me to call this part, "The 'Gentle' Man."

Being only nine, I was probably more bother than help; however he had me painting the machinery, cleaning, and acquiring the skill of using a hammer and nails without mashing my fingers. If I made a mistake, he was patient. When I was lazy, he'd listen to my complaints and then say, "*Okay, now let's get to work.*" In the late afternoon when it really got too hot for both of us, he'd quit and we'd go swimming at the community pool.

We slept on army cots in the shop and many times I'd fall asleep at night, listening to him hammering. When I think back to that summer of many beginnings, it was the best summer of my entire life. We were working, having fun, and having fun working.

By fall, Mom was with us again, we rented a house, opened the shop and I started to school.

### **MAN OF INTEGRITY**

Over the following years, Dad became involved in many civic activities, projects, and other interests. He was mayor until he was asked to use funds on a project that misrepresented the taxpayer's money and immediately resigned.

He was a member of the Chamber of Commerce, a Thirty-Second Degree Mason, supported school and community functions, and never forgot his first fire alarm as a volunteer fireman. What made this rather significant was the fact that I started the fire, or so I thought.

One night, Morla Rainey, a fifth-grade classmate, stayed over at my house. When we got up Saturday morning, Mom and Dad had gone to work. I had never cooked, but decided I was going to fix breakfast that morning. I observed Mother frying eggs and it didn't look like such a big deal. Morla, half asleep, looked on as I proceeded to drop some grease into the skillet.

I broke a couple of eggs and covered them with the lid. Frying too hot and too fast, I remembered seeing Mother throw water in the skillet, or so I thought. In a flash, fire shot up. I was so terrified that I threw the lid on the floor, as flames came dangerously close to the curtains behind the stove. Morla and I crashed out the front door screaming, "*Call the Fire Department!*" Within a relatively short time, here came Dad riding the fire truck, whipping into the driveway, all in vain. Nothing had caught on fire, and Dad stood looking at a skillet full of black gunk.

I felt sure he would be furious, but to illustrate how well he handled frustration and discipline, he looked at me and said, "*Well, it looks like the best decision you made out of this mess was to call the Fire Department.*" Actually I think he wanted to laugh, but that would have ruined the impact. I needed to suffer.

In the summers ahead, when the dry cleaning business slowed to nothing, he became the Scout director for the Boy Scout Camp near Enid. He also had the opportunity to have a full-time job with the Scouts, but since it would mean a lot of time away from his family, he turned it down.

From the time I was fifteen years old, Dad and I ran the Mooreland Swimming Pool. Every year we would have to scrape it down, whitewash it, and then paint it. It was hot, tiring, and miserable, but he never complained, he just worked. As lifeguard, he never voiced the fear he had as to whether he could actually save someone from drowning. He knew it would instill fear in me, and didn't mention it until years later.

Other employment opportunities came his way that would have gotten him and my Mother out of the dry cleaning shop. But again, integrity forced him to turn them down. He stayed with the long and tiring hours until Mother was no longer able to work, then closed the door for good, and went to work as a salesman for Trego's Western Wear in Woodward, Oklahoma.

There was one opportunity I feel must be addressed. A friend and fishing buddy, Willie Martin, opened a door for possible employment at Ft. Supply Mental Hospital. However, the job required a high school education. Since Dad had dropped out of school, he would have to pass a test to obtain his diploma. He spent hours studying, until finally test day came. When he came home, he was bursting with pride – he had his official paper stating he had a high school diploma. I have that paper today, and can't keep from crying knowing the pride he felt. My degrees can never equal that piece of paper.

When he was 65, he retired from Trego's, but he was not to remain idle for long. Although he was aging, he was still energetic and healthy. He worked part time for Trego's, became involved in a business card company, and constantly did odd jobs for people around Woodward and Mooreland. He and Mother lived on their social security and those part-time endeavors. He was conservative, owed no one, and managed to build a small savings account.

He was generous, kind, loving, and never cheated anyone that I know of. I do know that others took advantage of his good nature. My dad was not perfect, as none of us are. He lost his temper and displayed his negative feelings. Yet he attempted to appear positive when he was really hurting inside, another trait that I didn't acquire.

When I began writing this, I did not intend for it to be so lengthy. Yet I have omitted many things. It's not easy to condense someone's life into a few pages. But it is so important for us to realize that if we don't take time to smell the roses, there will come a time when there are no roses to be smelled.



### **FATHER KNEW BEST**

Possibly the most valuable lesson of my lifetime, I learned from him in the summer of my fifth-grade year. It was an exceptionally hot day that July in 1950, as he and Mom sweated it out at the dry cleaning shop. Determined to see a new movie, I realized I had spent my weekly allowance of fifty cents, earned from doing chores.

Without any hesitation, I went running into the shop and confidently asked my dad for a quarter, which in the past he had never refused to give me. The sweat was pouring down his face, as he brought the steam cover down on a pair of pants. There was a long pause before he quietly said, "No." I stood there bewildered, finally asking, "Have I done something wrong?" "No," he softly replied, "I don't have it. I guess you'll have to earn it." I hadn't expected this, so I reasoned he wanted the car washed, and I argued that I knew he had a quarter in the change drawer. Along with another burst of steam, his response to my pleading was, "You can't earn it from me. You'll have to get a job."

By this time, my stomach was queasy as I whined, *"Where am I going to get a job? No one will hire a ten-year-old."* But he just kept pressing those doggone pants, suggesting that I start asking for work, beginning with the stores on our block.

At this point, frustrated and defeated, I dropped my head, slowly sauntered out the door, and headed down a very short two blocks of our town's main street. The first business was a saloon; the next a repair shop, and it continued to worsen as I dejectedly passed each store, winding up at the theater across from our shop.

Then it hit me! Racing through the door, I blurted out my solution. *"Daddy, Daddy, I've been to every store and no one would hire me!"* I was sure he wouldn't refuse me after my fruitless, diligent efforts. However, with raised eyebrows he asked, *"Did you go north?"* *"North,"* I stammered. *"No. There isn't anything that way except a café and the ice house."* By this time I could read his mind and it was saying, *"Go north, my child. Go north."* Thus, I went north.

When I got to the café, I leaned against the wall and stared at the ice house. My mind was blank as I watched the ice truck unload the blocks of clear, crystal ice onto the metal platform. I thought about how we kids would wait until Mr. Chenoworth was inside, and then we'd run up to the platform and grab a piece of chipped ice. The idea was refreshing me when a thought flashed through my mind.

Racing back to the shop, I breathlessly shouted, *"Daddy, Daddy, I got a job!"* *"You did?"* he questioned. *"So, what is it?"* My heart pounding with excitement, I spurted, *"I'm going to make a sign for the icehouse!"* He smiled, *"Good. What did Mr. Chenoworth say?"* That stopped me cold. In a more subdued voice, I murmured, *"Well—I didn't talk to him. I—I thought maybe you'd ask him for me."* Somehow I had a notion this idea fell on deaf ears, and it did when he said, *"no, you'll have to ask him yourself."*

With the temperature and humidity close to 100, a cold chill went up my spine as I ambled out the door, trying to get up the courage to face the iceman. Trembling inside, I weakly squeaked, *"Mr. Chenoworth, how would you like for me to paint you a sign for the ice house?"* With his feet on the desk, he grumbled, *"Sign! What do I need a sign for? Everyone knows this is the icehouse!"*

I sure wanted to go to that movie, but I was having a terrible time finding the right sales pitch. In a final attempt, I said, *"Well, what about people who are from out of town? They wouldn't know where to get ice."* Clearing his throat, he grunted, *"Oh, all right."*

My weak legs stumbled down the steps and back to the shop. With some enthusiasm I blurted, *"Daddy, I got the job."* He smiled as sweat rolled down his arms. *"Good. How much is he going to pay you?"* By that time my nerves were shot and I weakly stuttered, *"I don't, don't know. I thought maybe you'd go back with me and ask him."* I knew that was stupid for by now I knew what he was going to say.

Again I faced the soles of the iceman's shoes, and somehow made a deal to paint a sign with "ICE" on each side – for twenty-five cents a side. When I returned to the shop, I told him about the big salary. Exhausted and unnerved, I realized I still had a problem. How do I make the sign? And this is where his fatherly love took over and the lessons he wanted to teach me had been learned.

He stopped working, found two pieces of sheet metal and drew the letters "ICE." My job was to fill-in the letters with black paint. I was so proud when we finished.

I'm often asked, "*Did you go to the movie?*" Yes, I did, but fell asleep half way through it. But I didn't care. I had my first real job. Of course, I later learned that within that lesson, he also taught me the value of perseverance, courage, motivation and work. Never again have I been without a job for any length of time. Even one week before he died, I was still asking for his advice concerning an employment situation. But my father really did know best.

Oh, and by the way. The "ICE" sign hung on the telephone pole in front of the icehouse for the next 17 years.



Dad and Chuck Dunbar

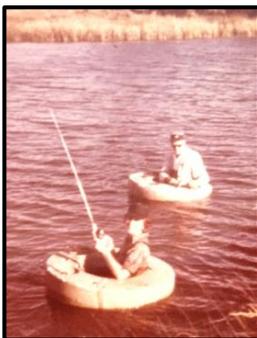


Willie Martin-fishing buddy

## THE FISHERMAN

Dad was very much at ease with most anything that was creative. He liked public speaking and was an excellent Master of Ceremonies. In his later years, he even took on his one and only acting part in a community play, "Barefoot in the Park." He had a sharp and good memory, telling old jokes and stories. I still have a tape of his "Pete Skunk" story.

In addition to his creative talents, he was an avid sports fan. He was competitive and liked to win, although he was not a poor loser. Of course, as most people know, he loved fishing more than anything else. Sitting in his raft with a casting rod and a plastic lure, he was at total peace. He rarely quit before his friends did, and he frequently out-fished them. No road was too tough to tackle, and the bass were often at a disadvantage against his patient and sensitive touch.



He thought nothing of getting up at 4:00 A.M. in order to be on the lake at daybreak. Most of those mornings I struggled to wake up enough just to see the pond. But I wouldn't trade those treasured memories for anything in the world.

As for his expertise, I often wondered if he sang to these fish, lulling them into taking his bait. There had to be some magic to come home with a loaded stringer, while I sort of hid my two crappies behind my back! Give him a rod, a quiet lake and a buddy, and he was in need of nothing else.

A thank you is in order here to all those persons who allowed him to fish in their ponds. He was always grateful for their generosity, often leaving them with a mess of fish.



### THE "MUSIC" MAN

I believe the love of music was a part of my father from the time he was born. He couldn't restrain himself from singing along when he heard a good tune. He had a beautiful voice, harmonizing by ear.

Dad sang at church, with barbershop quartets, in cantatas, at funerals, and with a local singing group, the Red Carpet Singers. He was thrilled when the group got the opportunity to sing in some of the cathedrals in Austria. His eyes filled with tears recalling an emotional moment on the return trip. "*When we flew over the Statue of Liberty we all broke out singing, 'God Bless America.'*" I will always regret not going on that memorable trip with him.

In the summer of 1987, I stood beside him at a church choir rehearsal as he looked at this difficult piece of music for the first time, following along perfectly. Knowing he couldn't read music I asked him, "*How did you do that?*" He said, "*I don't know.*" I assure you, I don't know either.

This was the only rehearsal he had before Sunday morning, but he was up there singing like a pro. He gave all the credit to a good director. I have a sweatshirt that says, "*Music is a gift from God.*" I believe Dad was given this gift and he used his talent to glorify God, for he was still singing up to the end of his life. I wept because there was no one to sing at his graveside.



## MEMORIAL DAY

These few stories are among so many. It was difficult to select those that best describe a man of multiple talents, deep convictions, and quality characteristics. I hope that those who read this or remember him will recall those special moments or a moment in which he somehow touched your life.

If in some way he hurt you, please forgive him. If in some way he gladdened your heart, please love him. We have no way of knowing when our loved ones may be taken from us. Fortunately, I have no regrets concerning this, but there are some things I would like to have said to him.

Thank you all for each and everything that you did for my father. And *“Thank you, Dad, for being a friend, teacher, and motivator. Rest in peace, and as the old Irish verse says, ‘May God hold you in the palm of His hand.’”*

\*\*\*\*\*

Twenty years later I received the following from Lee Castell, our next door neighbor. Remember that this kind of writing is a simple reminder of the loved one. It isn't about literary style. Children, family and friends can always add their thoughts and memories.

*Thanks for the reminders of Gene. I remember being out in the side yard (between our two homes) shooting a bow and arrow at a target, when I was ten. Gene came out and talked me into a commitment to attend the Boy Scout camp that he was directing that summer. Since I was already a Scout, he wanted me to be the “archery” instructor. That really inflated my head at the time...him having the faith in me to actually instruct other scouts in an actual archery class. I was pretty good, but not THAT good. Later, I realized that his action was deliberate to help build my self-esteem and he may have just needed a scout that knew how to shoot a bow. I had a wonderful time doing it too! LOL We even got on TV, when a local (Enid) station did a promo on the camp. I'll never forget Gene!!! Lee*

Lee's whole family were wonderful neighbors and were devastated when Lee's father, John, was tragically killed in an explosion at the gas company. Lee has written his own autobiography, but after thirty-five years, he still has trouble dealing with the death of his father.

There is something so raw about our grief when the death is violent and sudden. This is why we say it's important to talk with those who have experienced the same type of

loss. We don't know how others feel, but we can relate to their loss when it's a particular type of loss.

I returned to work the next year, but the music program was discontinued at George Air Force Base, so I accepted a fourth-grade position and later read this story to my students. In 1990, the fathers of these nine-year-olds were pilots during the Persian Gulf War. As a result, I encouraged them to write their own stories about their parents, even though, gratefully, none of these pilots were killed or injured.



## **THROUGH A CHILD'S EYES**

Dodie Lemley, Retired MFCC & Instructor

Through a Child's Eyes is designed to help adults understand children's perceptions, grieving processes and reactions to death. It was first published in 1991, while the author was serving on a crisis team at George Air Force Base in Victorville, CA during the Persian Gulf War.

It is never easy for anyone to cope with, confront, or discuss death. Hopefully, this guide will make that task a little less painful. It is highly suggested that every grieving child have a teddy bear or something to hold on to that is comforting like a blanket.

Following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, copies of the booklet were sent to New York and distributed by Operation Blessing.

### **MY MIND GOES "PICTURE"**

We all form pictures in our minds of death, relationships, experiences. However, it is important to understand that a child's picture is quite different from an adult's.

#### Infant to Two Years

The person is here, then not here. He appears. He is gone.

#### Three to Five Years

The person is asleep, in a temporary state, and it is reversible. It is just a fantasy.

### Five to Eight Years

Death is eerie, ghost-like, and a mythical monster that grabs someone and carries them away. It is a very personal picture.

### Nine to Ten Years

The picture is real; therefore the child questions the physical details such as the burial. These pictures may then lead to fantasy pictures that are bizarre.

### Eleven and Older

The picture is much like the adult's picture. CAUTION—the significant adult's picture may be distorted or unusual.

### **MY FEELINGS GO "OUCH"**

Children's emotions may seem similar to an adult's emotions, but since their pictures are different, so is the processing of their emotions.

### Children may worry that:

- Something they thought, said, or did caused the person's death.
- They won't be cared for, that they will be abandoned.
- They will go to sleep and not wake up.
- The monster will take them away.
- Someone or God is angry with them.
- The other parent will go away and not come back.
- Relatives, siblings, pets or friends will go away and not come back.
- Their pets will die too.
- They caused the person to be depressed or irritable.
- Burial is going to take the person or the pets breathe away.

### Children may be confused about:

- Their new position in the family. It has changed and they don't know what role they play.
- Being left out by a parent or others who are trying to take care of their own grief.
- Not having the same family as they had before.

### They may fear:

- The dark.
- Their own needs won't be met.
- Illness and especially their own, means death.
- The love of the surviving persons, for them, has changed.
- Getting lost, such as at a shopping mall.
- The unknown, what they don't understand.
- Being alone.

## **MY THOUGHTS GO “PHOOEY”**

Children’s thoughts are different from their emotions. Their thinking may seem irrational, but it is very real to them.

### Children may think that:

- They now have to become an adult.
- Other children will treat them differently.
- The person or pet will come home tomorrow.
- Other people are to blame for the death.
- They aren’t “good enough” any longer.
- A dead person or pet feels pain.
- God hates them and that is why He didn’t take them to be with Him.
- It isn’t fair.

## **MY BODY GOES “BUMP”**

### A child’s body may react with:

- Upset stomach or ulcers.
- Headaches.
- Unexplained pains and aches.
- Tiredness or exhaustion.
- Unexplained outbursts of crying.
- Unexplained rashes.
- Bad dreams or nightmares.
- Bad breath.
- Increase or loss of appetite.
- Shortness of breath.
- Visual, hearing, tasting and smelling changes.

## **MY BEHAVIOR GOES “BANANAS”**

### Children may:

- Become demanding.
- Become self-absorbed.
- Quit doing their schoolwork or homework.
- Regress developmentally.
- Daydream.
- Forget to do routine chores.
- Quickly forget what you or someone else just said.
- Reach out to be held.
- Become exceptionally timid.

- Become manipulative.
- Lie or grossly expand the truth.
- Throw a tantrum.
- Be moody, depressed.
- Deny or accept blame for something they didn't do.
- Be suicidal.
- Appear outwardly "okay", but inwardly "not okay".
- Talk incessantly or not talk at all.
- Revert to infantile behaviors such as thumb sucking.
- Wet the bed.
- Sleep a lot or a little.
- Begin to chew their fingernails, develop a tick, pull their hair, or harm their body.
- Talk about a person's death as if a pet had died.
- Argue and fight at school or at home.
- Lack of concentration and manual skills.
- Be jealous, resentful, or bitter.
- Become fussy and irritable.
- Lose interest.
- Be indecisive.
- Be embarrassed around peers or adults.
- Resist going to school, the teacher, or normal discipline.

### **MY SPIRITUAL SELF GOES "?"**

Whether you believe in God, religion, prayer, or anything else spiritual or not, children do have their own concepts. All their lives the world speaks of the spiritual. It is, therefore, an area that cannot be ignored when trying to understand loss in a child's life. Remember, it is through **his** eyes, not yours.

This is also possibly the most sensitive part of this guide, because what we say or don't say may affect that child for life. What follows here is not an attempt to influence a child to believe or not to believe in a spiritual power. It is to prevent us from unknowingly doing psychological harm.

#### Never say:

- It is God's will.
- God loves you, so He makes you suffer.
- Don't cry. God knows best.
- The person is so much better off in heaven.
- God took him.
- Don't be angry with God.

*If you do feel the need to say something about prayers, God or other spiritual references here are some safe statements and thoughts.*

- Allow children to be angry even with God. That is honest. They may tell God they're sorry, but they're still angry. Don't make them feel guilty about being angry. This is a natural wave of grief.
- You may say, *"I think God is crying too."* *"God will be with you."* *"God understands you are hurting."* *"I'm praying for you. Is there something special you would like me to pray about?"*
- Encourage a child to draw a picture for God or write a letter to God.

### **MY TEACHERS GO "HELP"**

Teachers play a significant role in a child's life when it relates to a death or loss. They may be the only source a child can turn to, but it is for certain they will be involved, whether they wish to be or not.

Unfortunately, teachers are so overwhelmed with responsibilities that they often tend to miss the significance of a child's behavior as it relates to death or loss. Teachers may focus on the behavior rather than on the problem.

Children are possibly experiencing more losses today than they ever have in our history. They may also be desensitized to death due to the violence they see on film, television and games. This complicates the entire scenario.

Also there may be changes in the family structure. They may have a one-parent family. Families move more frequently, thus the extended family lives farther away. The child may be continually readjusting.

Children often come to school with a lot of baggage, yet the teacher, who never has enough time, is expected to address a child's loss. The child will rarely allow the teacher to see their buried pain, but the behavior is indicative of a loss. If possible we suggest teachers incorporate the subject of loss into one of their lessons.

Once the teacher is aware of a child's loss, he may follow the suggestions here, speak privately to the child, or find it appropriate to refer the child to a school or professional counselor.

Getting through to a child who has suffered a loss may be difficult, but teachers may also be the ones to melt the frozen tears of grief.

#### Teachers:

- Ask the parents or guardians in for a conference as soon as you can.
- Continue on with your normal patterns in the classroom to give the child a sense of security.
- Temporarily lessen your requirements for schoolwork and homework.

- Give grieving children a classroom chore that is not demanding, but one that will please them.

Recognition is the key that unlocks the door of frustration. Once recognized, the following guidelines will help us to walk the child through these difficult times.

Understand:

- Children can endure grief for a short period of time.
- They are not as fragile as we think they are.
- Children very much need to express their fears, anger, sadness and guilt.
- They need to know that the deceased doesn't feel any pain, need food or air, and isn't just sleeping.
- Remember, children take things literally.

Don't say:

- *"It's best that he died because we wouldn't want him to suffer."*
- *"I know how you feel."*
- *"You shouldn't say that." "You shouldn't feel that way."*
- *"You'll have to be strong."*
- *"You'll need to be grown-up now, a man (or young woman)."*
- "Words of wisdom" or platitudes.

Do:

- Be patient. Children won't "get over it" quickly.
- Help them understand death by using the life cycle of plants – they live, grow, die.
- Be prompt and honest with accurate information.
- Answer their questions with a question until you understand just what they are asking.
- Answer only what they are asking you.
- Use humor and distractions to help them release their tensions.
- Tell children that "he died," not that "he passed away" or that we "lost him."
- Let them know they will be cared for and not be left or abandoned.
- Help them to understand that they did not cause the person's death.
- Let them repeat themselves as many times as they need to.
- Say, *"I just heard about your (whoever's) death, and (child's name), I'm so sorry. This is a sad time for you, and I want you to know that I care and I love you."*
- Encourage the child to talk about the deceased.
- Having the child draw a picture of his family may help him to express his feelings of pain about the deceased.
- Avoid answering their repeated "whys."
- Agree with them and listen if they say, "It's not fair."
- Establish a good rapport with the child before you begin to console with words.
- Encourage children to become involved in physical activities, even if limited.

## PUTTING IT TOGETHER

There is no conclusion. There is only a sense of putting the pieces together. There are no right or perfect answers for children who are grieving, just as there are none for adults.

What works best? No one knows for sure. We attempt to do the best we can in each and every individual situation. We are imperfect. We will make mistakes, but we must not ignore the pictures, feeling and thoughts of a child in grief. They grow up to become adults. Just because they lost a loved one at age two doesn't mean they won't still be grieving at age twenty-two.

Grief is not something that can be "taken care of." The pain is always there, sometimes well hidden, but it is always there.

Never assume, punish, debate, judge or preach. Always listen, love, nurture, care, and be there for the grieving child.

It is with love and sympathy that I dedicate this booklet to all those who are hurting. I hope that it will, in some way, comfort and help you heal.

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The Grief Recovery Institute is one of the best to help both children and adults through their grieving experience and healing. Check out their website. The method developed by John W. James and Russell Friedman has been used for more than 35 years to help grievers from all over the world.

The following is from the Institute: The majority of incorrect ideas about dealing with loss can be summed up in six myths:

### **The Six Myths of Grief**

- Don't Feel bad
- Replace the Loss
- Grieve Alone
- Time Heals All Wounds
- Keep Busy
- Be Strong for Others

Just looking at the myth that "time heals" creates the idea that a person just has to wait and they will feel better. There are people who have waited 10, 20, 30, and 40 years, and still didn't feel better! They would tell you that not only had time not healed them, but that it had compounded the pain. The other five myths carry equally unhelpful messages.

### **The Solution**

Recovery from loss is accomplished by discovering and completing all of the undelivered communications that accrue in relationships. Completion of pain caused by loss is what allows us to "let go" and "move forward." It is almost impossible to move forward without first taking a series of actions that lead to completion.

The Grief Recovery Method® Program provides the correct action choices that help people move beyond the pain caused by loss. The program provides a safe environment to look at old beliefs about dealing with loss; to look at what losses have affected your life; and to take new actions which lead to completion of the pain attached to one of those losses.

<https://www.griefrecoveryhouston.com/grief-recovery-program/>

2000 North Loop West

Suite 100 Houston, TX 77018

Phone: (832) 966-3743

Text: (832) 966-3743

Fax: (832) 575-1001

Email: [info@griefrecoveryhouston.com](mailto:info@griefrecoveryhouston.com)

