

Peaceful Moments

a journal to help you walk through grief
and come out on the other side

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My hope is that you will find the following thoughts and journal prompts useful as you continue to grow and change, to heal; for healing is the way of living. Take your time.

~ Jan



Welcome



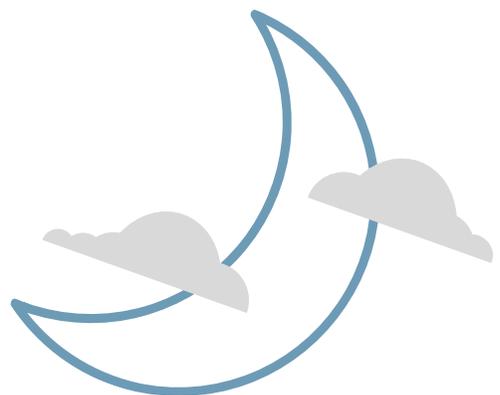
Sometimes one word can make a huge difference in a person's life. That's why almost every section title in this book is only one word. At the beginning of my grief journey, after losing my husband, the words that battered my mind were words like grief, loss, tears, anguish, heartbreak, guilt, and blame. All I saw was darkness. Someone – a lot of “someones” – took my hand and led me away from that darkness, where only death waited. I try to do the same thing for others now, a calling that has become my life's work.

When I talk to people now, especially those who are so very new to their grief, all I see is light. I can relate to their pain and the conflicting emotions it causes. I can remember my own. But what I see now are the moments of hope that are waiting for them because I know the darkness doesn't have to last.

For millennia, human beings have put their arms around each other in times of sorrow in search of connection. In this millennium, we still do that whether we do it in person, by text, email, handwritten letters or cards or via the internet. We can even connect by sending thoughtful gifts and flowers.

Together, we make a difference, one moment – one word – at a time.

And that is how we heal.



Alter



I never expected my journey through grief to take me to such beautiful places. I found solace in music, in the beauty of the day, in the natural world that my husband loved so much, and in the warm support of family and friends.

It took me months to smile again. I know this because less than a year after my husband died, I signed up for a water aerobics class on the advice of my doctor. Weeks had gone by when someone in the class commented, in quite an amazed voice, that I had a beautiful smile.

Tiny moments of healing occur under the surface of our consciousness, beneath our notice. When someone points them out or when they gather together enough, we see them. I remember the day I saw my old self for the first time. It was like running into a friend I had not seen in years. But I am not my old self, and we two had to part, as friends do, with a lingering sadness. The life I had with my husband is gone. I look back on it sometimes, much the way I might reminisce and even long for the days when my children were young.

I admit I didn't want the new life at first. And I admit that it is a life I love now. If I had not been willing to alter my life – my expectations, my hopes, my everything – after such a terrible tragedy, I would still be stuck in grief, bitter and clinging to the past in a way that is not healthy.

That's what he would tell me. He would tell me to live, to be happy, and to survive. Because he loved me. And I loved him. That's why I choose to honor him by living the best life I can – for both of us.

And the water aerobics class? After a lifetime of avoiding and being afraid of the water, I learned to swim and found much peace and healthful exercise in the pool. If you want to heal and build a new life that honors the memory of your loved one, be ready to alter your everything.

It won't happen in a day or a year but is a continuing process that can heal the deepest wound in your heart and bring you back to life again.

Believe



Belief is not proof. Holding on to an idea even though you can't prove it or don't feel it at the time requires faith. What made me believe in life again – a life worth living – was both belief and faith.

What was happening at the time or just before the time of a person's suicide is not the reason the suicide happened. It is the easiest thing to see, to blame, but the often invisible web of brain chemistry, personality, learned experiences, history, medications, illnesses and injuries, addictions, various kinds of stress, coping strategies or lack thereof, impulsivity and a myriad of other factors come together in ways that make a person lose hope, lose the will to live, and lose the ability to think rationally.

Later, as we try to dissect the suicide, we are still trying to follow a rational thread to untangle what happened, what caused the suicide, what could have been done to prevent it and to help our loved one heal. We struggle to comprehend these things as if finding the answers to those unanswerable questions could end our suffering and bring someone back to life.

Because suicide seems to go against our innate survival instincts, we can't follow the reasoning of the one who died. We come to a blank spot where things happened that we can't piece together in a rational way – and then there is the suicide.

No pattern or puzzle was ever so difficult to solve.

That is where logic breaks down and belief and faith take over. To fill that gap, that blank spot – to fill it with something we understand – we must abandon human reason and accept the unknown. In the same way, we accept the truth that we can survive. Belief is something you feel may be the truth. You choose to believe or not. Faith is the next step. Faith is putting trust in someone or something.

Write



I love words. They can touch the human heart directly. And they're powerful. They can lift us up, sustain us during our darkest days, be faithful companions when things are going right. But they can also smash us to the ground, haunt us the way nothing else can, and turn us toward chronic defeat. As human beings, we have automatic thoughts that can be filled with words that wield great power outside our conscious control. They run in the background, often unnoticed and often negative.

And they are a definite deterrent to healing after loss. Catch those negative thoughts that loop through your mind, things like "It's all my fault," "I caused this to happen," or "My life will never get any better." Write them down. Then ask yourself if they are really true. Write your answers, and decide if you want to keep those negative influences or fight against them. One way to do this is to replace them with positive truths each time they start their haunting singsong. Or, just hold up your hand and say, "STOP!"

Here is a link for general help: www.helpguide.org

A LOT of material is covered on this web site, which is connected with Harvard University, including help with things like depression.

And it has this page has this page about dealing with automatic thoughts: <http://www.helpguide.org/articles/anxiety/how-to-stop-worrying.htm>

Pain



Hand-in-hand with shock and confusion, pain covers us after loss to suicide. It cuts us to the core...but I believe it is an integral and necessary part of healing. In other words, there is no way around it, but allowing yourself to feel it and work through it is the basis of positive grief work.

Abigail Adams wrote in a letter to her husband, John, after learning of the death of their friend, "My bursting heart must find vent at my pen." Fast forward a couple of hundred years and you will find us doing the same. Grief is so big we have to find some way to release it. Yet this pain can only be released a little at a time.

Reading and posting in an online support group, letter or journal writing, speaking in person to someone who will allow us to talk and cry as often and as long as we need to, working with a counselor or local group...all of these allow the processing of our grief. Tears help release grief and trauma from our bodies, too, so it is okay to cry. I read once that tears from grief are different, chemically, from any other kind. Those chemicals need to exit the body.

<http://www.scienceiq.com/Facts/ScienceOfTears.cfm>

When the pain lessens, when its tide of grief flows outward, what is left is what was under the pain all the time: the love we shared with those we loved and lost.

Pain doesn't last; love does.

Peace



Peace is part of the survivor experience even when it comes in tiny moments. I'm constantly awed by those times. At first all I could see was the darkness of great loss. I could feel no peace except the numbness of shock, the unconsciousness of sleep (when I could get it), and occasionally during wild denial and fantastic daydreams in which I made up scenarios that had my husband coming home despite the impossibility.

Not true peace, those moments gave me a bit of relief, strength for more of my journey. In the beginning, we try to endure. Each breath is a victory though it may not seem so. But I came to a point when I could look back and realize how something someone said or did had pushed me back up on my feet and held me up.

The journey is long, my friends, and dark indeed. And it may seem that the turning of the calendar is taking more and more from you by taking you further away from your precious loved ones. But in reality, it is taking you closer and closer to more peace than you can imagine now and toward a new life in which you will feel only their love. Their pain will stay in the past. It is done.

We cannot change what has happened. I wish we could. But we can hold on, endure, and seek out those moments of fragile peace. We can hand them to each other and knit them together until they form a full and beautiful pattern for whatever is to come. I will light a candle for you tonight and imagine how bright the light from all our candles all over the world will be.

Change



In grief work, change can be a tool that motivates and moves you toward healing. Or, it can be a stressor that unsettles you and makes you step back from the gains you have made. Unlike changes in your life that you have no control over (and their consequences), recovering your balance and repairing and rebuilding your life includes many things you can command.

You have a choice. You have a choice about what to do next and whether you will focus on the positive or the negative. You can design and implement the transformations you desire in your life one small step at a time. You can do this. Yes, even you.

Life-affirming changes (and the positive outcomes they bring) can begin with an inexpensive pack of index cards, believe it or not, or sticky notes. On these inexpensive items, you can write your new path. You don't have to commit a lot of time or resources you may not have.

Keep it simple. Write one change you want to make on each card. Work on ways to accomplish that one idea. If you're not satisfied with the results, place the card in a box or file folder and come back to it later. Write down another change on another card. Start the trial and error process again. Record in your journal any successes as victories. If you don't have a journal, start one now.

Could something this small really work? I used sticky notes to draft this book. I wrote one word on one note and stuck it to the side of my refrigerator. I posted other words there as I thought of them. Each word represented one thought I wanted to write about in this book.

I didn't invent this technique. Other writers use it all the time. So do scientists, inventors, administrators...and almost everyone else. They discover what they want to do by dividing their work into small segments and then working on each step. They probably use sticky notes. I don't know. What I do know is that one simple step at a time can change the entire world.

You are the expert on you. You can improve your life. What do you need? What do you want to change? Where can you start?

Cherish



Making changes does not mean you forget about the ones you lost. Moving forward is not the same thing as getting “over it.” I will always miss and treasure my husband. He meant so much to me. But while I am alive, I need to live.

I couldn't look at photographs of him at first, but now they bring me happiness. Bittersweet? Yes. Some days are harder than others, but I am grateful for every day I had with him, and I don't want to lose the memories of our time together. Many of these moments were captured over the years and put into frames or photo albums.

I developed a tendency to take them all down from the walls and put the albums and home movies away and then put them back out as they had been. Back and forth. I don't feel the need to do that anymore. As with everything else, finding balance with this was a process.

The things I do now are things he would have loved, things he couldn't enjoy when he was sick. Just being together was so much fun for both of us. Seeing older couples eating out or shopping makes me feel his absence. Another hurdle to face; another step on my journey.

Connect



There are so many things in life, large and small, that call for our attention. The same is true about our grieving. There are many things to mourn. Even after the initial mourning period and when active grieving has passed, small moments can find those tender places in our hearts and bring pain to the surface.

One day, while cleaning out my closet, I found a wooden box filled with bits and pieces of my husband's childhood. Small toys, sticks and rocks, a couple of marbles, stuff a little boy would like. Automatically, my thoughts went like this: How could he leave these? He kept them all those years. How could he leave these...and his books...and us?

When you feel like you have walked off the edge of the earth as if it is flat, after all, find an anchor. Believe it or not, you can find your footing again later, even years later. At that time, you are ready for more than just enduring and only doing the things that need to be done.

If you have done everything you can but still feel hopeless, keep going. Keep trying. You will never know how far you can go unless you do. Expect these times. Prepare for them by reaching out to someone new now. Research support groups, local and online.

Flip the situation. Volunteer. Do something nice for someone else. When you are thinking of others, your mind cannot dwell on your own troubles.

Talk to God. Then wait. Listen. Grieve in His Arms. It is in those quietest moments that you will feel a nudge in the right direction or an overwhelming sense of love.

We are all connected. We are all pieces of each other. It is when we abandon what we think we want – what's not working – and surrender to being led, that we find we are part of a greater wholeness. At that time, we begin to work the puzzle of life. There is a place for you there, in the perfect scheme of the pattern, a place only you can complete.

Clarify



I used to love the game Connect Four, especially the television commercials for it. Two children would be playing in these. When one slipped the last one of his tokens into the slots to connect four in a row, he would hold up one arm in victory and yell, "Connect four!" The look on his face was wonderful to see.

Celebrating our victories and our connections is like that. It helps to look back now and again and see how far you've come. It is essential to look forward at least a bit at a time. But try not to live in the past or worry about the future. Both are threats to healing. However, stopping to clarify what you are doing right now and why you are doing it can be extremely valuable and, many times, a satisfying exercise. This is where all our living takes place. In the present moment.

We lived in the past; we will live in the future we're granted, but we can miss the present if we are not careful. Mindful. It's tempting to want to hurry by the hours, especially if they feel horrible. Most cultures today seem to fall into that pattern anyway, and it is an unhealthy one. Many people tend to say they have no time for their most urgent duties, let alone time for grieving and celebrating the small, daily victories. That habit can become something much different than what we are striving for here.

"Emptiness leads to mindfulness." I read those words when I became fascinated with Japanese teahouses and looked for information about how to build one in my small garden. The author referenced the simplicity of the structures, designed to blend in with the natural materials of their surroundings...and the minimal furnishings, intended to sweep away distractions and allow for relaxation and healing of both body and mind. Scholars believe the concept of teahouses, originating in the time of Samurai warriors, were built to provide a place for finding balance away from an often violent world.

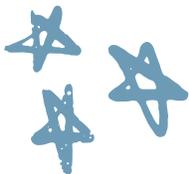
Clarify continued...



Mindfulness is nothing more than devoting attention to one thing while maintaining a calm state of acceptance. It is not a trance. And it is a natural state in which we find peace. Meditation is one way to get there, to still the frantic motion of the day through intention. Prayer is another. We are still aware of the world around us, but we purpose to enter our inner world. It is not so much thinking as it is a quieting of thoughts and a listening period.

Grieving certainly leaves us with a sense of emptiness, and survivors do need to find a healing balance of internal peace. When I was ready, God led me to a renewed faith, where I found the “peace that passeth understanding” (Philippians 4:7), which is a gift given by God’s grace. In the preceding verse, I found the balm I needed at the time I needed it.

Philippians 4:6 New King James Version was a passage that made my world feel right again.



“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God;”



Encouragement



Do you meditate? The word itself means the same thing as “contemplate,” “ponder,” or “muse” and has long been associated with looking inside the self to find connection with something greater than self. The practice of meditation is something that has been used for both philosophical and religious purposes. It creates mindfulness, as does certain kinds of breath work.

Seeking relaxation and spiritual connection seems to be very useful on the journey through grief or just through life. People can meditate on anything really, and in practically any setting, but peaceful surroundings with limited distractions are more conducive to finding same.

I found it difficult to settle enough to think deeply about anything after I lost my husband. My mind whirled in a thousand directions at once. I had lost the art of just “being.”

Still, a few minutes of giving myself time with no other expectations than to rest, helped. Now, I find it even more therapeutic to focus my thoughts in a direction where I can expect an answer. Sometimes, I write in my journal to find that connection. Sometimes not. Sometimes, quietness is best. And sometimes, I find the solitude in nature brings me to that prayerful state. The practice of stillness and two-way peace I found as I drew closer to God once more is specifically described as prayer.

Encouragement continued...



For that, I have had to relearn the art of listening. Not the same thing as hearing, listening requires silent communication between participants. It involves not only wanting, asking, telling but also waiting, interacting, and hoping.

For me, this was a three-step process a lot like how we set out on our human journey. A realization unfolds during toddlerhood. We throw ourselves into the discovery of joy each day; gradually, we learn to listen. And, later – sometimes, it must seem to new parents, much later – we gain control of ourselves enough to settle into who we really are, complete with free will and self-control that we use to navigate the years ahead. We are not done yet; we are just begun.

I think all three are necessary: joy, listening, and the capacity to settle.

Answers to your cries are important, too, and can come as actual answers from other people. Or an answer may come as a gentle thought that doesn't feel quite like it belongs to you (1 Kings 19:12 describes it as a "...still small voice." King James Version). A nudge. A feeling of peace. Something that sparks an idea, reassures you, gives you strength, or brings your encouragement.

Endure



At times, as I've mentioned – especially toward the beginning of the grief journey – there is nothing to do except endure. If life has brought earlier experiences that required endurance, the practice might have left behind a certain strength you can draw on now. If not, you can learn to endure. Religious faith and support from others can help us through these times. So can self-care. More about that important topic later.

As I write these words, I am suffering from a bout of shingles. Now, shingles, as painful as it might be, is nothing compared to the pain of great loss, but as soon as my doctor delivered the bad news, I wondered what this virus had to teach me.

My next thought was Wow, I've really come a long way. At no time in my life before losing my husband would my thought process have taken that kind of turn. I have been “taken out of time” before to experience an awareness of what my place in the universe really seemed to be, stripped of all of the surface busyness, but this mindset is very difficult to maintain amid daily duties.

I can be busy-minded with things that are good or bad...mission work, family concerns, material obsessions, career goals, and addictions that can be as simple as my cell phone or computer and as complex as what sugar is doing to my body. It doesn't matter what these things are. Whatever comes between us and awareness can take over until life is running us instead of the other way around. Living only at surface level is an easy but useless slip into a waking dream that robs us of the gifts life really has to offer.

Death, the serious illness of a loved one, and shock do slow us down, often at times when we feel most urgently we should be doing something. By changing expectations and our To-Do lists, we can use this time for rest. Sometimes, grief must just be endured.

Endure continued...



Arthur Kleinman, medical doctor, professor of both psychiatry and anthropology, and the director of Harvard University's Asia Center believes caring for ourselves and others "is at the very core of what human experience is about."

This means that each of us at some point must learn how to endure:
the act of going on and giving what we have. And we need, on occasion, to step outside ourselves and look in as if an observer on our endeavors and our relationships—personal and professional—to acknowledge the strength, compassion, courage, and humanity with which we ourselves endure or help to make bearable the hard journeys of others. These are the qualities that make acceptance and striving, if not noble, then certainly deeply human—worthy of respect of ourselves and those whose journeys we share.

(Kleinman. "How We Endure." *The Lancet*. Volume 383, No. 9912, p119–120. 11 January 2014. Web. 17 Feb. 2016.)

Energize



In the months and years following loss, periods of increased energy often follow those more difficult times that demand sheer endurance. Certainly, these two states ebb and flow around each other.

I startled myself the other day when I realized I have been living almost a decade without my precious husband. That's a long time. Looking back like this is only possible when time has been gained, but it is an exercise worth doing, no matter where you are on your grief journey.

When I looked back, I saw not only progress I had made but also new strengths I had never possessed before. I had rediscovered gifts I used to have, things that I enjoyed doing and was good at before, and I learned to use them in new ways.

While I could see all of these things at one time, they did not happen all at once. Like a tourist exploring an unfamiliar land, I had gathered them one at a time, some at great cost. I had picked up souvenirs – some not helpful – and placed them in the bags I carried. At first, there was not much room as my bags were stuffed with remorse, regrets, and sorrow. Along the way, as some of those things were left behind, I had more room for the new, including mistakes.

Losing someone I loved was not going to make me understand everything. It was not going to make me be my best in every situation, but it did give me a different perspective. As I met others who were trying to survive, too, I saw them experience and talk about similar things.

The gifts that come out of grief help us see the world differently than before. We feel compassion, share newfound wisdom, and heal together. We make mistakes. We fall down. We put our arms around each other. And we get up again. The wearing of sorrow awakens a fresh appreciation of life in all its fragility and toughness, one that bursts upon us with the same kind of lure and insistence found in a late Spring that follows a long, hard winter.

Explore



It's time to put those strengths and gifts into action. Reaching out to explore new or even old familiar territory can be a huge challenge in the aftermath of loss. Most people find the "want to" coming back, even if the urge is faint at first, even if it comes and goes as your physical and emotional strength waxes and wanes. If you don't feel that, don't worry. Action can help bring back those inner drives and can help you discover new purpose, new desires, and new motivations. Knowing what you are feeling is normal is very reassuring. You are not like anyone else. You never were. A childhood song expresses how special you are. Sing with me: "Look all the world over, there's no one like me, no one like me, no one like me. Look all the world over, there's no one like me, no one exactly like me." © 1975 Broadman Press (Admin. by Music Services, Inc.)

That's true. No one ever existed who is just like you, who can do exactly what you can do in the same way you will do it. No one else will ever be born who is exactly like you. You are unique. Even if you have an identical twin, you are different from your sibling. And you are here on this earth for only a limited time.

Take a step or two. Try new things. Keep those you like or that work for you. Loss creates a separation between us and the world around us. That surreal feeling can make it difficult to feel "normal" again or to find an existence that feels comfortable. It may be hard to communicate this situation to others in your life, but trying new things (or keeping old traditions) is part of reconnecting.

What should you try? Exercise. Try a new sport. Volunteer. Or just take a walk. Begin a new study such as a chapter from the Bible or one of Max Lucado's books. Enroll in a group activity or class. Even going to the grocery store can begin with painful reminders of your loved one, but repeating the process again and again brings a more settled and connected feeling. Focus on positive experiences rather than turning to the temporary "calm" of illicit drugs or excessive alcohol. Those two are quick "fixes" that only lead to more suffering.

Apply your exploration to the work environment, too. Can you adjust work hours or duties to make your load lighter? Use evenings and weekends to schedule play. Each step you take – work, rest, play – builds a new cycle for your life.

Gather



Grieving is a solitary process, for the most part, but finding support is helpful. Family members and friends, others who have experienced similar loss, and professionals such as counselors and doctors all offer something of benefit. Keep trying to find other people who can listen when you need to talk, who can offer their own experiences and insights, and who will not pressure you to fit into their ideas of what healing is like or their timetables. Your grief is your own. Even others who loved the one you lost will have a different kind of experience. That's the way it should be because each of you had a different relationship with that person and will have a unique grieving and healing experience.

Gather resources as well as connections. Reading is sometimes difficult after loss, but starting with short bits that seem relevant to whatever you are feeling on a given day can give you strength and comfort. The Internet can be a good source of help and information, but think carefully before you trust sites or people you meet online. The best advice is to keep your identity and personal information private. Do not share too many details. And keep in mind that not everything you experience or have questions about is suitable for discussion online. Counseling sessions provide safety and confidentiality for those issues that are most private.

Stepping back into the real world, even when you want to stay isolated, is another way to gather strength and support. If a friend invites you to lunch or if you are invited to a gathering of family and friends, accept and say you might need to leave early or take a few minutes now and then to deal with sudden emotions. Most people will understand and having these "escape routes" ready in case you need them can take some of the pressure off and make re-entry into life's activities more enjoyable.

You are not alone. Others do understand. It will get better.

Grow



Looking at the ruin of a garden in the winter might lead you to believe there could never be growth there again. Yet, under the brown, dead stems and stalks of a devastated harvest, root systems are strong in those plants that are perennial. Others will be turned under to enrich the soil and give life in new ways. Fallen seeds will germinate when conditions are right. New plants will volunteer.

We are perennials. From the earliest days following loss and in the midst of our winter of devastation, we begin to heal, invisibly at first. Taking one step and then another, we eventually leave the destruction our losses have caused, if not the memory of the ones we loved. We grow stronger and build new lives.

Walking through grief is a process, a journey of many steps. But life finds a way to coax us back toward the living. No matter the sorrow we carry, we also live. And grow. Seize opportunities to grow. Do not be afraid. Yes, it is scary to let the old life go, the people we used to be. But it is necessary. Some call this acceptance. Somehow, in some form, we return to life.

And then – wonder of wonders – a new life emerges, one in which our loved ones still play a significant part as we share the impact they had on our lives, as we move forward, as we carry on for ourselves and for them, forming a new relationship with them that is more spiritual in nature.

The love we shared – like seeds in the garden – continues the cycle of life.

Hug



I often end my online posts with “Hugs” or “Big Hugs.” Virtual hugs can be felt, not the way we physically feel a hug in person but with a surety that we are thought of fondly.

Hug someone. It might be a family member or friend. If you are very new to grief, if your loss was recent, you might not be able to bear the touch of another person at first, but try later. We are creatures who need contact with each other. Scientific studies have proven “failure to thrive” in babies and older adults is caused by little to no physical contact with others.

Now that you have committed to hugging, think about how hugs are normally given and received. People open their arms and move closer for a hug instinctively. Often that touch may be the only way a friend can think of to comfort you. Children, especially small children, are not shy about hugging and close physical contact. Make sure your hugs are appropriate, and ask permission first. Grandmothers and their grandchildren are good examples of how wonderful a warm hug can be.

Some people hug with food. Hence, the casseroles, desserts, and other dishes that typically arrive in the days following a death in the community. Grief is so isolating. Take note of comforting moments wherever you find them. Letters, cards, email, texts...all are virtual ways to stay close. Answering these need not be a chore, nor should a time limit be burdensome. People tend to go back to their normal lives after a few weeks, so consider spreading out your answers and letting others know you still need them.

Hugs are healing. Follow your natural instincts.

Know



Know you are healing. The body follows the mind. Remind yourself. It may not feel like the heavy burden of grief will ever get any lighter. You may not be able to envision a time when you can think of your loved one and smile. That's okay. Know, in your heart of hearts, that you won't always feel such dark despair.

How can I be sure of that? After all, I don't know you or your circumstances. I didn't meet the person who was so important to you and who is no longer physically in your life. I don't have to carry the pain of his or her loss. How can I tell you all of these things?

I can write this book and say these things because I lost the love of my life, the father of my children, my soulmate. I've lived with despair that is similar to that which you are feeling. I've been certain my life would never change for the better. And I've witnessed thousands of other survivors who were once just as lost in grief. I've seen us rebuild new lives and carry on the love we shared with those we lost. I've seen lives lived in honor of those so precious to us. True lives, not the fake lives of post-loss. True happiness. That is why I can be your guide.

Know you won't forget your loved one. Know his voice will still sound in your mind when you think of him. Know her laughter will still be available to you in memory. Know that you will be able to look at photographs again. Know that one day you will hear a favorite song and not dissolve into tears.

Know you have a purpose. Know you will find that purpose and, when you do, you will feel productive and face new challenges with a strength you never possessed before. Know you will be able to go a whole day without crying. Know you have enough love left for the two of you.

Know that the pain will soften and fade away. Know that love never will.

Increase



Increase your knowledge and understanding a little bit each day. If your loss was by violent means, take time to find out more about how people recover from such a difficult grief. Search the Internet. Many people are sharing their experiences in books, blogs, and forums. Read only those things that help you focus on healing. Too many graphic details and negativisms don't really help.

Get counseling. Call and ask questions before your first session. Does this counselor have training and experience in working with survivors of traumatic loss? Even after a session or two, if you feel the fit is not right, search for a different counselor or therapist.

Find a support group. What is your need? Do you need an in-person group? Would you feel better with the relative anonymity of an online community? No matter what type of group you choose, keep personal information and graphic details to a minimum as you discuss what happened and how you are coping. Give and receive support, for both are healing.

Read related books. Many books exist on almost every type of loss. Search among personal stories, inspirational books, and scientific explanations for the types of information you feel would help you most.

Come to the end of your research. This phase of your life is not something intended to go on forever. You have questions, some of which may never be answered. Use your own judgement to know when it's time to continue your life without a continuous search for help.

Continue to heal. Choose one or two coping techniques that can help you get through holidays or just those times when you need to slow down and take some time for yourself.

Inspire



What you do inspires others. Maybe you don't feel very inspirational, but when others, including your children, see you getting up each day and dealing/healing, they will follow your light.

Yes, each person affected by a loss has that very personal and unique journey and may need to grieve differently. Allowing for these differences and honoring each person's needs is not always easy, but it does keep additional problems to a minimum.

I wanted to talk after my husband died. I needed to talk. A lot. And I found people who were willing to listen. Family members, my counselor, other survivors. But not everyone handles grief in this way. I had to learn how to respect those differences, something that made my life easier and my relationships closer. If you face similar issues and varying healing styles, take time to think about what each person around you needs and what you need. Ask, if you're not sure, and let others know you can support each other while respecting any differences between you.

Leading your family is not the only way to inspire others. You can let friends and coworkers know how they can help. Join with others in your community to support awareness of mental health and other issues. Support organizations that exist to help new survivors.

Most of all, seek out things that inspire you to continue your healing journey.

Light



Grief and sorrow often feel very dark, especially during the first days and weeks following a significant loss. To travel through this unfamiliar land, you will need some light. Look for those tiny sparks of comfort as they come to you...a friend sends a card with encouraging words...you find a few moments to sit quietly in a garden... someone offers to cut your grass...you light a candle and think of your loved one... your grandchild brings you a drawing depicting happier times.

Even through tears, you can see the positive energy in these moments. And you don't have to wait for them to happen. You can add an evening cup of tea to your schedule or set aside time to read or attend a support group meeting. These moments of hope can lift your spirits. Many people begin a gratitude journal and find blessings to record even in the midst of their darkest days. Pets are some of the greatest comforters. They never tire of listening. Neither does God. Take your sorrow to Him in prayer.

The grief journey is one that can be measured in years, but healing happens all along the way, and the early weeks and months are usually the worst times. Most people find they have greater compassion and wisdom after surviving loss. These changes can translate into ways to hold out a bit of light for others.

Master



Master one task. It can be something small. Recognize how valuable it is to find success along the healing journey. Share your accomplishment with others, and take pride in what you've done. It can also be something large that takes more time to conquer. I learned to swim at age fifty-eight, four years after my husband's death. I didn't even set out to master that skill, but once in the water every week for that water aerobics class suggested by my doctor, I saw how the water (and the exercise) brought me some relief from my grief.

Anything you think of can be something you can master. That's a bold statement, isn't it? But think about all the things you must do in a day. Grief makes everyday activities difficult, often extremely so. You are a superhero when you try.

If you have children, you are mastering many things, even in the face of your pain. Think about how they will imitate you. No matter what their age, they have suffered loss. Using age-appropriate language and actions can help them find hope, too, and ways to deal with their emotions.

Take a painting class. Try a new exercise. Play a board game with your kids. Build a birdhouse for the yard. Plant a rose bush or other growing blessing in your yard or in a container. Start an herb garden on your kitchen windowsill.

Need to start smaller? Write in your journal for five minutes. Go to the grocery store. Call a friend. Breathe.

Master



Mastering challenges that come into your life after great loss requires motivation. Maybe you feel too overwhelmed right now to think about every hurdle you will have to face. Maybe you feel no motivation to do anything at all. That's grief. Those feelings are part and parcel of what you are walking through. In other words, those feelings are normal.

Let's say you need to pick up your child from school every afternoon at three o'clock. The steps to finding motivation to accomplish this task are the same as for other type of tasks. Breaking this one large goal down into smaller steps (accomplishments) might look something like this:

- Get out of bed or stop what you are doing.
- Dress or check to be sure your clothes are okay.
- Find your purse (or wallet) and car keys.
- Leave the house.
- Drive to school.
- Arrive on time.
- Deal with a crowded pickup line.
- Engage your child in conversation.
- Drive home.

Simple, right? Not if you are almost paralyzed by grief. Finding motivation for this necessary task every day can feel daunting, but mastering each small step helps. Laying out your clothes the night before and checking with your child and the school calendar for any extras that should go to school the next day is far easier than trying to do everything each afternoon at two o'clock. Keep purse or wallet and keys in the same location. A small bag with two bottles of water and a couple of snacks can bring comfort whenever needed.

Set an alarm on your phone that will give you plenty of time for the drive to school. Play a CD of soft music in your car as you drive and wait in line. If there is someone you trust, consider asking a close friend or family member to share transportation to and from school for a while and make sure his or her name is on the approved list of those allowed to pick up your child.

All of these smaller accomplishments make the larger task easier and less likely to cause you to feel overwhelmed. Feeling prepared and in control creates the motivation to get things done.

Move



Now that you have a goal or several goals in mind, along with the small steps needed to create motivation for accomplishing them, it's time to move. Sometimes, it's easier to move without a plan. Just getting things done can feel satisfying. At other times, using the small steps and pre-planning idea works best. You'll know which technique to use. Try both.

Moving your body is also a good way to help your mind deal with grief. You're moving toward healing and recovery all the time, literally and figuratively. Life tends to carry us forward. Keep this in mind as you try new things, set goals, and begin to feel better.

Healing has a rhythm. Good days or good moments can alternate with deep grief or sadness. Later, you will probably feel more of the good days though missing your loved one continues. Missing someone you love is normal and healing. After all, you loved this person. A good portion of your life was devoted to him or her, and you were used to being close.

Move, rest, move, rest. That seems to be the way a walk through grief goes, but on any given day, you might alter that routine. It's okay. You are on your own journey, and it can be as unique as you are.

Nurture



You automatically nurture your children and others you love, even friends and sometimes strangers. Why is it so hard to nurture yourself? Notice I did not ask if it was hard to nurture yourself. Most of us do find it difficult to make time for self-care beyond the bare basics.

Yet, how can we expect to care for others if we do not nurture ourselves? I don't have the answer to that; I just know a lot of us think we can. Are you Super Mom? Mr. Dependable to everyone? Do you feel so much pressure to get everything done, that you run out of day before you even think about meeting your own needs?

Trying to keep up with the demands of normal life while you are grieving increases the drain on your physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Prioritize what you need and want to do, but don't forget to put your own needs on that list.

Here are some examples of ways you can nurture yourself:

- Make a list of what you feel you can do each day or each week.
- Consider limiting extra activities, events, and chores to one per day.
- Stick to your plan, so you will have the energy to meet true emergency situations.
- Prepare and eat healthy meals (tip – preplanning can help).
- Stay hydrated. Carry water with you and sip throughout the day.
- Say “no” before you reach overload.
- Enjoy something special that is just for you each day. This could be anything from a relaxing bubble bath to a few minutes set aside for watching the sunset.
- Plan larger “treats” that help you relax, maybe a weekend getaway or a massage session.
- Start a wish list, adding things you would really like to do, and save to make those things happen.

Journey



Healing after great loss is very much like taking a journey. Just like any other journey, it requires planning, preparing, meeting challenges, moving through periods of rest and chaos, maintaining flexibility, and getting tired.

- Plan – Keep a pen and notebook near your calendar. These three tools can help you organize your day or week. Block out the hours you need to spend doing something that nurtures you and helps you heal. Use this time to read, write letters to your loved one, or take a nap.
- Prepare – Lay out clothes for the next day at night before you go to bed. This works for your children’s clothes and school lunches or other items, too. Anything physical that must be done (paperwork, bills, materials related to work or special meetings) can be set in one spot (desk, shelf, filing cabinet), so you can be ready to face the new day with what you need.
- Meet challenges – Practice meeting challenges. In your notebook, describe a few options for common scenarios. What will you do if the car breaks down? Who is your best backup baby sitter? Can you ask for routine medical appointments at a time of day that is best for you?
- Move through periods of rest and chaos –Expecting chaos actually lessens its negative effects. If you find yourself facing a challenge, remember that life does not stay in one place for long. Soon, this challenge will be behind you. Get extra support from family, friends, or your circle of support during this time, if you need it.
- Maintain flexibility – Sometimes, things just don’t work the way you want them to. Give yourself permission to be okay with that fact. And go back to your routine when you can.
- Get tired – Grieving is tiring. Exhausting. Take extra time for rest when you feel too tired. Go to bed early or take a nap. Check with your doctor to see if vitamins might help. And try making a change in your schedule. Do something that is just for fun. Do something for others. Often a change helps break up the day.

Refresh



Refresh your mind and spirit. Read something new. Have a picnic, even if you are the only one there. Sit outside. Visit a nearby park or body of water. Plant a garden, even a small one, or add a few potted plants to your home (they clean the air and provide extra oxygen as well as beauty). Water, along with other natural materials, has a soothing effect. The same is true for mountain scenes or countryside views. Time spent in nature is time well spent.

Check your closet. Is it time for a few new pieces of clothing? Try a new style or different colors. Get a haircut.

Painting or playing in the sand at the beach can put your mind into a place where nothing else is going on. That's restful.

Refresh your day with music, either old familiar songs or something you don't usually listen to.

Sometimes, doing volunteer work or just taking time to speak to a neighbor can bring a new sense of rest into your life. Explore.



My Free Gift to You



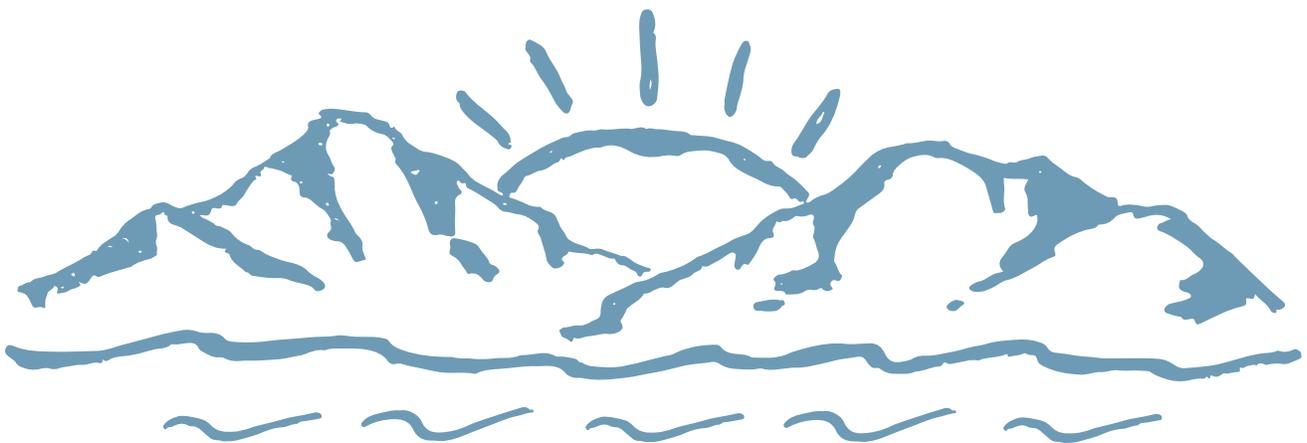
Visit my Website – www.WayForHope.weebly.com – to read Hope in the Aftermath of Suicide (Second Edition) completely free. Just click on the book's cover.

While there, be sure to check my Resources page and my Blog to find reasons for hope on your healing journey.

Thank you for purchasing this journal.

Blessings,

Jan McDaniel



About the Author



For over forty years, I have written for print and digital media, winning awards for both fiction and nonfiction, but after my husband's death in 2007, I thought I would never write again. Since that time, I have interacted with thousands of other survivors of suicide loss and professionals who work with them and written almost exclusively about healing.

I am a forum moderator and blog columnist at the Alliance of Hope for suicide loss survivors. Certified to lead a Survivors of Suicide (SOS) local support group by The Link Counseling and National Resource Center in Sandy Springs, Georgia, I can recommend their programs and participation in the International Survivors of Suicide Day Annual Conference.

Writing is the way I can reach out to help others who are going through some of the darkest days of their lives. It's also the way I honor the life of my husband and the love we shared. I think he would like that.

