



# Comfort for the Grieving Heart

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Provided by St. Luke's Hospice Bereavement Program

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*"Loss is inevitable, but what we do with it is a choice we must each make."  
~Bernie Siegel, M.D.*

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**PLEASE NOTE:** If you would like to be added or removed from our mailing list, or if you would prefer to receive an electronic copy, please contact Dawn at 484-526-2499.

After the death of someone we loved, life can feel like a slow motion dance, putting one foot in front of the other in a fuzzy stupor that can last weeks, months or even years. Yet research indicates that some grieverers – even as they struggle with the pain of loss – are able to obtain new insight, acquire new skills and gain new knowledge. Is it possible to grow through our grief?

Fred, a former client of mine, struggled to get his bearings after his wife died. Fred and Sally were married for 42 years, she had been a stay-at-home mother to their only child, daughter Julie. Fred's job as an investment banker took him all over the country. When I first met him, he was broken. He had retired a few months before Sally's death and the retired life he had worked so hard to achieve now looked very bleak without her.

In the following months, though, Fred's love for Sally deepened, strange as that may sound. She'd kept their house immaculate so in the beginning, he struggled with learning how to cook for himself, do laundry and grocery shop. Sally had been the social butterfly in their marriage, arranging dinner parties and backyard barbecues, he was the quiet one by her side. Friends stopped by to check in on him and he heard stories about the wife who never said "no" to volunteering for school events or driving neighbors to doctor appointments. He had never realized what a giving person he had married.

In time, Fred realized he was able to be with other grieverers. When his neighbor's wife died, he stopped at the house to offer condolences. Fred had always been uncomfortable talking about sad things, but over the next several months he and his neighbor George often met for coffee. Fred realized he didn't have to offer words of wisdom; he just listened. It felt good to sit and affirm another person's grief.

Sally had always maintained a strong bond with daughter Julie and her family. The last time I saw Fred he told me he was moving to Colorado to be closer to Julie and his three grandchildren. "Sally was a wonderful grandmother and now it's time for me to learn how to be the best grandfather I can be," he told me.

Death requires us to make changes. The first change is recognizing that life as we know it will be different. But through the changes we encounter along the way, we can also celebrate the growth that comes from these changes. On page 2, we highlight a few ways to grow through grief.

*Jean Francis*

# Choosing to Grow Through Grief

**Build on your strengths.** While the pain of loss may feel raw and unfamiliar, it is unlikely that this is the first crisis you've ever faced. What strategies helped you through other hardships in life? Use some of those strategies now, with some reframing. If you are someone who needs to talk through a situation to make sense of it, find people who will listen without offering advice. The opposite is also true. If there are strategies you employed during earlier crises that weren't helpful, avoid them. Isolating yourself, hiding your true feelings and ignoring the fact that your world feels like it is crumbling are not helpful ways to grieve a loved one's death. If you have a personal philosophy or spiritual belief that provides strength, seek out others who share your beliefs.

**Use your support systems.** Grief can be lonely but that doesn't mean you need to face grief alone. Use family, friends, co-workers, neighbors and others for support. Within this web of support, recognize that all helpers are not created equal; each has unique gifts. Some people may be good listeners and can sit with you while you have a stress-relieving cry. Others are better at more tangible tasks—like shoveling snow or carpooling the kids. Others may be uncomfortable even talking about your loss, but are glad to take you to a funny movie. These friends offer respite from the hard work of grieving. Don't be surprised if the most helpful person is one you just met, maybe someone at a grief group. Someone who "gets it" because they've encountered a similar loss.

**Never lose the bond with your loved one.** The people we love never leave us; we are different people for having known and loved them. What did they value? What kinds of a legacy did they leave behind? It is through intentionally remembering them – by talking to them, by telling stories about them, sharing photos and their passions and even emulating the qualities and values they held dear that we strengthen our bond with them.

**Focus on positive steps you've made.** Periodically review how you're beginning to change on your journey through grief. Grief is not a race to the finish line. It's hard work and you're learning ways to live without the person you loved. So expect both good and bad days, productive days as well as sluggish days. Above all else, be patient with yourself. Growth does not occur in giant steps every day. Pay attention to your inner dialogue. You are relearning the world. Are you judging yourself harshly or being a gentle teacher?

**Keep hope alive.** Life after the death of a loved one will be different, but different doesn't mean terrible. No one can predict the future and as hard as it may be to believe, you will once again experience joy and happiness. Keep sight of the future and focus on where you want to be next month or next year. Remember that while we had no choice about loss or the grief that follows, we do have choices about how we grieve. Choose to grow through your grief.



### Diamante

A diamante (pronounced dee-uh-MAHN-tay) is an unrhymed seven-line poem, with the beginning and ending lines the shortest, which gives the poem its diamond shape.

Change

Worrisome, Fearful

Troubling, Anxiety-provoking, Disconcerting

What next, What do I do; A new future, Full of possibilities

Promising, Adjusting, Transitioning

Hopeful, Optimistic

Opportunity

### 8-Week Mindfulness Group

We're offering a mindfulness based stress reduction group for grievers that will meet virtually for eight Friday afternoons from 3-4:30 p.m. beginning March 5th. Participants will practice and utilize various strategies to reduce anxiety and stress from the loss of a loved. To register, call Alexandra Becker at (484) 635-0662.

### Spouse/Partner Loss Group

Losing someone we chose to spend our life with poses unique challenges of loneliness, fear of the future and navigating new roles in the family and household. During our spouse/partner group sessions, participants will explore the unique relationship with the person who has died as well as coping techniques and strategies to reconcile the loss and continue on. We will meet virtually on six Thursday nights from 7-9 p.m. beginning March 25, April 1, 8, 15, 22 and April 29. Pre-registration is required. To register, call Jean Francis at (484) 225-9269.

### Walking Group for Grievers

A walking group for those who are grieving will be offered for eight Thursday afternoons from 3-4:30 p.m. beginning March 11th. We will be going to a variety of Lehigh Valley locations that will be an easy walk in the company of others who are also grieving. Masks will be required. Come and join in the company of others and get some fresh air and exercise to boost those endorphins! To register, please call Tara George at (484) 523-0833.



### Ongoing Grief Support

All in-person support groups and workshops are still on hold in compliance with CDC and Pennsylvania state guidelines. Here are the support options we offer to you at this time:

**Individual support:** Our three grief counselors are available for phone and video sessions to provide support and information. Contact information for us is on page 1 of this newsletter.

**Video library:** St. Luke's website includes a dozen short videos that provide information about the grieving and mourning process and ways to care for yourself during these tender times. To view them, go to <https://www.slnh.org/vna> and click on the hospice heading. On the left side of the screen under the VNA heading, click onto grief support. About halfway down this page, click onto the video library heading "Want to understand your grief?" Access the library by answering the question about your connection with St. Luke's Hospice (if any). Then view videos from the comfort of your home.

**Virtual Support Groups:** These groups enable participants the chance to receive and provide support in a collaborative environment. They are facilitated by a grief counselor and participants are invited to suggest topics for discussion.

Our first online open group meets virtually on the 2nd Tuesday of each month (**February 9th**) from 4-5:30 p.m. Please contact Tara George at (484) 523-0833 and she will show you how to connect using the Microsoft Teams platform.

Our second online open group meets virtually on the third Tuesday of the month (**February 16**) from 1:30-3 pm and all are welcome to join. For more information on how to connect using the Microsoft Teams platform, contact Alexandra Becker at (484)-635-0662.

## *Additional Places to Find Support and Share Your Story*

**Below is a list of free bereavement services in the area. Because of the pandemic and physical distancing, many resources are being offered online. Please contact our bereavement department at 484-526-2499 if you are in need of additional resources.**

### **Adult Support Information**

**Bradbury Sullivan LGBT Community Center** offers bereavement support for LGBT people who have experienced loss. For more information, visit their website at [www.bradburysullivancenter.org](http://www.bradburysullivancenter.org) or contact Reilly at [reilly@bradburysullivancenter.org](mailto:reilly@bradburysullivancenter.org).

**The Compassionate Friends** offers ongoing support for parents, grandparents and adult siblings grieving the loss of a child, grandchild or sibling. Visit their website at [www.thecompassionatefriends.org](http://www.thecompassionatefriends.org). Enter your zip code to locate the local chapter and contact person nearest you.

**Doylestown Hospital Hospice** offers a variety of support groups and programs that change seasonally. Visit their website at [www.doylestownhealth.org/hospital/services/bereavement](http://www.doylestownhealth.org/hospital/services/bereavement) or call 215-345-2079.

**Gentle Yoga for Grief, Stress and Life Transitions** is currently being offered virtually by Wendy Littner Thompson, M.Ed., LPC, RYT. Visit her website at [www.givinggriefavoic.com](http://www.givinggriefavoic.com) or contact her at 610-730-1992 to learn more. Be sure to indicate if your loved one was a St. Luke's Hospice patient.

**Grand View Hospital Hospice** offers many groups and services that change seasonally. For more information, call 215-453-4210.

**Grief Share** is a faith-based grief support group program offered at many locations throughout the Lehigh Valley. Visit their website at [www.griefshare.org](http://www.griefshare.org) and enter your zip code to find the contact person nearest you.

**Grief Support for Substance Related Losses (GRASP):** The Oasis Community Center in Bethlehem provides grief support for adults who have lost a loved one from substance-related losses. They hold both in-person and virtual groups that are led by therapists. Visit their website at [www.oasisBethlehem.org](http://www.oasisBethlehem.org) for more information. A second GRASP group meets virtually two evenings a month. Contact the leaders Nancy Howe (484-788-9440 or [nancyhowe@ymail.com](mailto:nancyhowe@ymail.com)) or Tim Howe (646-401-4458 or [howet60@yahoo.com](mailto:howet60@yahoo.com)).

**Lehigh Valley Health Network** offers many groups and services including programs for children between the ages of 6 through 17. For more information about program offerings for adults and children in the Lehigh Valley, call 610-402-7481. For information about program offerings in the Pocono area, contact Bryson.Boes at 272-762-3826 or via email at [Bryson.Boes@lvhn.org](mailto:Bryson.Boes@lvhn.org).

**Suicide Loss:** The American Foundation for Suicide Prevention has excellent information on risk factors, statistics, education and local services. Visit their web site at [www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org) and enter your zip code to find the chapter and contact person nearest you. All chapters are run by people who have experienced the suicide of a loved one.

### **Support Information in New Jersey**

**Karen Ann Quinlan Hospice** offers support to those who have experienced the death of a loved one. For more information, call 973-948-2283 or visit their website at [www.karenannquinlanhospice.org/services/bereavement](http://www.karenannquinlanhospice.org/services/bereavement)