



The **Quest for Life** Foundation
Founded by Petrea King

The Living Well of Grief

by Petrea King

When life delivers us an unexpected diagnosis in ourselves or in someone we love or when a relationship we thought would last a lifetime suddenly ends, when our dreams are shattered by the death of someone dear, we enter the bewildering landscape of grief. We don't get 'over' grief as if it were a surmountable obstacle. We can become more comfortable with our discomfort but there is no finite time for grief as there is no finite time for love. Grief can spring out of drawers and cupboards, off shelves, from photographs, wafts to our nostrils upon a perfume, is precipitated by music, clutches at our heart, hollows out our insides and plummets us to the depths. It is indeed a strange beast to know and understand, to embrace, digest and assimilate.

The chemical consequences of grief create a powerful visceral reaction. Our heart can indeed feel like it's breaking, we may feel vague or disoriented and many people describe a sense of feeling 'amputated' - as if a part of them has been severed.

It can be very helpful to identify the behaviours, the environments and the things that we do or have in our lives that give us peace or that connect us to the present moment. For some people solace can be found in the garden, by listening to music, in the company of friends and loved-ones, through writing out our feelings or creating a special event or project in celebration of that person's memory. Activities that nurture us such as warm baths, eating well, massage or counselling can help us maintain a healthy perspective that acknowledges our pain without overwhelming us. Scheduling time for ourselves to express our sadness, disbelief, anger or frustration can be more effective than it coming out in less helpful reactive language or behaviours.

Many people berate themselves for having a good time or for laughing and enjoying themselves when they are grieving. Some people think they must be in denial or they feel guilty or mortified that they can find pleasure in anything after the dreadful pain of loss. Having fun or enjoying each other's company is not a sign that we miss a loved-one any the less. Holding onto the pain of grief as a way of staying connected to our loved-one deprives us of the opportunity of integrating the experience in the knowledge that love never dies. The opposite of death is birth, not life. Life is indestructible, life is eternal, love never dies.

The loss of someone dear to us – no matter how it came about – doesn't *mean* something. We have to make meaning of our loss. In so doing we begin to find a way to honour their life by the way we choose to live ours. Participants in our programs conducted by the Quest for Life Foundation find the shared company of others gives them an opportunity to find their individual ways of honouring the impact of their loss and begin to make meaning of their experience. The programs are available to all in need of them and it is important to give ourselves the time and space to take on the changed reality of loss. Grief carves deeply into our being and forces us to explore parts of ourselves that are often unfamiliar to us.

There is no healthy way *around* grief. By honouring our unique way of embracing grief and removing the pressure of other people's – and our own – expectations of how we *should* grieve, we can create a healing pathway for ourselves.

an excerpt from the book *Sometimes Hearts Have to Break* (Random House)
by Petrea King
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