

Guidebook to Help us During Difficult Times

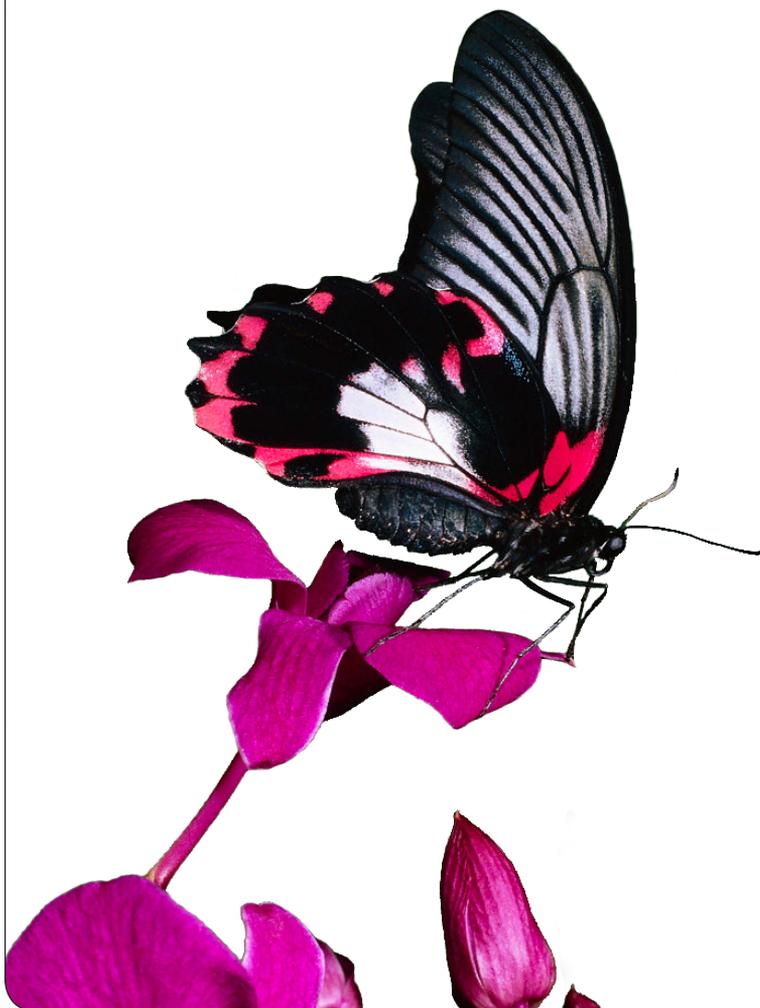


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Wild Geese

*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

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

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

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?*

*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.

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.

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.

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

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.*

*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.*

*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

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

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.

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

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

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.....

- ❑ 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!

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 ~

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

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

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

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

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 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

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

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.

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

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.*

*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

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

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

Hospice Foundation of America- <http://www.hospicefoundation.org/>

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