

# Guidebook to Help us During Difficult Times



*Thanks to Danielle Schroeder, Patient & Family Support Counsellor*

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## Wild Geese

*You do not have to be good.  
You do not have to walk on your knees  
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.  
You only have to let the soft animal of your body  
love what it loves.  
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.  
Meanwhile the world goes on. Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of  
the rain  
are moving across the landscapes,  
over the prairies and the deep trees,  
the mountains and the rivers.  
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean, blue air,  
are heading home again.  
  
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,  
the world offers itself to your imagination,  
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting-  
over and over announcing your place  
in the family of things.  
  
--Mary Oliver*

## Internet Resources

The Family Caregivers Network Society - <http://www.fcns-caregiving.org/>  
Canadian Virtual Hospice- [http://www.virtualhospice.ca/en\\_US/  
Main+Site+Navigation/Home.aspx](http://www.virtualhospice.ca/en_US/Main+Site+Navigation/Home.aspx)  
Hospice Foundation of America- <http://www.hospicefoundation.org/>

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## Recommended Book List

*Kitchen Table Wisdom-* by Rachel Naomi Remen

*My Grandfather's Blessings-* by Rachel Naomi Remen

*Final Gifts-* by Maggie Callahan

*Tuesdays with Morrie-* by Mitch Albom

*The Fall of Freddie the Leaf-* by Leo Buscaglia

*When things fall apart-* by Pema Chodron

*Take A Deep Breath: The Haiku Way to Inner Peace-* by Sylvia Forges-Ryan and Edward Ryan

*When Bad Things Happen to Good People-* by Harold Kushner

*Mortally Wounded: Stories of Soul, Pain, Death and Healing-* by Michael Kearney

*What Dying People Want: Practical Wisdom for the End of Life-* by Dr. David Kuhl

*Facing Death, Embracing Life: Understanding What Dying People Want-* by Dr. David Kuhl

*The Next Place-* by Warren Hanson

## The Intention of this Guidebook

**Regardless of how well or ill we feel we may struggle to comprehend the depth of our illness, or our loved one's illness. We often feel overwhelmed and unclear about what to think, feel, or do.**

**In the pages ahead you will find a variety of poems and passages that may offer you words of healing, comfort, inspiration, or solace. In addition to journaling exercises that can help you explore and better understand some of the difficult feelings you may be experiencing.**

**We have organized the guidebook according to common emotional, psychological, and spiritual themes that can arise for individuals and families as they find themselves at this difficult time in their life.**

*"Yesterday's history, tomorrow's a mystery, today's a gift."*

## ***The Opening of Eyes***

*That day I saw beneath dark clouds  
the passing light over the water  
and I heard the voice of the world speak out.*

*I knew then, as I had before  
life is no passing memory of what has been  
nor the remaining pages in a great book  
waiting to be read.*

*It is the opening of eyes long closed.  
It is the vision of far off things  
seen for the silence they hold.  
It is the heart after years  
of secret conversing  
speaking out loud in the clear air.*

*It is Moses in the desert  
fallen to his knees before the lit bush.  
It is the man throwing away his shoes  
as if to enter heaven  
and finding himself astonished,  
opened at last,  
fallen in love with solid ground.*

*-- David Whyte*

*Whatever you hear from  
the water, remember,*

*it wants you to carry  
the sound of its truth on your lips.*

*Remember,  
in this place  
no one can hear you*

*and out of the silence  
you can make a promise  
it will kill you to break,*

*that way you'll find  
what is real and what is not.*

*I know what I am saying.  
Time almost forsook me  
and I looked again.*

*Seeing my reflection  
I broke a promise  
and spoke  
for the first time  
after all these years*

*in my own voice,  
before it was too late  
to turn my face again.*

*--David Whyte*

## ***All the True Vows***

*All the true vows  
are secret vows  
the ones we speak out loud  
are the ones we break.*

*There is only one life  
you can call your own  
and a thousand others  
you can call by any name you want.*

*Hold to the truth you make  
every day with your own body,  
don't turn your face away.*

*Hold to your own truth  
at the center of the image  
you were born with.*

*Those who do not understand  
their destiny will never understand  
the friends they have made  
nor the work they have chosen*

*nor the one life that waits  
beyond all the others.*

*By the lake in the wood  
in the shadows  
you can  
whisper that truth  
to the quiet reflection  
you see in the water.*

## **FEAR**

*'You mustn't be frightened, if a sadness rises in front of you, larger than any you have ever seen; if an anxiety, like light and cloud-shadows, moves over your hands and over everything you do. You must realize that something is happening to you, that life has not forgotten you, that it holds you in its hand and will not let you fall.'*

*--Rainer Maria Rilke*

## **Letting go of Fear**

Picture yourself swimming-floating-peacefully down a gentle stream. All you need to do is breathe, relax, and go with the flow.

Suddenly you become conscious of your situation. Frightened, overwhelmed with "what ifs?" your body tenses. You begin to thrash around, frantically looking for something to grab on to.

You panic so hard you start to go under. Then you remember- you're working too hard at this. You don't need to panic. All you need to do is *breathe, relax, and go with the flow.* You won't drown.

Panic is our great enemy.

We don't need to become desperate. If overwhelming problems appear in our life, we need to stop struggling. We can tread water for a bit, until our equilibrium returns. Then we can go back to floating peacefully down the gentle stream. It is our stream, it is a safe stream. Our course has been charted. All is well.

*--Melody Beattie*

## Living in the Present Moment

The present moment is all we have. Yes, we have plans and goals, a vision for tomorrow. But now is the only time we possess. And it is enough.

We can clear our mind of the residue of yesterday. We can clear our mind of fears of tomorrow. We can be present, now. We can make ourselves available to this moment, this day. It is by being fully present now that we reach the fullness of tomorrow.

Have no fear, child, a voice whispers. Have no regrets. Relinquish your resentments. Let Me take your pain. All you have is the present moment. Be still. Be here. Trust.

All you have is now. It is enough.

--Melody Beattie

Now think about nature- the places of beauty that constantly gift us and bring us home to ourselves. It is often here that we resonate with the part of us that is pure beingness. Here we not strive or hunger for anything. Instead our hearts open wide while walking through a forest, listening to the sounds of songbirds or watching a sunrise or sunset.

Do you have a favorite place in nature- a place where your spirit feels at home? If so, imagine yourself being back there right now with all your senses fully awake and alive. Give yourself ample time to enjoy this experience. This is another one of Mother Earth's greatest gifts to us- the ability to use our imaginations, and in this case, go back to a time and place to recreate an experience of love, joy, and inner serenity.

Now think about yourself. What gifts and talents do you have and express in the world? Do you have an appreciation for art, music, dance, laughter, creativity? Give thanks for the ability to enjoy these things. Consider the random acts of kindness you've given to others and that you too have received.

Next, how does your spiritual life feed you? Are you noticing the synchronistic events that are at play- the phone ringing when you think of someone you love and there they are, the money coming in just when you wondered how it ever would, the book someone lent you ages ago that just fed you exactly what you needed to hear to inspire and uplift you. This is you in Divine Co-creation with the Universe. There are no accidents. Breathe in the glory of this.

Now consider all the things in your life that you have to grateful for. Living life with an attitude of gratitude brings joy, love, and abundance into our lives. Love begets Love. Joy begets Joy. Gratitude begets Gratitude.

Move to your writing space and begin your story of appreciation and thanks. And remember, when you are writing the stories that are difficult, return to this one. Let it bring you back into today and all that is good and beautiful in your world.

--June Swadron

## Journaling Exercise

Begin to look at your life as it is right now. The following memory prompts will help you recall the things for which you can be grateful. Read them all the way to the end before you start or begin writing after any of the prompts that call to mind something for which you are grateful.

Let's begin with your home- where you are currently living- no matter how big or small. Notice how it supports you, keeps you warm, shelters you from the cold. In your mind's eye, walk in the front door of your house or apartment and lovingly move from room to room saying "thank you". Take a new look at what fills each room-the furniture, paintings, the colours and the energy that fills your home and makes it yours. Bless all of it. Notice what you really like or love about it. Notice what you would want to change while being in full appreciation of what is there now.

Now think about the supports in your life- the people who love you just the way you are- and how you can love them just the way they are- your partner, your children, grandparents, grandchildren, siblings, nieces, nephews, neighbours, colleagues, and special friends. Say a silent thank you for the richness you feel because of their presence in your life. Perhaps you have a mentor or teacher, past or present, who has believed in you, has given you the loving support you needed- either in kind words or deeds- encouraging you to take the next steps. Acknowledge these people in your heart now.

Now reflect on the work you do. What skills and talents do you bring to your work? What is your work teaching you? Who are the people who are there with you? Bless each of them and say thank you to your work for helping you to pay bills and giving you an opportunity to contribute.

Do you do volunteer work? How is this act of giving honouring you? Who are the people involved? Bless them. Bless yourself. Give thanks for this opportunity to give and receive in this loving way.

Do you have a pet or pets? How do your pets enrich your life? Breathe in the joy and delight of this. Say a silent thank you to them. Love them for their open and tender hearts, for the comfort they bring you again and again.

## Journaling Exercise

The following is an exercise designed to help you excavate deeper truths as to what you may fear at this moment in time. The exercise has been adapted from Leonard Shaw, author of the book: Love and Forgiveness. He suggests answering these 2 questions 10 times as quickly as possible.

Here are two questions:

- **Regarding where I am right now, what do I fear?**
- **Regarding where I am right now, what do I hope for?**

Examples:

1. Regarding where I am right now, what do I fear?  
*I fear being alone.*
2. Regarding who I am and where I am right now, what do I fear?  
*I fear the future.*
3. Regarding who I am and where I am right now, what do I fear?  
*I fear being in pain.*
4. Regarding where I am right now, what do I fear?  
*I am fear giving up hope. .*
5. Regarding where I am right now, what do I fear?  
*I am afraid to talk honestly to other people about how I really feel inside.*
1. Regarding where I am right now, what do I hope for?  
*I hope for peace and calm.*
2. Regarding where I am right now, what do I hope for?  
*I hope that my family will be okay.*
3. Regarding where I am right now, what do I hope for?  
*I hope that I will be free of pain.*

Do this 10 times as quickly as you can for each question. Don't be concerned with repeating yourself. It simply means that this answer is particularly strong for you. The insights you will gain from doing this exercise may surprise you. They will reveal the deeper truth as to why you might be feeling the way you are right now.

--Adapted from June Swadron

## Grief and Loss

### *Heavy*

*That time  
I thought I could not  
go any closer to grief  
without dying  
I went closer,  
and I did not die.*

*Surely God  
had His hand in this,  
as well as friends.*

*Still, I was bent,  
and my laughter,  
as the poet said,  
was nowhere to be found.  
Then said my friend Daniel  
(brave even among lions),  
"It's not the weight you carry  
but how you carry it--  
books, bricks, grief--  
it's all in the way  
you embrace it, balance it, carry it  
when you cannot, and would not,  
put it down."*

*So I went practicing.  
Have you noticed?*

*Have you heard  
the laughter  
that comes, now and again,  
out of my startled mouth?*

## The Magic of Gratitude and Acceptance

Gratitude and acceptance are two magic tricks available to us. No matter who we are, where we are, or what we have, gratitude and acceptance work.

We may eventually become so accepting that we realize our present circumstances are OK. Or we master our present circumstances and then move forward into the next stage of our life.

If we become stuck, miserable, feeling trapped and hopeless, try gratitude and acceptance. If we have tried unsuccessfully to alter our present circumstance and have begun to feel like we're beating our head against a brick wall, try gratitude and acceptance.

If we feel like all is dark and the night will never end, try gratitude and acceptance.

If we feel scared and uncertain, try gratitude and acceptance.

If we've tried everything else and nothing seems to work, try gratitude and acceptance.

If we've been fighting something, try gratitude and acceptance.

When all else fails, go back to the basics.

Gratitude and acceptance work.

*Today, help me let go of my resistance. Help me know the pain of a circumstance will stop hurting so much if I accept it. I will practice the basics of gratitude and acceptance in my life, and for all my present circumstance.*

--Melody Beattie

‘Gratitude is an attitude. It is an attitude that no matter what is going on in your life, you are able to recognize the good-that which is working-the events and moments that warm you, bring you joy and help you see and acknowledge those things that lift your spirits...They are everywhere if you just let yourself be open to them. Have you ever walked down the street on a day you felt particularly sad or lonely and a stranger smiled at you and in an instant your heart opened? Even such a seemingly small gesture can give meaning to your day.

Gratitude is a mindset. It is a way of showing up in the world breathing in the beauty that is around us even in times of pain and sorrow.

Melody Beattie expressed it this way:

*“Gratitude unlocks the fullness in life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It can turn a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend. Gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today and creates a vision for tomorrow.”*

Perhaps you are not in a state of gratitude at the moment. Perhaps you are feeling lonely, or afraid, or angry with your life circumstances and gratitude is the last thing you are feeling. I understand what that’s like. Even though I keep a gratitude journal that I like to write in every night before I go to bed, and I generally find at least a few things that have given me pleasure that day for which I can give thanks, and often many things, this is not always the case. Recently I was feeling angry and resentful toward someone and it flooded into all that other areas of my life. That night in my gratitude journal I wrote, “I am grateful for this day to be over!”

--June Swadron

*How I linger  
to admire, admire, admire  
the things of this world  
that are kind, and maybe  
also troubled--  
roses in the wind,  
the sea geese on the steep waves,  
a love  
to which there is no reply?*

--Mary Oliver

## **The Grief Process**

To let ourselves wholly grieve our losses is how we surrender to the process of life. How do we grieve? Usually with a great deal of resistance. Often with anger and attempts to negotiate. Ultimately, by surrendering to the pain.

The grief process, says Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, is a five-stage process: *denial, anger, bargaining, sadness, and finally, acceptance*. That’s how we grieve; that’s how we accept; that’s how we forgive; that’s how we respond to the many changes life throws our way.

Although the five-step process looks tidy on paper, it is not tidy in life. We do not move through it in a compartmentalized manner. We usually flounder through, kicking and screaming, with much back-and-forth movement- until we reach that peaceful state called *acceptance*.

Grief can be frustrating. It can be confusing. We may vacillate between sadness and denial. Our behaviours may vacillate. Others may not understand us. We may neither understand ourselves nor our own behaviour while we are grieving our losses. Then one day, things become clear. The fog lifts, and we see that we have been struggling to face and accept a particular reality.

It takes time to touch into our losses. We can learn to help ourselves and

others by understanding our grief. We're moving towards acceptance- acceptance of ourselves, our past, other people, and our present circumstances. Acceptance brings peace, healing, and freedom-the freedom to take care of ourselves.

Don't worry. If we are taking steps to take care of ourselves, we will move through this process at exactly the right pace. Be understanding with yourself and others for the very human way we go through transition.

*Today, help me open myself to the process of grieving my losses. Help me allow myself to flow through the grief process, feeling my pain, finding acceptance and forgiveness so I might find peace and love in my life. Help me learn to be gentle with myself and others while we go through this very human process of healing.*

-Adapted from Melody Beattie

## Sadness

*When sorrow comes, let us accept it simply, as a part of life. Let the heart be open to pain; let it be stretched by it. All the evidence we have says that this is the better way. An open heart never grows bitter. Or, if it does, it cannot remain so. In the desolate hour, there is an outcry; a clenching of the hands upon emptiness; a burning pain of bereavement; a weary ache of loss. But anguish, like ecstasy, is not forever. There comes gentleness, a returning quietness, a restoring stillness. This, too, is a door to life. Here, also, is a deepening of meaning—and it can lead to dedication; a going forward to the triumph of the soul, the conquering of the wilderness. And in the process will come a deepening inward knowledge that in the final reckoning, all is well.*

--A. Powell Davies

Ultimately, to grieve our losses means to surrender to our feelings. So many of us have lost so much, have said so many goodbyes, and have been through so many changes. We may want to hold back the tides of change, not because the change isn't good, but because we have had so much change, so much loss.

## Mindful

*Every day  
I see or hear  
something  
that more or less  
kills me  
with delight,  
that leaves me  
like a needle  
in the haystack  
of light.*

*It was what I was born for -  
to look, to listen,  
to lose myself  
inside this soft world -  
to instruct myself  
over and over  
in joy,  
and acclamation.  
Nor am I talking  
about the exceptional,  
the fearful, the dreadful,  
the very extravagant -  
but of the ordinary,  
the common, the very drab,*

*the daily presentations.  
Oh, good scholar,  
I say to myself,  
how can you help  
but grow wise  
with such teachings  
as these -  
the untrimmable light  
of the world,  
the ocean's shine,  
the prayers that are made  
out of grass?*

--Mary Oliver

## Gratitude

*'We learn the magic lesson that making the most of what we have turns it into more.'*

Sometimes in life, things happen too fast. We barely solve one problem when two new problems surface. We're feeling great in the morning, but we're submerged in misery by nightfall.

Every day we face interruptions, delays, changes, and challenges. We face personality conflicts and disappointments. Often when we're feeling overwhelmed, we can't see the lessons in these experiences.

One simple concept can get us through the most stressful of times. It's called *gratitude*. We learn to say, *thank you*, for these challenges and feelings. *Thank you* for the way things are. I don't like this experience, but *thank you* anyway.

Force gratitude until it becomes habitual. Gratitude helps us stop trying to control outcomes. It is the key that unlocks positive energy in our life. It is the alchemy that turns challenges into blessings, and the unexpected into gifts.

--Melody Beattie

Many of us have so much grief to get through. Sometimes we begin to believe grief, or pain, is a permanent condition.

The pain will stop. Once felt and released, our feelings will bring us to a better place than where we started. Feeling our feelings, instead of denying or minimizing them, is how we heal from our past and move forward into a better future. Feeling our feelings is how we let go.

It may hurt for a moment, but peace and acceptance are on the other side.

--Melody Beattie

## Anger

Feeling angry-and, sometimes, the act of blaming-is a natural and necessary part of accepting loss and change- of grieving. We can allow ourselves and others to become angry as we move from denial toward acceptance.

As we come to terms with loss and change, we may blame ourselves, our Higher Power, or others. The person may be connected to the loss, or he or she may be an innocent bystander. We may hear ourselves say: "If only he would have done that...If I wouldn't have done that...Am I being punished?" We know that blame doesn't help. Ultimately, surrender is the only concept that can move us forward, but to get there we may need to allow ourselves to feel angry and to occasionally indulge in some blaming.

It is helpful, in dealing with others, to remember that they too, may need to go through their angry phase to achieve acceptance. To not allow others, or ourselves, to go through anger and blame may slow down the grief process.

Trust ourselves and the grief process. We won't stay angry forever. But we may need to get mad for a while as we search over what could have been, to finally accept what is.

--Melody Beattie

## **Being Gentle with Ourselves during Times of Grief**

The process of adapting to change and loss takes energy. Grief is draining, sometimes exhausting. Some people need to “cocoon for transformation” while going through grief.

We may feel more tired than usual. Our ability to function well in other areas of our life may be reduced, temporarily. We may want to hide out in the safety of our bedroom. Grief is heavy. It can wear us down,

It’s okay to be gentle with ourselves when we’re going through change and grief. We can be compassionate with ourselves. We do not have to expect more from ourselves than we can deliver during this time. We do not even have to expect as much from ourselves as we would normally and reasonably expect.

We may need more rest, more sleep, more comfort. We may be needier and have less to give. It is okay to accept ourselves, and our changed needs, during times of grief, stress, and change.

It is okay to allow ourselves to cocoon during times of transformation. We can surrender to the process, and trust that a new energy is being created within us. Before long, we will take wings and fly.

-Melody Beattie.

## ***The Journey***

*Above the mountains  
the geese turn into  
the light again*

*Painting their  
black silhouettes  
on an open sky.*

*Sometimes everything  
has to be  
inscribed across  
the heavens  
so you can find  
the one line  
already written  
inside you.*

*Sometimes it takes  
a great sky  
to find that  
small, bright  
and indescribable  
wedge of freedom  
in your own heart.*

*Sometimes with  
the bones of the black  
sticks left when the fire  
has gone out*

*someone has written  
something new  
in the ashes of your life.*

***You are not leaving  
you are arriving.***

*~ David Whyte*

## LEGACY

*'As long as we can love each other, and remember the feeling of love we had, we can die without ever really going away. All the love you created is still there. All the memories are still there. You live on—in the hearts of everyone you have touched and nurtured while you were here.... Death ends a life, not a relationship.'*

*--Mitch Albrom*

*"I will not fail you, my love. I will continue on the path we shared, and I know you will be there to help me, as you always were. And when we meet again at the journey's end, and we laugh together once more, I will have a thousand things to tell you..."*

*--Queen Noor Al Hussein*

## Acceptance

Our basic healing concept that never loses its power to work miracles is the concept of *acceptance*.

We do not achieve acceptance in a moment. We often have to work through a mirage of feelings-sometimes anger, shame, outrage, self-pity, or sadness. But if acceptance is our goal, we will achieve it.

What is more freeing than to laugh at our weaknesses and be grateful for our strengths? To know the entire package called "us"-with all our feelings, thoughts, tendencies, and history-is worthy of acceptance and brings healing feelings.

To accept our circumstances is another miraculous cure. For anything to change or anyone to change, we must first accept ourselves, others, and the circumstance exactly as they are. Then, we need to take it one step further. We need to become grateful for ourselves or our circumstances.

*--Melody Beattie*

## Grief Reactions: Some Helpful Tips

The following are all normal reactions to grief and loss and some suggestions on ways to work with them.

- ❑ **Forgetful, difficulty concentrating:**  
Keep a pad of paper and pencil available to write things down. Use yellow stickies. Write yourself and post them on your fridge. Keep your calendar, glasses, keys and bills all in special places so you can find them.
- ❑ **Difficulty eating, upset stomach, loss of appetite:**  
Eat small meals or at least one good meal a day, even if you are not hungry, just to maintain your own health.
- ❑ **Sleep disturbances:**  
Try not to nap during the day. Don't drink caffeine after 12:00 noon. Exercise, take vigorous walks, work in the garden, etc.
- ❑ **Crying spells:**  
Good! Keep tissues handy. Allow yourself to cry. It releases tension and toxins in the body.
- ❑ **Restlessness, can't keep still:**  
Exercise. Keep in contact with friends and family members you feel comfortable with, Write down things you enjoy doing. Try doing one of them. Keep the list handy for these restless times.
- ❑ **Irritable, short-tempered, angry:**  
Release anger through tears, exercise, beating a pillow, etc. Talk with a trusted friend. Do whatever helps you. It's all right to talk aloud to yourself or to the person who died. It can help.
- ❑ **Difficulty making decisions, can't concentrate:**  
Don't make any more decisions than you have to. Try not to make major decisions, such as moving, for the first year.

Discover what simple things you like, e.g., hot baths, a good book, etc. Give yourself permission to change: your routine, place you go, your furniture arrangement. Above all, be kind to yourself, be your own best friend.

--Adapted from *Found Through Loss* (2003) by Nancy Reeves.

## The Courage of the Seed

*All the buried seeds  
Crack open in the dark  
The instant they surrender  
To a process they can't see*

What a powerful lesson is the beginning of spring. All around us, everything small and buried surrenders to a process that none of the buried parts can see. And this innate surrender allows everything edible and fragrant to break ground into a life of light that we call spring.

In nature, we are quietly given countless models of how to give ourselves over to what appears dark and hopeless, but which ultimately is an awakening that is beyond all imagining. This moving through the dark into blossom is the threshold to God.

As a seed buried in the earth cannot imagine itself as an orchid or hyacinth, neither can a heart packed with hurt imagine itself loved or at peace. The courage of the seed is that once cracking, it cracks all the way.

## Journaling Exercise

Write about a time in your life that you knew you had to change the circumstances you were in because it was too painful or too destructive to stay where you were. The idea of making a change scared you but you did it anyway.

Describe in details. What did you do to turn the circumstances around? Do you remember the year and your age at the time? Where were you living? What stands out as the most painful or challenging part of that time for you? Were there people there to support you? What happened once you made the decision to change your circumstances? Write all the details as you remember them. Honour yourself for the strength and courage it took to get you through it. What tools did you use? What were your strengths? Looking back at it from a distance, what did this time teach you about yourself.

-- June D. Swadron

## COURAGE

### *Self Portrait*

*It doesn't interest me if there is one God  
or many gods.  
I want to know if you belong -- or feel abandoned;  
If you know despair  
or can see it in others.  
I want to know  
if you are prepared to live in the world  
with its harsh need to change you;  
If you can look back with firm eyes  
saying "this is where I stand."  
I want to know if you know how to melt  
into that fierce heat of living  
falling toward the center of your longing.  
I want to know if you are willing  
to live day by day  
with the consequence of love  
and the bitter unwanted passion  
of your sure defeat.  
I have been told  
in that fierce embrace  
even the gods  
speak of God.*

*~ David Whyte ~*

## But you're absolutely normal...

Grief is a normal reaction to loss and it shows up in ways you might not expect. If you've...

- Been angry with doctors or nurses for not doing enough
- Been angry with yourself for not taking more heroic steps
- Been sleeping too much or not enough
- Noticed a change in appetite
- Felt that no one understands what you're going through
- Felt that friends should call more or call less or leave you alone or invite you along more often
- Bought things you didn't need
- Considered selling everything and moving
- Had headaches, upset stomachs, weakness, lethargic, more aches and pains
- Been unbearably lonely or depressed
- Been crabby
- Cried for no apparent reason
- Found yourself obsessed with thoughts of the deceased
- Been forgetful, confused, uncharacteristically absent-minded
- Panicked over little things
- Felt guilty about things you have or haven't done
- Gone to the store every day
- Forgotten why you went somewhere
- Called a friend and talked for a long time
- Called friends and wanted to hang up after only a brief conversation
- Not wanted to attend social functions you usually enjoyed
- Been angry for being left alone
- Found yourself unable to concentrate on written material
- Been unable to remember what you just read

...you're absolutely normal. These are common reactions to loss. You may have experienced one, a few, many, or none of the above. Grief is a very complex experience, one like you have never experienced before. Everyone experiences grief differently, and there is no fixed time to indicate when you will feel "normal" again. Take care of yourself.

# FAITH

## *Faith*

*I want to write about faith,  
about the way the moon rises  
over cold snow, night after night,*

*faithful even as it fades from fullness,  
slowly becoming that last curving and impossible  
sliver of light before the final darkness.*

*But I have no faith myself  
I refuse it even the smallest entry.*

*Let this then, my small poem,  
like a new moon, slender and barely open,  
be the first prayer that opens me to faith.*

*-- David Whyte*

- ❑ Sometimes others can't "be there" to support us (or our loved one) as we wish they could be. If you are feeling resentful or angry about this, try to let go of your expectations about other people's behaviour. We can't control what other people do, only our own actions.
- ❑ Identify your support people. Let them know what you need, and how they can help.
- ❑ Even in the midst of grief; we have blessings around us. Try to stop to notice them; a beautiful sunset, the fall leaves, etc... Remember your blessings...they will help you to find some peace in the midst of suffering.
- ❑ Practice some form of relaxation, at least once a day.
- ❑ Give yourself credit for the gift you are giving to your loved one through your caring!

## Strategies for Helping Caregivers Take Care of Themselves

*“You can’t stop the waves, but you can learn to surf”*

*--Joseph Goldstein*

Taking care of a loved one who is living with a life-threatening illness is a difficult and challenging task. It may pull on resources you never knew you had. It will affect your emotional, physical, mental and spiritual health and well-being. In order to sustain the energy required for caregiving, it is extremely important to take care of oneself. Here are some suggestions:

- ❑ Talk with other caregivers: it will remind you that you are not alone in your experience.
- ❑ Acknowledge and express your feelings of sorrow, loss, anger, guilt, regret, joy...
- ❑ Try to make space in your schedule for personal time: even one hour per day where you can step outside of your caregiving role.
- ❑ See your doctor regularly—pay attention to messages from your body; your sleep, your appetite, weight gain/weight loss, etc.
- ❑ Seek help/more information if you are concerned about your use of substances as a coping mechanism.
- ❑ Try to eat as well as you can.
- ❑ Treat yourself to a meal out at a restaurant at least once a month.
- ❑ Treat yourself to a hot bubble bath.
- ❑ Join an exercise group or a yoga class.
- ❑ Walking is easy exercise that can be shared with a friend or used as your own personal thinking time.
- ❑ Establish a phone buddy; someone you can call on a regular basis to share your feelings/thoughts with.
- ❑ Remember the spiritual practices that give you strength and comfort.
- ❑ If information on your family member’s illness is helpful, read or use the internet as a resource. Knowledge can be empowering.
- ❑ Use your own creativity to express your thoughts and feelings: journal, write, draw, paint, make music.....

## Opening to faith

*Once a man was about to cross the sea. A wise man tied a leaf in a corner of his robe and said to him: “Don’t be afraid. Have faith and walk on the water. But look here- the moment you lose faith you will drown.” (Sri Rama Krishna)*

We often move away from pain, which is helpful only before being hurt. Once in pain, it seems the only way out is through. Like someone falling off a boat, struggling to stay above water only makes things worse. We must accept we are there and settle enough so we can be carried by the deep. The willingness to do this is the genesis of faith, the giving over to currents larger than us. Even fallen leaves float in lakes, demonstrating how surrender can hold us up.

We can learn from the leaves that ducks swim around. In life as in water, when we curl up or flail we sink. When we spread and go still, we are carried by the largest sea of all; the sea of grace that flows steadily beneath the turmoil of events. And just as fish can’t see the ocean they live in, we can’t quite see the spirit that sustains us.

Again and again, the onset of pain makes us clutch and sink. But life has taught me that how we first open after doubling over is crucial to whether we will heal at all.

### Reflection:

- *When you can, walk or sit by a lake or pond and watch the leaves float on the surface.*
- *Breathe like a fallen leaf and think of nothing.*
- *Just breathe and let your heart and mind be carried, however, briefly, by the spirit you can’t quite see.*
- *Center yourself by breathing steadily.*
- *Bring into view one thing you are reaching for. As you exhale, reach without moving and let it open up your body.*
- *Bring into view one thing you are needing to express. As you inhale, feel without speaking and let it open up your heart.*

## ***What I Must Tell Myself***

*Above the water  
and against the mountain  
the geese fly through the  
brushed darkness  
of the early morning  
and out into the light,*

*they travel over  
my immovable house  
with such unison  
of faith  
and with such  
assurance  
toward the south*

*cresting the mountains  
and the long  
coast of a continent  
as they move  
each year  
toward a horizon  
they have learned  
to call their own.*

*I know this house,  
and this horizon,  
and this world I have made.  
I know this silence  
and the particular treasures  
and terrors  
of this belonging  
but I cannot know the world  
to which I am going.*

## ***Working Together***

*We shape our self  
to fit this world  
and by the world  
are shaped again.*

*The visible  
and the invisible  
working together  
in common cause,  
to produce  
the miraculous.*

*I am thinking of the way  
the intangible air*

*passed at speed  
round a shaped wing*

*easily  
holds our weight.*

*So may we, in this life  
trust  
to those elements  
we have yet to see*

*or imagine,  
and look for the true*

*shape of our own self,  
by forming it well*

*to the great  
intangibles about us.*

*--David Whyte*

## Accepting our Feelings

Why do we struggle so with our feelings? Why do we work so hard to deny our emotions, especially concerning other people?

In the course of a day, we may deny we feel frustrated in reaction to someone saying something that upset us.

We may deny that we feel frustrated, angry or hurt in reaction to a friend.

We may deny feelings of fear, or anger, towards our children.

We may deny a whole range of feelings towards our spouse or the person with whom we're in a love relationship.

Sometimes the feelings are a direct reaction to others. Sometimes people trigger something deeper—an old sadness or frustration. Regardless of the source of our feelings, they are still our feelings. We own them. And acceptance is often all that is necessary to make them go away.

We don't have to let our feelings control our behaviour. We don't have to act on each feeling that passes through us. We do not need to indulge inappropriate behaviour.

It does help to talk about our feelings with someone we trust. Sometimes we need to bring our feelings to the person who is triggering them. That can breed intimacy and closeness.

But the most important person we need to tell is ourselves. If we allow our feelings to pass through us, accept them, and release them, we shall know what to do next.

--Melody Beattie

*I have only this breath  
and this presence  
for my wings  
and they carry me  
in my body  
whatever I do  
from one hushed moment  
to another.*

*I know my innocence  
and I know my unknowing  
but for all my successes  
I go through life  
like a blind child  
who cannot see,  
arms outstretched  
trying to put together  
a world.*

*And the world  
works on my behalf  
catching me in its arms  
when I go too far.*

*I don't know what  
I could have done  
to have earned such faith.*

*But what of all the others  
and the bitter lovers  
and the ones who were not held?*

*Life turns like a slow river  
and suddenly you are there  
at the edge of the water  
with all the rest  
and the fire carries the  
feast and the laughter  
and in the darkness  
away from the fire  
the unspoken griefs  
that still  
make togetherness  
but then*

*just as suddenly  
it has become a fireless  
friendless  
night again  
and you find yourself alone  
and you must speak to the stars  
or the rain-filled clouds  
or anything at hand  
to find your place.*

*When you are alone  
you must do anything  
to believe  
and when you are  
abandoned  
you must speak  
with everything  
you know  
and everything you are  
in order  
to belong.*

## **RELATIONSHIPS**

### **Keep Returning to the Road to Freedom**

*When suddenly you seem to lose all you thought you had gained, do not despair. Your healing is not a straight line. You must expect setbacks and regressions. Don't say to yourself, "All is lost. I have to start all over again." This is not true. What you have gained, you have gained.*

*Sometimes little things build up and make you lose ground for a moment. Fatigue, a seemingly cold remark, someone's inability to hear you, someone's innocent forgetfulness, which feels like rejection—when all these come together, they can make you feel as if you are right back where you started. But try to think about it instead as being pulled off the road for a while. When you return to the road, you return to the place where you left it, not to where you started.*

*Remember, you are not alone. You have companions on the journey... Keep returning to the road to freedom.*

*--Adapted from 'The Inner Voice of Love', by Henri Nouwen.*

## Letting Go

“How much do we need to let go of??” a friend asked one day.

“I’m not certain,” I replied, “but maybe *everything*.”

Letting go is a spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical process, a sometimes mysterious metaphysical process of releasing to a Higher Power or the Universe that which we are clinging to so tightly.

We let go of our grasp on people, outcomes, ideas, feelings, wants, needs, and desires-everything. We let go of trying to control our situation. Yes, it’s important to acknowledge and accept what we want and what we want to happen. But it’s equally important to follow through by letting go.

Letting go is the action part of faith. It is a behaviour that gives our Higher Power or the Universe permission to send us what we’re meant to have.

Letting go means we acknowledge that hanging on so tightly isn’t helping to solve the problem, change the person, or get the outcome we desire. It isn’t helping us. In fact, we learn that hanging on often blocks us from getting what we want and need.

There is a magic in letting go. Sometimes we get what we want soon after we let go. Sometimes it takes longer. Sometimes the specific outcome we desire doesn’t happen. Something better does.

Letting go sets us free and connects us to our Source.

--Melody Beattie

*If I have no one to turn to  
I must claim my aloneness.*

*If I cannot speak  
I must reclaim the prison  
of my body.  
If I have only darkness  
I must claim the night.*

*And then,  
even in the closest dark  
the world  
can find me  
and if I have honor  
enough  
for the place in which it finds me  
I will know  
it is speaking to me  
and where I must go.*

*Watching the geese  
go south I find  
that  
even in silence  
and even in stillness  
and  
even in my home  
alone  
without a thought  
or a movement  
I am part  
of a great migration  
that will take me to another place.*

*And though all the things I love  
may pass away and  
the great family of things and people  
I have made around me  
will see me go,  
I feel them living in me  
like a great gathering  
ready to reach a greater home.*

*When one thing dies all things  
die together, and must live again  
in a different way,  
when one thing  
is missing everything is missing,  
and must be found again  
in a new whole  
and everything wants to be complete,  
everything wants to go home  
and the geese traveling south  
are like the shadow of my breath  
flying into the darkness  
on great heart-beats  
to an unknown land where I belong.*

*This morning they have  
found me,  
full of faith,  
like a blind child,  
nestled in their feathers,  
following the great coast of the wind  
to a home I cannot see.*

*~David Whyte*

## **Prayer**

Erica Jong has said that we are spiritual beings who are human. Praying and meditating are ways to take care of our spirit.

Prayer and mediation are not necessarily connected to organized religion. Prayer and meditation are ways to improve our personal relationships with a Higher Power to benefit ourselves, our life, and our sense of peace. We don't pray because we have to; we pray because we want to. It is how we link our soul to our Source.

We're learning to take care of our emotions, our mind, and our physical needs. We're learning to change our behaviours. But we're also learning to take care of our spirit, our soul, because that is where all true change begins.

Each time we talk to our Higher Power, we are transformed. Each time we connect with our Higher Power, we are heard, touched, and changed for the best.

--Melody Beattie