



Bereavement Bulletin

The Gift of Story

By Larry Dawalt, M.Div.

Director of Spiritual & Grief Care Services

As a young boy, one of the greatest gifts I received from my parents was the time they took to read fairy tales to me. I can't recall all the stories I learned as a child, but I can recall ten words that were in every story. They all began with 'Once upon a time,' and ended with 'And they lived happily ever after.' I loved those stories. Without sounding too cynical, though, I guess that's why they call them fairy tales; because by definition, a fairy tale involves a far-fetching sequence of events.

We like 'happily ever after' because it's the easiest thing for us as a society. If everyone is happy, then we don't have to worry or be concerned with sorrow. So we go through the motions. We say 'how are you doing' and expect to hear 'fine' and absolutely nothing else. Even those who are deeply grieving are sometimes expected to play this game. Why? Because grief is as individual as the relationship that brought it about, and the only way to understand the grief is to hear about the relationship ...and that takes time.

Taking time for grief is a personal process, and the time it takes to grieve is not definable. But that's what we want to do. We want to compartmentalize the grief experience into a timetable that we can use to predict when 'they' are going to 'be over it' so that things can get back to normal. So, what is normal? Is it happily ever after?

'Normal' is that we all live with loss. We are certainly starting to talk about it more and more as a society, but there is still the tendency to expect people to go on. It is evidenced by the fact that most companies give employees three days of 'bereavement leave' upon the death of a 'close' relative. I don't even like that term. I think it should be changed to 'funeral leave,' because even the bereavement process, much less the grief process, is not over in three days.

So what are those who are grieving to do?

You have to write your own story and tell your own story. Write your own story of your grieving process by living where you are right now. If you are sad and hurting, that's

where you are. It doesn't mean that's always where you are going to be, but that's where you are right now. Be there, and make sure you have people in your life who are comfortable with you being there and don't feel the need to take you somewhere else. Being the 'author' of your grief process means taking control. It means saying yes to things when you've got energy and saying no to things when you don't. It also means giving your permission to ignore any preconceived grief timetable you may have or feel from others.

It is also important to tell your story, because sometimes the story needs to be finished. Relationships don't

“Relationships don't end just because people die. They continue.”

end just because people die. They continue. It is in telling your story that you can go back to places of joy and sorrow and give thanks or extend forgiveness in such a way that you begin to complete and heal the relationship. Some stories should end with applause and cheers while others may end with 'I'm sorry,' or 'please forgive me,' or 'I forgive you.' That is usually not work you want to do alone, so it's good to have a support person with you for those times.

For some people, it is valuable to tell your stories to a grief professional who can provide assessment, guidance, and education about the process. Others find grief support groups to be valuable. For some, this work is best done with a trusted friend. However you do it, tell the stories that brought about the great love, hear them, and do what it takes to add what needs to be added through gratitude or through forgiveness.

It's your story- your 'once upon a time.' It's not about 'happily ever after.' It's about living and feeling what we all experience, and acknowledging that it's an important part of life. Tell the story. Share the story. And if there is still pain, to the best of your ability and with the help of someone you trust, heal the story.

Disenfranchised Grief: Express Yourself

By: Gerri Cummings, MPA, CT
Grief Care Services Program Coordinator

Most people experience an outpouring of love, kindness, and generosity when a loved one dies. Expressions of sympathy, prayers, and comforting words are provided; emotional, psychological, and financial support is offered, and assistance is given to help the bereaved with managing the necessary and practical activities that define daily living. These gestures, for the grieving, are acknowledgements that recognize a life once lived and a life now changed. The gestures are normal responses directed to the bereaved. The acknowledgements can provide the first small steps towards the healing process for the griever.

However, there is another response that a person who has lost a loved one may experience. That response is one of silence or avoidance from family and friends, co-workers, neighbors, and the general community. The griever's loss may be discounted, minimized, or ignored and may lead to what is known as disenfranchised grief. Disenfranchised grief, according to Ken Doka noted researcher and educator on grief and loss, refers to losses that are not openly acknowledged, socially supported, easily recognized, or publicly mourned. It is grief that is felt but hidden. The griever may feel ashamed because of the nature of the loss or the relationship. The main factors contributing to disenfranchised grief are often found within societal views and cultural norms.

Some situations within which disenfranchised grief can occur are the death of a partner in a same sex relationship; death of an ex-spouse or significant other; death of an estranged immediate family member or relative, such as a father or grandparent; death of a child during pregnancy or at birth; death of a child with birth defects; death related to AIDS; death by suicide; or death while performing an unlawful act. There is a growing awareness for those who experience disenfranchised grief as a result of the physiological and cognitive transformation of loved ones with dementia and Alzheimer disease. The lack

of acknowledgement for individuals experiencing disenfranchised grief can leave a profound feeling of isolation.

The good news is that there is help and steps that individuals can take who experience disenfranchised grief:

1. *Seek out a trusted person and take advantage of offers from a professional grief counselor to help you through your grief and to validate the loss.*
2. *Name and describe the loss and what it means to you.*
3. *Be aware that you are not alone and that others have similar experiences; find or form a support group of kindred souls.*
4. *Speak openly of the loved one and the loss to anyone who will listen respectfully.*
5. *Journal your thoughts and feelings about the loved one and the loss.*
6. *Find meaning through honoring and memorializing your loved one.*

The grief journey is a process, and disenfranchised grief can hi-jack it. To ignore that grief is to delay the journey. The hope for those experiencing disenfranchised grief is to recognize it, respond to it with help, and to remember and grieve the loss with a sense of importance and worth.

Sources:

- Doka, K. J. (2002). *Disenfranchised grief: Recognizing hidden sorrow*
- Gilbert, K.R. (2007). *Grief in a family context: Ambiguous loss and disenfranchised grief*. Indiana University.

Support Groups

Grief: The Reluctant Journey Support Group

**Levine & Dickson Hospice House
Hospice & Palliative Care Lake Norman**

11900 Vanstory Drive
Huntersville, NC 28078

Monday afternoons, February 2 through March 23, 2009
3 - 4:30pm

Hospice & Palliative Care Charlotte Region, South Charlotte

7845 Little Avenue
Charlotte, NC 28226

Tuesday afternoons and evenings, February 10 through March 31, 2009
1 - 2:30pm and 6 - 7:30 pm

Hospice & Palliative Care Lincoln County

107 North Cedar Street
Lincolnton, NC 28092

Tuesday evenings, February 17 through March 31, 2009
6:30 - 8pm

Hospice & Palliative Care Charlotte Region, Uptown Charlotte

1420 East Seventh Street
Charlotte, NC 28204

Tuesday evenings, April 7 through May 26, 2009
6 - 7:30pm

Pre-registration is required. Please call Gerri Cummings at 704.335.4334.

In order to respect the group process, new members to our support groups will not be admitted after the second session. Individual counseling is available upon request.



"Let's Do Lunch" Grief Support Group

4th Wednesday of each month
11:30am

The Olive Garden
9421 Pineville - Matthews Road
Pineville, NC

Call Marge Brokaw at 704.335.4308 for additional information.

GRIEF EDUCATION

Our eight-county service area: Cabarrus, Catawba, Cleveland, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Mecklenburg, and Union

Moving Forward with Hope Workshops

Mark your calendar now and plan to join us for respite and healing during your grief journey. We will cover a variety of topics on self-care from relaxation tips, to organizing, to creating the environment you desire for your well-being. Please call Gerri Cummings at 704.335.4334 for registration or visit us at www.hpccr.org.

Hospice & Palliative Care Lincoln County

107 North Cedar Street
 Lincolnton, NC 28092
 Monday, January 26, 2009
 Noon - 1:30pm and 6:30 - 8pm

Hospice & Palliative Care Lake Norman

705 Griffith Street, Suite 203
 Davidson, NC 28036
 Monday, January 26, 2009
 3:30 - 4:30pm

Hospice & Palliative Care Charlotte Region South Charlotte

7485 Little Avenue
 Charlotte, NC 28226
 Tuesday, January 27, 2009
 1 - 2:30pm

Hospice & Palliative Care Charlotte Region Uptown Charlotte

1420 East Seventh Street
 Charlotte, NC 28204
 Wednesday, January 28, 2009, 6 - 7:30pm
 - and -
 Thursday, January 29, 2009, 1 - 2:30pm

Individual grief counseling sessions are available upon request at all offices. For more information on grief groups, grief education, or to discuss your feelings and experiences with loss, call 704.335.4300. Office hours are Monday-Friday, 8:30 am - 5:00 pm

The mission of Hospice & Palliative Care Charlotte Region is to relieve suffering and improve the quality and dignity of life through compassionate hospice care for those at the end of life, palliative care for those with advanced illness, and through community education.
How we care for you: Hospice Care, Palliative Medicine Consultants, Kids Path[®] Pediatric Care, Grief Care, Inpatient & Residential Hospice Care and Professional & Community Education.

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