

Maximum Living Newsletter

“Dedicated To Our Families As They Take The Grief Journey”

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THE GIFT OF FORGIVENESS

by Kay Talbot

When my nine-year-old daughter, Leah, died suddenly in 1982 from an unexplained brain seizure, I had not thought a whole lot about forgiveness. I was mourning the death of my marriage to her father, having divorced him the previous year. I was still riding the emotional roller coaster of ups and downs that are part of grieving a loss. My daughter's death meant I was destined to continue riding that roller coaster much longer than I would have ever imagined.

Over the years I came to realize that guilt and anger were key emotions behind the pain that was searing my soul. Through a long process of study and reflection, I have come to realize that feelings of anger, resentment, and guilt are part of the grief process for most people. Often our anger is directed at others such as doctors, nurses, clergy, police, family, friends, God, and/or the loved one who died and left us. This is especially true when the death was a suicide or murder or might have been preventable in some way.

Like so many bereaved parents, I felt guilty for not being able to keep my daughter alive, somehow. An autopsy revealed no answer for why she apparently suffered a brain seizure that caused her heart to stop beating that day. And so I live with the “Why?” question, as so many others do.



For a long time, I believed that I had failed in my duty as her mother. I should have taken her home with me the day I visited her at camp and learned she had caught a cold. I was guilty of not being diligent enough. At the same time, there was the guilt I felt because of the freedom I now had from the exhausting responsibilities of being a single parent raising a handicapped child.

It was only through a long process of counseling and spiritual exploration that I finally concluded my guilt was misconstrued. I did not have the power to keep anyone else alive, not even my beloved daughter. Sometimes it is easier to live with guilt than to feel powerless. Ultimately, I had to admit I was indeed powerless in many ways. I came to believe that for reasons unknown to me, Leah had followed her destiny. Gradually this process of re-examining and changing my beliefs allowed me to relinquish my guilt and forgive myself.

Anger is another emotion that commonly accompanies grief. We can be angry at ourselves for things we did and didn't say or do, most often preceded in our thinking by the words, “if only...”. Sometimes we may be using our anger to avoid the pain of our loss or to avoid communicating with others about what we are feeling.

Anger can be a very useful emotion. My anger was
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GOOD HEALTH ON THE JOURNEY

by Shirley Brogan, LPC

Remember the last time you traveled and were sick? Extra tissues, some aspirin and cold medication packed into a handy duffle bag? Something to keep your stomach settled as you climb into the car or board the plane?

Good health is something we count on as we travel, but we don't always have it. Stress before the trip can wear us out. Even an unexpected accident – a knee injury or a wrenched back – can make little things, like not sleeping in your own bed, difficult.

As you move through a new part of your life, without a loved one who has died, you are on what many call a journey through grief. It is travel through new territory with destinations you may not have imagined. Taking good care of your physical self can

make you stronger to face whatever comes. Poor health can slow you down, physically and emotionally, and make the journey's difficult times more fearful.

“Having good health does not mean you will never get sick,” writes Alexandra Stoddard in her book, The Art of the Possible. (William Morrow, 1995) “We all have to grapple with colds, flus, broken limbs, and pain of one kind or another. Some of us have chronic problems such as ulcers, arthritis, and back pain.”

She notes that while it may be impossible to go through life without any physical or emotional mishaps, it is possible to live without bringing unnecessary suffering on ourselves.

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The Gift of Forgiveness

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directed at God...how could he allow such bad things to happen to His people? My anger kept me in dialogue and relationship with God. Ultimately, I came to believe that God did not choose for Leah to die; it was merely her time to shed her earth suit and continue her spiritual journey in God's world.

Today, in my work with grieving people, I often find that forgiveness is misunderstood. What does forgiveness mean? Let's look first at what it doesn't mean. Forgiveness does not mean condoning or pardoning insensitive or abusive behavior or acting like everything is okay when we feel it isn't. It does not mean forgetting what has happened or naively trusting others who have shown themselves untrustworthy.

Robin Casarjian, (from her book, Forgiveness: A Bold Choice for a Peaceful Heart, 1992), helps to clarify this:

"What we are forgiving is not the act, not the abuse or the insensitivity. What we are forgiving is the people, the people who could not manage to honor and cherish themselves, us, their families, their spouses, their children or others. What we are forgiving is their confusion and ignorance and desperation and whatever it happens to be. It's not about what you do. It's about how you perceive the person and the situation."

Forgiveness is a conscious decision to stop hating both ourselves and others. It is an act of self-interest—something we do for ourselves to find greater freedom and peace. Even when we have suffered a severe trauma, we can work through our appropriate anger and choose forgiveness as a powerful way to cast off the role of the victim.

When we choose forgiveness, we consciously recognize that we cannot change others, but we can change ourselves—gradually, over time, and often with difficult, emotional work.

Psychologist, Richard Gayton, journeyed through this difficult process after his wife was murdered in their home. "We became frightened and confused when we notice that our grief and fear are as strong or even stronger, for brief periods, even many months after the death than it was during the first periods of shock," says Gayton.

"In fact, we customarily cycle back and forth between resting, remembering and releasing our emotions as the healing part of our minds brings up each aspect of our loss for healing. It's as if the mind selects 'chunks' of the experience that are just enough for us to deal with at that moment. Healing takes place in such 'moments of time' through accepting and learning to change our thinking."

Forgiving becomes a process we embrace over and over. Memorials and rituals are tools we use to continue this process. Forgiveness is not a one-time event that absolves us of all future feelings of anger or guilt. Guilt, like anger, can be a useful emotion. Appropriate guilt stirs up our consciences and makes us realize we need to ask for forgiveness. Whereas, inappropriate guilt keeps us from feeling forgiven and from creating a healthy future.

In my evolving grief process, I have learned to identify, express and release anger and inappropriate guilt, to forgive, to seek and receive forgiveness. The person I am becoming is a gift from my daughter. Not one I would have chosen, but one I cherish nevertheless. My hope is that all who grieve will find such gifts within the legacy of their own lives.

An excerpt from the article in [Bereavement Magazine](#)



"Forgiveness means accepting the core of every human being as the same as yourself and giving them the gift of not judging them."

-Joan Borysenko, PhD.



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Russellville, AR
Hospice Care Network
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Hospice of Salina
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HospiceCare of Southeast Florida
Fort Lauderdale, FL
Tomorrow's Child
Lansing, MI

Grief Resource Center

For Additional Resources, please visit the [GRIEF RESOURCE CENTER](http://www.maximumlivingconsult.com) at: www.maximumlivingconsult.com

SUGGESTED READINGS

- Healing Grief**, by Victor Parachin. Chalice Press, 2001.
- Living When a Loved One Has Died**, by Earl Grollman. Beacon Press, 1995.
- The Challenge of Living**, by John D. Canine, Ed.D., Ph.D. (call 866-540-0047 to order) Ball Publishers, 1983.
- Helping Children Cope with the Loss of a Loved One: A guide for Grown-ups**, by W. C. Kroen. Free Spirit Publishing, 1996.
- Motherless Daughters: The Legacy of Loss**, by Hope Edelman. Dell Publishing, 1994.
- A Grief Observed**, by C.S. Lewis. Bantam Books, 1961.

ORGANIZATIONS FOR SUPPORT

- Compassionate Friends for Bereaved Parents**
P.O. Box 3696 • Oak Brook, IL 60522 • 630-990-0010
<http://www.compassionatefriends.org>
- Widowed Persons**
1909 K Street, NW • Washington, DC 20049
WidowNet: <http://www.fortnet.org/WidowNet>

WEBSITES WORTH SURFIN'

- Centering Corporation** - www.centering.org
- Willowgreen**-(James E. Miller)-<http://willowgreen.com>
- Bereavement Magazine**-<http://bereavementmag.com>

Good Health on the Journey

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“Being accountable for your health and taking action on your own behalf are essential,” says Stoddard. She warns against overdoing it. Extensive physical exercise or heavy workouts may give you a feeling of control in your ability to shape your body, but, she adds: “it will not prevent your body from needing rest or from growing old and changing.”

“We have to respect our own individual capacities for physical exertion;... It’s not fair to expect your body to be able to do strenuous exercise if you have a bad back, or if you’re prone to getting flushed and dizzy when you work out....Moderation is the key to good health and balance.”

She further adds:

“Exercise, dancing, participating in a sport, and physical exertion of any kind are great contributors to a healthy state of mind and body.” Endorphins, chemicals that give us a sense of well-being and joy, are released in our bodies as we exercise or move continuously for a period of time. The movement doesn’t have to be jogging in the park.

“I get this sense of exhilaration, this wholeness, often when I clean the kitchen floor or wax our wood floors. Not only do I get the floors clean and gleaming, but I feel enormous satisfaction from doing the work myself....You get energy from exerting energy.”

Stoddard also believes illness, when it comes, can be a teacher. It tells us that we have gone off course, that we have lost our way. She tells of the day her brother Powell died, and how she had taken a walk in a snowfall, oblivious to the cold and to her wet shoes.

She hadn’t eaten properly or slept well during his illness, and came down with a “dreadful, debilitating cold.”

What she learned, as friends came to care for her, was that often “our helplessness forces us to receive warmth and care from others, care that we all need. In illness, we learn that it is not only OK to depend on others, but that such relationships can be healing for all involved.”

As you make your journey through grief, what are the ways that you are taking care of you?

Endorphins, produced when we move, give us a sense of well-being and joy.



THE ACTIVITY PYRAMID

Barry Franklin, PhD

Maximum Living Support Groups

The purpose of the Support Group is to come together and draw strength and support from each other during this time of loss. The meetings are part of the community outreach program of our Funeral Home and are available at no charge. Please feel free to attend and know that your friends and family members are always welcome.

The following Support Group is available in your area, for a complete listing, please go to: www.maximumlivingconsult.com
