

Good Grief!

*An excerpt from a Toastmasters' speech written by Courtney Ferguson,
A recent "**Healing Through Loss and Grief**" participant*

Would those of us who have never experienced grief or loss, please raise your hands? Hmmmm. No hands – and no surprises. My next questions however, may require a little soul searching. How many of us continue to carry that grief with us, at least sometimes. If we fully understood how grief can sabotage the quality of our lives, would we still hang on to it?

We all share that age-old human bond of loss and grief. Perhaps our grief is about losing someone who has passed – or losing our health. Maybe it's about a pet's death – or a lost opportunity. It could be about a relationship that's ended, or a situation we handled badly. It could be about not being respected, even abused. Whatever the reason, **Fear ... anger ... regret ... and even guilt** can be the signposts that point the way to destructive detours.

The cause may be accumulative, even decades old, but it's right there with us, tapping us on the shoulder with profound sadness, sometimes at the most inopportune moments – at the gas station, while we're shopping – or maybe even right now.

Grief is a subject that is often avoided - or treated like a kind of social leprosy. Why? The fact is most of us do not know how to grieve in a healthy, nurturing way. We're often handed, or we use, convenient clichés. "Oh, cheer up." "You'll get over it, in time," ... or "Oh, I know exactly how you're feeling." If you're in a state of grief, such words suggest dismissal, rather than care, and they offer about as much comfort as a pair of shoes a size too small.

I recently made a commitment to be part of a local group called “**Healing Through Loss and Grief**” – and it has been a positive adventure in finding acceptance, happiness and peace. Definitely, a **GOOD GRIEF GROUP!** We’ve met each Thursday evening for two hours of open support, coupled with intense work in small groups. At the beginning of each meeting, we make an agreement to honesty, trust and confidentiality. The group is a safe place to be **who** and **how** you are.

We do not judge others’ grief; nor do we compare it to our own. We do not interrupt. Most important, we do not rescue. Our levels of compassion may reach new heights. While we can share tears, we must not try to fix the grief. Grief is like a pendulum. Before it can settle, it needs to be allowed to swing to its extremes.

As the group’s journey continued, we learned to let go of wanting to rescue. There are no quick fixes. Moreover, that rescue approach feeds the urge to slap a band-aid on the pain, sublimate it – and change the subject FAST. Instead, we learned how to be patient, and simply listen. Although we know that grief is an inevitable part of life, none of us wants to stay there. It’s wise to remember that grief is unique, and it does not work to a time table.

Look a little closer, and you might be surprised to learn that grief has benefits. When we are still with it ... when we recognize that, while each of us may grieve for a different reason and in a different way ... **grief connects us.** Whether we’re facing our own sadness or supporting others in theirs, we grow from it – and when we are patient and brave enough to explore it, we can reach inspirational levels of connection.

Admittedly, the work was sometimes intense, and I wished that I'd signed up for a Spanish class instead. It frightened me to explore the dark, rocky depths of my own uncharted grief. Yet the discoveries I've made are enlightening. I feel a sense of freedom, even exhilaration – as well as deep appreciation. I have new tools that are helping me move forward, and be a more loving friend – to others and, equally important, to myself.

Instead of hanging on to sadness that weighs a ton, I am now able to live the lessons others left behind when I recall their words, their examples ... even their mistakes. Although they have passed, my relationship with them is very much alive – and I now live and love in the present tense.

If grief is the roadblock to your joy, you may be glad to know that this same **FREE**, 14-week **“Healing Through Loss and Grief”** group is offered to the Community twice a year – in January and in August.

To my friends in the group, your courage reminds me that who you are impacts who I choose to be. You are unique. You are generous. Your words and shared experiences helped us all listen, learn and heal. Each of you ... each of **US** ... makes a profound impact on **ALL** of us. Each small step we've taken has created a positive change – a change that will grow over time.

One of my favorite quotes is by spiritual activist and author, Ram Dass. It's this one. “We are all just walking each other home.” I am grateful that we have shared that journey – and walked the path together.