

Putting Intention into Healing: Become the Master of Your Grief

by David Stephenson

“The Soul would have no rainbow if the eyes had no tears.” ~Minqauss proverb

When a person close to us dies, we often experience anguish. Dr. Brene Brown in her book *Atlas of the Heart* defines this as a combination of shock, fear, grief, and powerlessness. Our world and our heart have shattered. Nothing is normal. How will we survive? Will the pain ever lighten?

In his book *Understanding Your Grief: Ten Touchstones for Finding Hope and Healing Your Heart*, Dr. Alan Wolfelt talks about these six needs of mourning:

- 1) Acknowledge the reality of the death.
- 2) Embrace the pain of the loss.
- 3) Remember the person who died.
- 4) Develop a new self-identity.
- 5) Search for meaning.
- 6) Let others help you—now and always.

Addressing these needs helps us take charge our grief and our path toward healing. Note that each of these are actions. They won't happen unless we engage with our grief. Get curious as to which may come naturally, and those needs on which you may need to work. After the death of my wife Annette, I knew that developing a new identity and finding meaning in my life without her would be difficult for me, so I focused on actions that addressed these needs.

Some ideas...if you have a hobby or skill in music, art, crafting, sewing, woodworking, writing, etc., create something in honor and remembrance of the person who died. Set aside times to look at photos, read cards and letters you gave to each other and embrace your grief and let the tears flow. Continue to do those things you used to do together. If you're like me, you may find these activities deeply connect you to the person who died and brings them closer. Plan events, trips, visits with friends and family and other activities that will coax you back into life. Our connections to others are especially important and healing. Consider volunteering or donating to causes that were important to that person or to you. Attend grief support groups and/or find people with whom to share your feelings, and who will listen and support you without judging, or telling you how you should grieve. Allow yourself to feel the full range of your emotions and be deeply seen—this is what makes us human. Be compassionate to yourself and others and lean into gratitude.

As I engaged in these activities, I experienced more and more moments beyond pain. I have learned not to feel guilty for feeling good. When I see beauty and experience moments of joy, I thank Annette for allowing me to do so. I believe this is her ongoing gift to me, and that she is with me always, deep in my heart and soul. When we were going through cancer treatments, we learned to really appreciate how valuable each day is. Although life is very different for me now, each day is still an amazing gift. In her honor and memory, I've committed to making good use of them.

Last, it's also important to be patient with ourselves. There is no reward for speed, and the path toward healing is not linear. There will be many twists and turns. Healing is not about never feeling grief or the pain of loss again. Rather, it's about integrating that grief while actively taking charge of our future. It's about turning our tears into rainbows...