

Seven Pages of Grief
Volume One

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Dedication

This series of essays on grief is dedicated to an incredible forever young man, my son James Peter Ratcliffe who died at Hudson, Quebec in a firefighter water rescue training accident on June 6, 2005 at age 20.

Everyone talks about the perfect child, but James was really exactly all of what we imagine as perfection in a child. I learned so much about love watching and mentoring him for twenty years.

I have learned far more about love as I have explored and healed the pain of losing his physical presence.

In a reversal of roles, part of my life is now following what I believe would have been James' footsteps in life and thinking more like an idealistic twenty year old.

James was raised to have purpose and be kind and he died being kind to his community as a volunteer firefighter.

I know that James would want us our grief to have purpose, not pain, he would want everyone to love living their lives as much as he loved living his life.

James would be proud of me finding purpose in this sharing to help others who may struggle with grief to find some constructive purpose in their grief.

Foreward

We humans fear the inevitability of death and we don't talk enough about grief. I will keep talking until I run out of things to say, or until people are grieving the loss of me.

This is a short free eBook on Grief, the first volume of I have no idea how many volumes yet to come. This free downloadable PDF booklet is formatted to fit on 8-1/2"x11" paper, to print on one or both sides, with margins suitable for two sided printing and hole-punching to use simple 3 ring binders or other methods of binding.

The title of this series, "Seven Pages of Grief", is a gently mocking wordplay on the common "Seven Stages of Grief" that many speak of or write about. The Seven Stages of Grief are a concept that I don't favour as fully effective for healing the loss of loved one. I have come to understand grief differently since I have experienced grief that just didn't react to that concept and I explored solutions and meaning outside of that concept.

Each essay will be standalone, so you can easily share the entire volume, or print and share a single essay on paper with someone you believe that it might help. Sometimes grieving people need small chunks of information, inspiration or new ideas rather than a big picture solution that might overwhelm them.

The "Seven Pages" is also homage to my many prior personal attempts and failures to write a complete book on grief. I am not a trained or professional writer, but I have written hundreds thousands of words as weekly newspaper columns. I believe that, on grief, perhaps I might function and communicate more effectively via short conversational essays on topics I am passionate about. I intend to speak to you as if I were sitting with you discussing grief.

I have decided that I will break the subject of grief down into sequential volumes, each a grouping of seven seemingly random essays, rather than a straight line. I will take authors liberty on the paper length of each of the seven "pages", some will be short, some will be better suited to scrolls, but each of these volumes will include seven purposefully random essays on concepts and thoughts that I believe are important parts for healing grief. Each will fit on as few or as many pages as it takes for me to fully describe the point I think you need to understand.

There is no intent or sense of profit in this work. You are free to use this writing, with attribution to me or links, for any non-commercial use. Use is also free use for paid therapists, grief counselors, clergy and both commercial and casual grief support groups who might deem any part of it to have value for their discussions with those grieving.

I am without professional education in healing grief. But, I have extensive real life experience in grief, having grieved multiple unexpected and untimely losses. The big three:

- 2000: the loss of a brother to suicide at age 43
- 2001: the loss of a best friend and key employee of my small company to sudden heart failure in his late 30's.
- 2005: the death of our son in a firefighter training accident at age 20.

That last one, the loss of a child, truly broke and emptied my soul. Today, my soul is alive, healed, well and comfortably scarred, and very full of love for life. I visit and speak of these losses regularly and comfortably. The people I have loved and have lost remain close to me and are a wonderful and very valuable part of me.

I don't believe that grief ends, nor do I believe that it should. I believe that we complicate our lives and promote a feeling of failure when we seek to visit seven (or more) stages of a journey and then try to reach a conclusion on some imaginary timeline.

Instead, I understand that grief is a purposeful highly evolved human process of love that teaches us to embed and include loss comfortably into the rest of our lives. Grieving is an honour (I am Canadian, eh), a process of gathering, sorting, and carrying memories and lessons from those we have loved and lost.

I have come to call grief a process of distillation. Though grief we concentrate and keep the best of the spirits of those we have loved with us comfortably for a lifetime, while discarding most of the anger and pain. Distillation to comfort requires conscious work, time and understanding, and each loss we grieve requires different understandings. As a result, grief is really a very individual and personal process leading each of us on a very different personal journey to heal the loss of the same person.

The wisdom you require for distilling your grief to comfort will come from inside you, it's waiting to be discovered, unwrapped and planted permanently into your soul. I will help you ask the questions of yourself, I will try to help you avoid pitfalls and obstacles along your journey through grief and through life.

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Grief is the final responsibility for having loved someone

Responsibility is an underlying theme of my writings and discussions on grief. How we choose to grieve is a responsibility that should respect and it should be chosen to reflect the value and the meaning of the love we have shared with those whom we have loved and lost.

Grieving responsibly also implies that we will continue to love ourselves and those around us who share this loss, consciously minimizing the collateral and ongoing damage to ourselves and to those around us. We grieve responsibly to best preserve the memories of the love that we have built and shared in life.

Begin with Honesty.

You're my kind of people, good loving people. You come here because you have loved. You did not come here for sport or entertainment. You came here because you feel pain you might not understand, you feel changed in ways you might not want to have changed, and you are feeling different and somehow unsettled or unstable. You came here because you are struggling, because have lost a loved one, because you will lose a loved one, or because someone you know is struggling with the grief of losing a loved one. You came here seeking a better memory of someone you have loved and lost.

Grief is usually associated with death, but we will grieve many things in life. Loss of a love based relationship, loss of job, a mistake you have made, hurt you have caused, an accident you have caused, or an accident that you have not caused but injured or affected you, the loss of a pet, and so many more life events that can trigger grief can all be incorporated into your lives by what you learn about grief here.

Whatever brought you here is serious business, potentially hazardous to your physical and mental health as well as your relationships and lifestyle. This is challenging territory, and to be responsible you will need to recognize if and when you need more help than you can find here or on other sites or books.

It is important that you quickly and honestly recognize any leanings towards self harm and if such feelings surface you immediately seek professional help. The same advice applies if your grief become intractable and you feel stuck or overwhelmed or depressed for a period of time that makes you uncomfortable or unable to manage your responsibilities of daily life in a responsible fashion.

Grief Health Basics

Grief is emotional, stressful and physically exhausting, so before we get into it, a few basic physical and mental health suggestions and ground rules are important.

Do you have any pre-existing conditions or illnesses, physical or mental?

Even if you feel that you are in good health, a visit to your primary care physician soon after loss would always be a wise choice. Tell them about your loss, and be honest how loss is impacting your daily life and your relationships with others. Establishing baselines of blood pressure and other factors that might be of concern will ease your mind and help you to remain healthy and manage risks as you grieve. A heart attack or stroke would complicate your grief and negatively impact the lives of many more around you, so we want to responsibly avoid or manage health risks as best we can.

Sleep is essential, so if you are unable to sleep well enough, your doctor can explore solutions that are non-addictive.

Your diet may suffer. It's common to forget to eat, to eat poorly, to lose interest in basic nutrition, or even to over eat. If you are alone, feeding yourself well can be challenging, so some focus on regular healthy meals is important to maintain and fuel the energy required to grieve. Those who wish to help: please feed the grieving people regularly.

Care for yourself first, while keeping an eye on those around you who are grieving the same or similar loss. People around you may lean on you, but that leaning may be too much for you to handle while you yourself are grieving. Be honest and open, choose kindness when offering to help and ensure that extending your kindness doesn't harm you or drag you backwards.

You may be irrational at times, perhaps more prone to bad judgment than usual. This irrationality can compile and trigger events that are more destructive to your life than grief normally might be. A moratorium on major decisions in life is important, but some critical decisions must be made in spite of grief. Take notes and establish a timeline to better monitor your own competence to make major decisions.

You might be more prone to substance abuse, and the legal and physical ramifications might last a lifetime and cause more grief to you and to others around you.

Please be responsible and aware of negative changes that might creep into your life. Some people will use grief as a crutch or an excuse, and those behaviours can become lifelong habits that make grief harder and less effective and they may drive people close to you away.

Grief will be a stress test for you and those around you, both emotionally and physically. It is a marathon, not a sprint to a finish. You will lose some friends and may gain a few much more important friends in grief. There will be inevitable social changes that must be incorporated into our daily lives.

Volume One Seven Pages of Grief Essay 1

What is grief?

It seems fitting to squeeze in my most common distillation of grief early in Volume One. This explanation is something that I can spontaneously adapt to be situation appropriate when writing about or speaking to someone experiencing grief. It's a great guide for those wondering what to say to someone who has loved and lost.

I ask you to read these points one line at a time, close your eyes and absorb that line, until you accept and understand that line as your truth for your loss.

These simple truths are the basis of understanding your grief as a necessary and productive part of any good life that shares love.

Grief Is Love

- We grieve because we love
- No love, no grief. Deep love, deep and complex grief.
- When we love someone, there is always the possibility that one of us will die before the other.
- The person we have loved has died; our love for them has not died.
- We don't wish to forget, we want to continue our love for them.
- Grief is the final responsibility for loving someone.
- Grief is an evolved emotion, attached and woven directly into love we share.
- Grief is a teacher, it reminds us of the purpose and depth of love, and at the same time that our lives are finite and there is an urgency to build love.
- The lessons and memories that we can find in grief are meant to be cherished and shared for a lifetime and not meant to be forgotten.
- **The grief you feel is one of the greatest love stories of your life, it needs to be expressed freely and shared.**

The last point is bold, because whenever you will speak of those who have died, you should tell a story of life, of that love that was meaningful enough for you to never forget, a love truly worth sharing with others.

Too often in grief, we speak only of death, forgetting that we grieve not because of the inevitability of their death, but because in our life we have memorably loved another life and that love entered our souls and became a living part of our own love for life.

It's a big goal, but if I have one purpose writing here, it would be to help you become comfortable with all of the grief that you have now and better at dealing with whatever grief you will experience later in your life.

Grieving with purpose adds meaning and personal goals to the grief that you feel and helps to validate your grief as natural and healthy. That validation will allow you the comfort to journey through this grief at any time seeking memories and lessons to enrich your life and the lives of those around you.

The goal is to build the most comfortable grief that you can find for each loss in your life.

I can say, with confidence that whatever grief has brought you here probably won't be the last grief you will experience. If your destiny is to live long and love well, you will grieve, so it's a good idea to get some tools and some skills for grief along the path of your life.

The attitudes and tools for grieving the death of a loved one can help you grieve losses in your life that don't involve death. These tools allow you to better understand, accept and redefine yourself after any loss you will suffer in your life.

Good tools to last a lifetime of loving life where grief is inevitable.

Volume One Seven Pages of Grief Essay 2

Grief Arrives, Happiness Leaves

You're not happy grieving, which is the completely normal and expected response.

Grief is tougher than you had ever imagined it might be.

I have been there, I know how you feel.

Grief comes at you like a terrorist holding you hostage and torturing you. You feel trapped and just want grief to end; you want to leave the pain and escape back to the life you knew before grief.

Grief seems, at first, very inconvenient, inconsiderate and extremely unkind.

Honestly, behind everything: Grief is really making you angry.

Grief has an evolved purpose in its way of first making you angry, making you feel trapped, of making you cry when you don't want to. Those emotions are an evolved response. Pain is a call to action that can't easily be ignored, so we have evolved to feel intense emotional pain when we lose a loved one.

Anger is a starting point of grief common to all human loss.

How can something as painful as grief have any positive purpose?

I hope to help you change your perspective and teach you what I have learned through grieving multiple losses: Grief is a teacher, an ancient and highly evolved process with great purpose, where we each can learn more about life and love. I hope to help you find comfort in your grief by helping you find a purpose of redefinition and confirmation of your personal value and meaning of the love in your life.

Only as you move away from the angry epicenter of loss, you can come to see and understand the real purpose of grief. Without anger, or with less anger, you will be better able to redefine yourself in more positive directions. With less anger you will slowly stop resenting grief, perhaps even embrace it. Once we remove the anger of resentment, there are so many more productive pathways to incorporate this loss more comfortably into your life in very positive ways.

This grief that you're trying to escape from is one of the great love stories of your life, it's not something you should run away from quickly, and in the memories there are lessons you should carry in your soul, into the rest of your life comfortably exploring why that love and all love has meaning for your life.

A well grieved loss can become a super power, mentoring and shaping you for deeper more meaningful love in your daily life.

There will be other losses in your future, because if you love, you are destined to grieve. Learning to grieve constructively will help make you better prepared for the next loss. You can acquire a personal spiritual toolbox full of the fundamental attitudes that, in a good life where we love freely and deeply, we will have the honor, the responsibility to grieve the loss of those we have loved and eventually lost from our physical world.

A fundamental goal is to heal this pain with no lasting damage to ourselves. I am certain that the person you have loved and lost would not want you broken and in the pain and confusion that brings you here today.

Grief is not your enemy, grief is love now expressed by one, honoring the love that you have shared. Grief must be shaped and concentrated to comfort, so that we may carry, without weight, the wonderful memories and powerful lessons of love we have shared through the rest of our lives.

You can do this. It will take thought, it will take courage, it will challenge you, force you to confront your loss, it will make you understand and become stronger than your pain, and as it progresses it will help you grow around loss and become better at loving life.

Give me your attention and let's see if my experience and what I have learned about grief can help you. You have so much to gain, but nothing to lose.

Volume One Seven Pages of Grief Essay 3

Who am I to talk about grief?

As I write this in 2023, I am a retired Canadian husband (once and still), father of two (one deceased) and grandfather of two beautiful and brilliant grandkids. This eBook that I am writing, and my website and blog are dedicated to our late son with thanks for what his life and loss continues to teach me about love.

I am a simple man talking openly and calmly about my grief, atypical behavior for males of my age and generation. Coming to this point in my life was not an easy journey, it has taken many years. I am vulnerable here opening my scarred soul to view. My intent is to cause good things to happen in how people might come to see the purpose and meaning of grief.

I have no negative purpose, commercial goals or hidden agenda. I am spiritual, but an agnostic so there is no religious agenda here. I keep it simple, self- managed and self funded and will not profit in any way from the distribution of these downloadable volumes.

Disclaimer: My thoughts and interpretations may not be applicable to your grief; my writing contains honest thoughts that may trigger you as easily as they might guide you. If my thoughts are of no value, or of negative value to you, please stop reading and seek answers and guidance elsewhere.

Grief is the most personal of journeys, and there is no one path, no one solution for the challenges that grief brings to your life. That said, whatever triggers you to anger or tears is probably something that you need to work more on to reach a more peaceful life.

Stay, leave, come back often, never come back, it's your choice. This is free advice with no income potential or monetary purpose for me. It is a discussion that I feel that I have been called to offer people who might need a shoulder to lean on, or a thought based in experience to guide them. A common emotion in grief is loneliness, because grief makes you different and it takes time for people around you to understand how you have changed. That's rooted in our discomfort and lack of discussion about grief.

For me to become credible to you, it's important for you to know a bit about me, my qualification (or lack thereof), and especially some of my journeys through grief.

I am not formally trained; my training is experiential and quite deep. My experience with grief has been primarily with untimely and unexpected death. My credentials are not degrees on my walls, but a collection of well healed deep scars on my soul from healing losses. Most of us try to hide the scars on our souls because we fear they will be seen as weaknesses that others might exploit.

My soul has been hurt to the point that almost nothing could ever hurt me more, and now that I have healed comfortably from those injuries, I know I am stronger than ever before. I will carefully share my scarred soul with you; so that you might find more hope in healing your soul well and coming back to a stronger version of you truly loving life after whatever loss brings you here.

For me, there is little more beautiful than the resilience of a human soul that has healed from loss again and again and again loving life. Through healing, we are freed from being defined by our losses; we become ourselves again but a completely redefined purpose and understanding of life. If you come to believe that this healing process of our soul is inside of us waiting to be unlocked and empowered, then you can allow yourself much more hope of healing.

No longer defined by loss, we are are instead defined by learning and reaching the high plateaus of understanding that we have climbed onto as we have healed those losses. Our view has changed, because we through loss we have chosen to be called to seeing life and love differently.

Loss can enrich our lives with dramatic new understandings of love, and remind us that there is urgency to build and share love, because all life is finite. We who heal well are the lucky ones, we live comfortably able to carry, to teach and to share the memories of every great love that has come to our life.

Seven Pages of Grief Essay Four

What do I know about grief?

We all have a perceived timeline of what our life is meant to be in the context of the universe. We speak of average life expectancy at birth and at any point in a lifetime, but there are never guarantees that our life or the life of any of our loved ones will be average, worse than average, or better than average.

Subconsciously we will measure each death against the concept of an average life, and often use the word fair in that discussion. A shorter life seems unfair, a longer life is preferred.

Suicide is complicated by the victim having made the difficult to accept choice to end their own life. In a later volume I will discuss the details and what I can understand about the suicide of my brother twenty-three years ago when he was 43. That event was not my first contact with suicide, but this one was my family, and my first untimely and very personal major loss and ensuing grief.

Suicide is always complicated by the widespread collateral damage to the survivors, family and friends seeking answers that no one has, and by religious and societal stigma, the moral and religious context of suicide further complicates the grief that surrounds it, and try as we might there is a large element of shame that further isolates the survivors. There is more complicated anger in grieving suicide than most deaths and that can bring the survivors guilt and self-recrimination. Family dynamics are complicated by suicide, often leading to arguments and isolation of the survivors, increasing their danger.

The second major death I grieved was Eugene, a key employee of my small company, a man who was my best friend, a trusted and loyal part of my life and an integral part of my company and income for two decades. This death was also untimely, in that he was in his early 40's and died at home alone one night of an undiagnosed heart problem. For me it was complicated more by happening a few months after my brother's suicide, when my grief was unhealed, not yet organized, when more grief piled on with Eugene's untimely death. This death created serious business consequences, and a group of employees grieving the same loss and wondering about their future added emotional and financial pressure on me personally.

Sometimes life piles on and keeps pounding you. In 2005, five years after my brother's suicide, four years after Eugene's sudden unexpected untimely death came a third major untimely loss of our son. Our near perfect 20 year old son James died in a firefighter training accident in our small home town. The accident was avoidable, a result of poor choices at many levels of a municipal government and fire department leadership, so blame and anger across a small community further complicated grief.

Those three major untimely and unexpected losses were immensely challenging, but the experience and understanding gained from each prior loss helped me with the successive challenges. That said, loss of a child is probably considered the most challenging form of grief.

Grieving the loss of a child as a married couple is probably the most challenging thing we have done together, a grieving process with a statistically very high divorce rate.

The tools gained thru excellent therapy after my brother's suicide provided little satisfaction or acceptance in the death of our son. The commonly used staging of grief, the concept that grief has a beginning, some number of stages, and then a conclusion called acceptance, proved unproductive for me in dealing with the loss of our son.

It was the loss of our son that forced me to seek different perspectives, tools, and methods to resolve my grief to comfort. Looking back, I spent five years struggling for acceptance within common teachings on grief and then another five gradually finding my different paths to comfort, and then a bunch of years trying to organize my thoughts into something presentable and coherent that I can share with others.

I became fascinated with the seemingly automatic process of grief and came to see it as an evolution unique to animals that have evolved to having family and community social structures. Of those animals that grieve, humans have the most complex social structures, the most varied community dependencies that we call civilization. It's logical that human evolution into civilization has evolved a purposeful process of grief to have an important functional part of our life.

In writings and in speaking to people about their losses, many have encouraged me to write a book on grief. Writing about personal losses is challenging, and I have started that book many times without finishing it.

This process of blogging and writing a non-commercial self-published eBook to give away to those who may need some help or insight into grief is designed to keep me honestly engaged in better understanding grief. These writings are my different understandings of the human soul and the most uniquely human emotion that we call love and what happens to us when we lose a loved one. I'm slowly (hopefully very slowly) running out of years to share these thoughts and ideas as a legacy, but I have the luxury of time now.

It has been my great honour to walk beside people who grieve, not pulling or pushing, just keeping them company and giving them someone to talk to. For many, grief will be the most profound loneliness that they will ever experience, and that loneliness can have devastating consequences.

I have been told that I am comfortable to talk to about loss, that I bring peace and understanding quickly to some. My writing will try to be conversational, if you pause reading to speak your thoughts to others or even write to me, you will flatter me and reinforce this purpose that loss has chosen for me.

I have been called "wise" by some. I can't or won't judge myself, but do know that I believe that what we humans call wisdom, in its purest form, is always acquired by healing great pain of loss into truth.

Some have even said that I have "grace". Again I can't judge myself, but know that I believe that what we humans call grace is universally the result of becoming wise without becoming angry for the pain that acquiring wisdom brought to us.

More than one might tell you that I helped save their life by talking to them openly about loss, especially suicide. If so, know that I have only helped them to find enough reasons for them to save their own lives. They each did the hard work; I was merely a bystander or spotter ready to try to catch them before they fell, but trusting that under all personal strife is a very human will to not only survive, but to love living.

Be well, seek peace, and build love. These words evolved in a very long continuing conversation by email in support of someone grieving multiple losses as a way to always close my emails with some reminder of purpose.

Be well, seek peace, and build love.

Seven Pages of Grief Essay 5

Gardens for Grief

We build them in our soul, for our soul. It begins with your attitude.

If we treat grief as an affliction that needs to be cured, then naturally we will resent the injury and try to hurry thru grief as quickly as possible. If you believe in the process has some number of stages of grief, we will try to do each stage quickly, so we can say that we've been there and done that and our grief is over. But, whenever you are again confronted with a recurrent emotion, you will perhaps again resent the return of that thought you believed had been dealt with.

On the other hand, I believe that grief is a highly evolved process that informs and teaches us about love. It is a purposely lifelong process of gathering and cataloging the positive feelings of a specifically meaningful love that you have shared. Grief as a teacher can make you more aware of all of the types and versions of love that you share in daily life, and grief can make you better at loving those people who surround you.

The initial shock and unbalancing of emotions that quickly follows a death can cause people to hit the road towards acceptance and run through the process too quickly. Grief becomes a hurried journey, 20 cities in 14 day unguided tour through a strange place you never really wanted to go to. Your hurried schedule is fixed, you have only so many hours to explore and absorb each place you go to before you must get back on the bus and head to the next place. At the end of two weeks, you can't remember much about any of the places you have visited, you barely know which city you're in, and you are exhausted rather than enlightened.

The model that I have adopted for grief is different. I build that peaceful garden, an emotional place in my soul for each of the loved ones that I have lost. Gardens not just for those lost thru death but also those lost thru disconnection. Loss thru disconnection, if unresolved to peace, can be more traumatic and more damaging to our daily life than loss thru death.

I'm an older geek, so I have built this emotional ability on the model of a Star Trek Transporter that disassembles a living breathing person and re-assembles them somewhere else. I can "beam" myself completely between daily life and each of these quiet peaceful gardens, each garden full of the collection of memories and lessons I have built in that part of my life. When life calls, I can "beam" myself right back into daily life, with all of its noise and responsibility. The way I do it, grief is a quiet place full of peaceful comfortable gardens that I can visit any time I need or want to.

The words peaceful and comfortable are operative here. If the emotional place you build in memory of a love lost is not peaceful and comfortable, then you will avoid visiting it. This is the case for most people, their grief remains uncomfortable and a place to avoid.

My gardens are full of the most valuable but lost parts of my life, so not being able to visit them comfortably would keep me away and erase the greatest parts of my past. Grief could become a desolate empty place over a lifetime, or it can become a beautiful place to visit.

It is imperative that you extinguish any anger that accidentally comes into these gardens of memories. Anger causes fires that will damage or destroy the memories that you most want to hold onto.

Simplified, my process is to resolve anger that I find in grief within my daily life.

When I find resonance, peace, and happiness in a memory of someone I loved, I move that important memory to the safe peaceful emotional garden that I am building and plant it. This move and re-plant process for memories isolates, concentrates and protects the important memories I wish to keep alive and safe from the fires of any remaining anger. Order and organization of the garden can come with time, the important part is to seek, collect, move and replant the important memories we find while grieving.

I have programmed my emotional transporter to sense the danger of anger and to not allow me to visit these places when I have active anger. This keeps the responsibility for extinguishing anger front and center in my daily life and protects the peaceful memories I am keeping.

Well managed anger is a natural and often healthy part of grief. In some grief, for me it's often my brother's suicide, recurring flares of anger are normal events that may never be resolved to my complete peaceful satisfaction. I believe those flares are self-protective warnings, sparked by some fear of ever finding myself in the emotional state he was when he killed himself. I keep that anger in my conscious daily life and it shapes things that I do, say and write to help prevent suicide.

Keeping the unresolved anger in daily life keeps that anger from becoming an emotional wildfire in your garden. When I seek peace from the anger, I must put aside and cleanse myself of it before I visit my gardens, to keep memories of lost loved ones anger free.

When I began this process of creating emotional spaces, I thought first as a library with rooms for each person I have loved. But libraries are passive places that require no effort or input. So, I came to the peaceful garden concept, because one must visit, tend to and nurture a garden to derive real benefit and satisfaction from it. Gardens will suffer weeds, drought, flood and untended unused gardens die. These emotional gardens I have built need me to visit, to bring new memories, to trim and adjust old memories. These gardens live and breathe, keeping the past alive with my help, in the same way those I have lost once lived and breathed.

No hurry, but in your grief, start building a safe and accessible emotional garden for those memories that you will wish to keep alive. Keep it free of anger and of the noise and responsibility of daily life. Bring and plant beautiful memories when you transport yourself there, and bring some pretty flowers back into your daily life from those well planted memories every time you visit your garden.

Be well, seek peace and build quiet peaceful gardens of love for your most important memories.

Volume One Seven Pages of grief Essay 6

Assignment: Keep a Journal

Grief will change us, grief must change us.

Grief will redefine the parts of ourselves that loss has broken, and we will grow around the loss. If we are aware of those changes, we can help shape the changes.

Choose your journaling method, paper and pen, or digital. My handwriting is awful and I am comfortable on digital, so I keep my journal digitally. Digitally, I prefer reverse chronological order, so I start at the top of my last post and insert a page break, pushing yesterday's writing down. I date the new page, and casually begin adding my feelings and thoughts. I include my goals and my fears. I explore pain I have felt, and memories that I have found. Most of all include your hopes and dreams as you return back to life, and any happy moments from any source from the previous day.

Early in grief, I wrote a daily entry on a fixed schedule. I'm an early riser, so I set aside 20-30 minutes of each early morning, when I am alone, to open a blank page and write. Sometimes I got a line or two, and sometimes I went overtime and filled many pages. Over time it became random, I would slack for a few days and then miss writing.

The main purpose of any journal is to establish history and gain perspective of changes over time. Be truthful and open with yourself, the journal is private. You may never read back to older posts, but a journal allows you to. I would usually be shocked at how far I had come when I read back to my early anger and confusion riddled posts. My journal helped me to find the issues that kept rising up to hurt me, the issues that I still needed to heal.

Some find the structure of a standard template of questions helpful.

- What made me sad today?
- What made me happy today?
- What am I going to work on today?
- Did I accomplish what I said I would work on yesterday?
- On a scale of 0(worst) to 10(wonderful) how do I feel today?
- On a scale of 0(no anger) to 10 (couldn't be more angry) how angry am I today?

Digital or paper I am convinced you will find a journal is a valuable and productive tool. Choose your most comfortable format and please make the time to document your journey through grief.

Be well, seek peace and journal your journey through grief.

Volume One Seven Pages of grief Essay 7

Anger in Grief

This last “page” of volume one is an advanced and longer essay.

There are a few links to my online blog early in the post that new followers might wish to branch off for a warm up before the main course, so that the rest of what I am saying might make more sense to you.

Anger is a common component of grief and anger is the most dangerous and destructive emotion. I commonly refer to anger as a cancer of the human soul that consumes love. Grief wounds the human soul and often cancer finds a place in a wounded soul.

In my self-developed model of the human soul (www.distillinggrief.com/2023/04/24/a-model-of-a-soul/), I believe that we build metaphysical connections with loved ones that allow us to give and to receive love from each of those that we love. When we are grieving, we are bleeding the life force energy of love (www.distillinggrief.com/2023/04/25/what-is-love/ link) from our soul because of the loss of a loved one, and as our reservoir of love drops anger can come to feed easily.

As we love someone longer and deeper, we establish trust. When we trust, we flow deeper love with less resistance. A special loved one dies and all of the connections we have with them, small and large, deep and shallow will bleed love from our soul towards the memory of them. The process of healing grief can reconnect those broken pathways of love to the permanent memories and monuments that we build in the gardens of our grief (insert link), and the loss of love from our own soul eventually comes to a stop.

If we consider that our soul contains only love, and is entirely responsible for our love of daily life, a sudden flow of love away from our soul can trigger panic. The loss of a deeper and more meaningful love, by its depth and breadth, can empty a soul in a very short time causing extreme anxiety and fear that can outwardly present as anger or resentment, or if internalized as numbness.

I experienced that complete emptiness after the death of our son, but at that time I had no capacity to describe or explain it, so what I felt was simply described as numbness. Numb is a common description of how many people feel when grief first sets in. Numb is often a description of the symptom of not knowing how to feel, not understanding what you feel. That’s logical because every grief is so different, a new and uncharted journey without a map. Numb is uncomfortable and unpredictable, and so, we are often made afraid and become angry by being numb.

When we internalize our anger in grief, often we are punishing ourselves for not having done more, for not doing something, for not seeing this coming, for not somehow intervening and stopping the Universe from taking this life that we loved. There's an irrational sense of failure, of hopelessness, and of personal responsibility that is unreasonable to place on ourselves. These negative emotions can become self destructive and self defeating quickly, and they can form lasting bad habits as well, because in our sense of failure is a sense that we might actually bear that responsibility and we twist that to we deserve to have our life punish us for the death of a loved one.

Another side effect of grief is that we lose trust in life itself. We question the purpose of the life lost as well as our own life. This is especially challenging for some who seemingly have very well defined purposes that have been derailed by grief. Grief will change how you see your own life, and questioning your own definition of purpose is a healthy and natural part of grief as you heal. But, this questioning of purpose is not wise too early in grief, because your soul is under filled with love and unbalanced to make such significant decisions competently.

The simplest explanation of the pain that we feel in grief is that we have become addicted to the love that we share with each person that we love. People who truly love life will gather love from one or many other people, from many activities and passions. The complex cocktail of love that we build for ourselves is addicting, and that wonderful addiction truly defines us in daily life. When any component of that cocktail of love is removed, we might lose the feeling and love for our life until we find ways to replace or regenerate that part of the blend of love that we live for.

That collection of love that defines our love for life is blended, not compartmentalized. So, when a significant loved one dies and our soul drains some of all of our sources of love, we can lose some or all of what defines us. Through grief, we may become someone quite different from our usual normal, for a time or for a lifetime. These changes can become negative or positive, they can redefine us as we heal, but left unchecked or unhealed they can destroy much of what we are and much of the life we love living.

In the first couple of years after our son died, I could not look myself in the eye in a mirror. I saw that empty space, the confusion, and the destruction of so much that I had loved about life. I saw my own empty soul and wanted to avoid it. I had lost sight of my own value, a value that I had spent decades building and maintaining. My son was a large part of that value, but in those years any love that flowed into my soul drained through the wounds that his loss had left, wound that I had not healed because I did not understand how to best heal them, or even that I was the one who needed to choose to allow my soul to heal them.

While I was numb, there was very little outward anger. I had internalized it and the cancer of that anger was consuming any love that flowed into my soul. Think of it as an auto-immune reaction of the soul that was addicted to love, now unable to expand and live on the little love remaining.

As the reserves of our collected love flow out and away, we create room for that cancer of anger to come to us. The more full of love our life is, the more we become dependent on a feeling of security that an abundance of love generates in us. In grief, we sense love flowing out of us, and that triggers panic. The deeper the love, the faster that outflow is, the more we feel panic. Panic threatens us and often triggers anger.

Slowly, in spite of the serious injury to my soul, love started to collect again. I could smile, and after a time I could even laugh without guilt. My soul was healing itself. As I explored myself, modeled and explained what I was feeling, I came to understand that I could help myself to heal. I understood that it was I who was responsible for how I would change through grief, that I could build a solid joyful memory for each of those broken pathways and that that memory would reduce the amount of love flowing out of my soul. Building good memories was my path back to live and loving life. Each fixed memory, each monument to that love built in my soul improved my feelings about life.

The vast majority of anger in grief is tied to the things that we just can't change. It's a lot more than simple frustration or resignation; anger is often a violent call to a forced reflection on mortality and the meaning and purpose of our own lives as well as the life of the loved one we have lost. We are drawn into the vortex of coming to understand that love is meaningful to us, but also that love can be suddenly taken from us by any random event of the chaotic Universe. This loosens and may weaken or break some of our foundations and beliefs, upon which we have built our purpose for life.

In my writings I speak of the three choices we have as Ignore, Change, or Accept (insert link). We can't safely ignore the reality of the death of a loved one, and we have no capability to change death, so any death brings us to a forced acceptance of that death and the changes it will bring to our lives. It is human nature to fight or resist forced change, especially those changes that we see as negatively impacting our lives.

The question we must inevitably ask ourselves is: How much of our life, a life that we loved, are we willing to, or expected to sacrifice in memory of this death? The simplest answer I found is that the person you are grieving would be ashamed and disappointed if their death caused any damage to your life. They would not want that responsibility for any part of the ruin that you allow to be inflicted on yourself by their death.

With this perspective, it becomes your responsibility to heal and to minimize the damage to your soul and to your life. This is the foundation of what I mean when I distill grief to:

We grieve because we love.

Be well, seek peace, and extinguish anger from your grief to build love.

Volume One Seven Pages of Grief Closing Words

To be human is a wonderful opportunity, a gift of evolution.

To be human means that we will each come to know loss.

No other species has the ability to organize life to generate the emotions and actions of great purpose and accomplish great things in our individual and collective lives. No other species has the type of soul that makes us human. No other species has a limitless soul with the capacity for love, and therefore no other species has the responsibility to grieve loss, as do we humans.

Humans grieve naturally and with evolved purpose.

Humans grieve because we love.

Grief is love.

I am not finished. I will soon write another volume and probably more after that. Writing has become a part of my healing and redefinition of my souls after losses. Writing on love and grief is now part of my purpose. Between volumes, my latest writings on grief are on:

www.DistillingGrief.com

I have lost, I have perhaps lost the greatest loss. I have healed around loss. I am stronger, deeper and more loving for the journey.

Today, I love my life more than ever. Not in spite of loss, but also because of the awareness that loss has brought me. I have an urgency and passion for loving and living life for as long as I can. Loss has called me to share, from time to time what others might find helpful on their journeys of finding love through grief.

Until our words and thoughts meet again:

You may email me comments, questions or suggestions in confidence at:

Peter@DistillingGrief.com

I will respond as I can if I have time and resonance with your message,

We and our world can never have too much love.

Be well, seek peace and build love in your world.