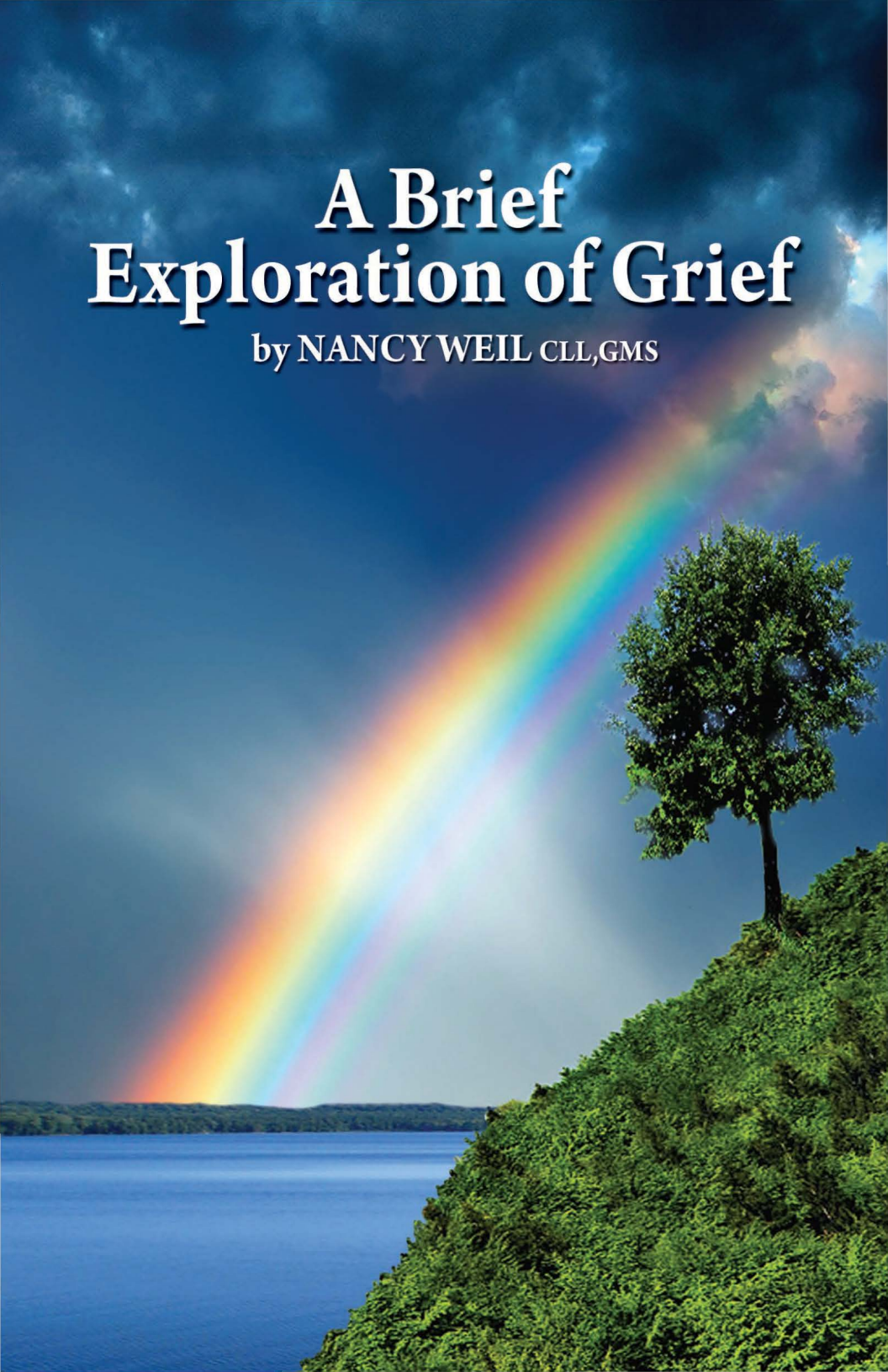


A Brief Exploration of Grief

by NANCY WEIL CLL, GMS



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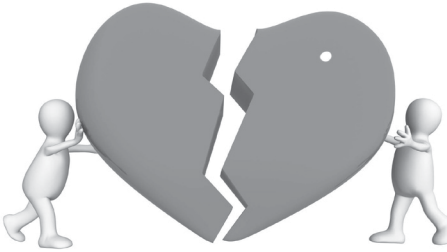
*“It is only with the heart
that one can see rightly.
That which is essential is
invisible to the eye.”*

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Introduction

This booklet was designed to give you a short overview of some of the common physical and emotional aspects of grief. Grief is a solo journey best shared with the support of others. You don't have to grieve alone. There are many resources available that can support you as your heart heals and some of these are contained in this booklet.

While my words don't have the ability to remove the pain of grief, it is my hope that you will find some comfort contained in these pages. If you are struggling with a loss that is not due to the death of a loved one, may you find reassurance in the words of Gilda Radner who said, "I wanted a perfect ending... Now, I've learned, the hard way, that some poems don't rhyme, and some stories don't have a clear beginning, middle and end. Life is about not knowing, having to change, taking the moment and making the best of it, without knowing what's going to happen next. Delicious ambiguity."



If you've received this booklet because you are mourning the death of a loved one, may your memories sustain you and the good times you shared bring laughter and joy to your heart. In the words of Irving Berlin, "The song has ended; but the melody lingers on."

Grief

*“Death is no more than a turning
over from time to eternity”*

William Penn



Everyone grieves differently. Even within the same family, each person will cope in his or her own way. While you may not be able to understand why some people never cry or others cry all the time or how someone can go on as if nothing has happened, their methods of handling the situation are all unique. Even when you are also grieving, it is never a good idea to slide

into judgment. Relationships can be damaged by stinging comments or building resentments.

Remember the four C's:

Communication, Cooperation, Compromise and Compassion.

Communication

*“We are healed of a suffering only
by expressing it to the fullest.”*

Marcel Proust

Open, clear communication with those around you is important. It is common for grieving people to feel very alone. It is as if their closest friends have abandoned them or backed away. Sometimes, this is just a misperception, but there are times when those who are unsure of what to do or what to say, do back off a bit. They would rather do nothing than do something that might hurt you or make you cry.



This is when I advise my families to write a script. Tell people what you will need and when you will need it. If you know that the following week has a date that will be difficult for you (perhaps you have a doctor's appointment or it is your anniversary), let others know that you would appreciate a phone call or a date for coffee. I have found that if you let others know what they can do for you, they are usually willing to comply and are often relieved to be trusted with a task that can support you in this time of need. But never assume that they can read your mind or that they should just know what you need. Just write the script, give them the words you need to hear and you are more likely to find yourself surrounded with the support you desire.

Cooperation and Compromise

"Better bend than break."

Scottish Proverb

Every individual has their own way of doing things and, in order to get along, we must cooperate and compromise with one another. It is useful to really listen to the other person first. Why do they want to do it a certain way? Why is it important to them? What do they need or want? Once we have listened, then we can offer our own feelings about the situation, not to persuade, but to inform.



*When we love
someone and we
listen with our
hearts...*

Once both sides have been heard, a compromise can usually be found. When we love someone and we listen with our hearts, even if we don't agree with them, we can at least understand them. Through this understanding, a

plan can be worked out. When we cooperate with one another, there is no room for the ego to enter.

Compassion

*“ You can choose to be right or you can choose to be kind...
choose to be kind.”*
Wayne Dyer

When we are grieving we have no energy for fighting with others. We just want the day to run smoothly and for everything we want, need and desire to magically appear when we need it. When this does not happen, we may over-react. If you find yourself doing this, take a breath and step away until you are able to interact from your heart space. It’s okay to be angry with someone, it is not okay to yell or say hurtful things to them. Express your feelings without blame or shame and be kind.

Stages of Grief?

*“In three words I can sum up everything
I’ve learned about life: it goes on.”*
Robert Frost

There is really no such thing as “stages of grief.” This misnomer has been repeated over and over: denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance - is what you may hear from others. When Elizabeth Kubler Ross conducted her study on death and dying, it was focused on people who were facing their own death, not those who were left behind. You may hear from others what you should or should not be doing, feeling or experiencing. They may compare their own experience with yours



and then try to “help” you to feel better by telling you how you need to be. Because they care, they will offer you their advice, but you don’t have to take it. You only need to listen to what they have to say and then determine for yourself if it makes sense to you. The only thing you need to do is to honor yourself and listen to your own inner knowing.

*What we miss
most is their
very presence*

Grief occurs whenever there is something that you want and you cannot have it. If you are sick, then you desire to be well. If your loved one is ill, then you want them to be restored to full health again. If you are going through a divorce, perhaps you would like your spouse back or you would like to be more certain of what life will look like now that you are no longer married.

When someone dies, the finality makes it very difficult. You know that your loved one will never sit at the table with you again or call you on the phone. You may intellectually understand this, but your heart hurts and you wish it could be different. I have a friend who told me after her husband died, that she was so tired of people coming up to her in the weeks that followed and telling her that he was still with her. While she understood that the love they had shared could never die, she told me that if one more person said that to her, she was going to scream. She said to me, “I know that he is still with me, but he isn’t bringing me my coffee in the morning.” What we miss the most, is their very presence in our daily life.

Grief - From the Inside Out

“The heart is not simply suspended in a body but in a culture, a place, a time.”

Mimi Guarneri

Our bodies react to grief in many ways. We may feel lethargic and tired. Our desires to do something may be replaced with the desire to just curl up and do nothing. While we may be tired, we may also find ourselves having trouble sleeping. We toss and turn and thoughts keep us awake. We might find that night is the loneliest time with little to keep us distracted and no one to talk to. This could be when we cry the most or find ourselves replaying old tapes in our minds of regrets and worries.



Another common trait is to have appetite changes. While some people may find it hard to eat, others turn to comfort food and eat more than usual. Grief is a time to take care of and support our bodies by providing the healthy food needed during this time of stress. Stress underlies many of our physical symptoms. By helping ourselves to relieve the stress, we can

also help to alleviate some of the symptoms. Some people find that exercising is helpful in relieving tension. Just the simple act of taking a walk can be healing. It allows the body to move and, if the weather allows, it gives you some time out in the fresh air. By walking with others who understand, you can talk about your loved one and your feelings. I have a friend who rode his bicycle and talked to his deceased father for hours. It helped him to make it through the day.

Living by post-it notes is what I call the “forgetfulness that is common when grieving.” It is as if our brain slows down and makes us need

to write reminders of even the simplest task. I do not consider this as an affliction, but rather a grace. If we had to take in the enormity of the changes that are taking place in our lives all at once, we probably couldn't get out of bed in the morning. By slowing down our brain, the new reality creeps in little by little.

Grief is often described as an emotional roller coaster. We may find ourselves having a good day and then suddenly start to cry without any obvious trigger. We could feel very alone or overwhelmed by too many people calling.



We may feel as if we have lost our identity and direction. If you were caretaking a loved one before they died, you may also feel like you have lost your purpose. Your day had revolved around your loved one's needs and suddenly the time becomes yours to do with as you please, but all you really want to do is have them back and continue to take care of them. As one of my clients told me, "Grief can be a very contradictory experience."

Our emotions seem to run the gamut from sadness to anger to laughter and everything in between. When we are very young, we are taught that there are "good" emotions and "bad" emotions. If we are angry, we are told that this is not good, but when we are filled with joy it is very good.

There is an appropriate place for every emotion, but we must differentiate between having the feeling arise and acting upon it. It is okay to feel angry; it is not okay to lash out at someone. If a feeling arises, just notice it. Perhaps say to yourself, "I am sad at this moment" (or whatever emotion you are experiencing). I use the metaphor that some emotions are in a neighborhood you can visit, but you don't want to build your house there. Don't live on Anger Alley or Offended Lane. Visit that place temporarily, but pull yourself from it as soon as you can.

Complicated Mourning

“God is closest to those with broken hearts.”
Jewish Saying

You may find that you are having more than the usual trouble getting through your grief. Perhaps you have had multiple losses in a short time or are struggling with the death of a loved one at the same time you are facing your own illness. It could be that the circumstances surrounding your grief are extreme, such as the death of a child or a terminal diagnosis. If you find yourself unable to function on a daily basis or are extremely depressed, it is time to seek help. No matter the reason, if you need help, seek it out. If you aren't sure if you need help, consult with your doctor. A trained professional can assess your personal situation and guide you to the right resource to help you.

*You don't have to
grieve alone*

Many people find it helpful, no matter the circumstances, to receive a little extra professional support during this difficult time. It is important for you to remember that you don't have to grieve alone. There are therapists and support groups available to help you along your path of grief.

Lemonade

“When life hands you lemons, make lemonade. Then, find someone whose life has given them vodka, and have a party!”



Just as the saying goes that if you have lemons, you may as well make lemonade, so, too, can it be with grief. Of course, those lemons made their transition by feeling like they had the life squeezed

out of them and then being surrounded by a lot of sweetness and this might be necessary for you as well. Discovering how many people you can rely on can be an unexpected surprise during a trying period. You may find that someone who was not a close friend, suddenly becomes the rock you can lean on. The sweetness may come from a caring card you receive in the mail or a phone call from someone just checking on you.

You realize what is truly important...

Some have discovered that they are stronger than they ever thought they could be after going through a grief experience. They may also become determined to reach out to others who are going through a loss of any sort, as they can now truly empathize.

Never taking a day for granted and re-setting priorities may also occur. You realize what is truly important and determine how you really want to spend your time. Things that would have bothered you in the past, suddenly become irrelevant. You might vow to take that trip you always wanted or to spend more time with those you love. Whatever your decision, grief changes who you are forever.

Finding a way to allow your loved one to live on in memory may be an important part of your grief process. You might donate to a cause in their name or participate in a fundraising walk that benefits the disease that took their life. Some have fought to change laws or enact new legislation. Others may just create small family ceremonies to remember and celebrate their loved one's life. Somehow we feel closer to our loved one when we participate in an activity in their memory.

Tools for Tough Times

“To change your life, change your habits.”

Author Unknown

When you are grieving, you may feel like you are no longer “yourself.” You wake up wondering who this person is that has taken over your body. Grief can be quite disorienting as you adjust to life without the person you love. You cry, you sigh, you can’t sleep, you sleep too much, you can’t eat, you eat too much – your daily habits are no longer the ones you had before. You may feel like there is nothing you can do but wait until you feel better. However, there are many actions you can take to feel better now. These are the tools that I refer to as the “can’t hurt, might help” methods to easing your pain and getting through the day.

Start with your breath. It is always present, but by slowing down and breathing deeply, we can return back to a calm state. Try loudly sighing as you exhale. Let out a deep, “aahhhh” until you have no breath left. Then you can inhale deeply and shift into a less stressed breathing pattern.

Try out different essential oils. Lavender is wonderful for calming you down and helping you to fall asleep. Place a few drops on your wrist or pillow and breathe in the fragrant aroma of this sweet flower. Peppermint oil can help to wake you up. Put a few drops on your chest and inhale this strong aroma on the days when you just need a pick-me-up. Citrus oils, like lemon or orange, can uplift the emotions.

Meditation, flower essences, massage, acupuncture, drumming, laughing and other holistic tools are available for you to experience. Remember: You don’t have to feel good, to feel better. You can use these modalities to ease the grief and support yourself through your day.

Listen to Your Inner Child

*“Hold the hand of the child that lives in your soul.
For this child, nothing is impossible.”*

Paulo Coelho

Within each of us is a small child that has been with us since our own childhood. Largely forgotten, this child yearns for attention and, most of all, to be heard. When we are grieving, we work with our adult selves to find our way and adapt to what life now holds. We explore new ways of thinking and new routines, yet we ignore this aspect of ourselves that is scared and insecure. As any child does when ignored, this child may throw a tantrum to get attention and you may wonder why you suddenly get angry and yell at someone. You may find yourselves upset when you see a couple out holding hands and realizing that you no longer have that hand to hold. You may be turning to unhealthy habits to feel better, like eating too many cookies or candy.

In order to fully heal from the grief, we must address this child. We must reassure the child that you know they hurt, too and that you are going to take care of him or her. You can speak to the child within or you can use a simple writing technique to facilitate this communication. Using your dominant hand, write a simple note asking how they are feeling about the loss. Now place the pen in your non-dominant hand, gaze at a photo of yourself as a child, and allow the child to take over the writing. You can go back and forth between writing from the “adult” and the “child” until you feel complete. You may be surprised to hear what he/she has to say. You may also find that you feel better once you bring your inner child into the healing process.

For more information about this, I recommend you read *Recovery of Your Inner Child* by Lucia Capacchione, Ph.D.

Your New Normal

“Life is what happens to you while you’re busy making other plans.”

John Lennon

Experiencing a loss changes who you are and how you approach life. Following a grief experience you work toward getting life back to “normal.” But what does that really mean? Nothing seems normal anymore. Even the most routine tasks take on a different meaning when done without your loved one around or when you are feeling sick and run down. Following the recovery from a serious illness people may find that life seems different somehow - even sweeter in a way. Perceptions change and you change along with them.

After a death, life takes on what can be called a “new normal.” Daily routines may be re-established, but they are not the same. You may find yourself surrounded by new friends who were only acquaintances previously or perhaps you find a new job or take a trip that you

had postponed. Eventually the rhythm of your life returns - work, errands, laundry, cooking and the other mundane tasks occupy your time. You may find yourself thinking about your loved one without crying or recalling a fond story and laughing. The before-death-and-grief kind of sweetness does return to life, even though

*What I know to be true is this:
Love never dies*

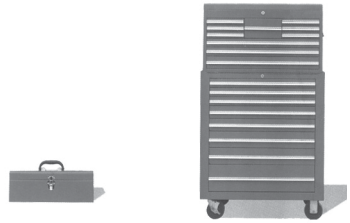
your life is not what it was, nor will it ever be again. But that does not mean that your life can’t be good. Every person believes that their loved one would want them to be happy and to laugh again and not want them to stay in the depths of grief the rest of their lives. You never “get over” grief, but you are given permission to move forward. You can find your way through your grief and re-emerge on the other side changed, but looking forward to what each new day brings.

Your Spiritual Toolbox

“Troubles are often the tools by which God fashions us for better things.”

Henry Ward Beecher

Each of us carries with us a spiritual toolbox filled with things that we do that help us feel better. Perhaps you love to cook, walk or knit; it doesn't matter *what* you do so long as you *do* it. When we are grieving, we freeze for a while. It is difficult to take any action in that frozen state. You may even forget what feeling good is like or believe that what used to feel good will now be unsatisfying. That is why it is important to make a list and write down all of those tools that belong in your toolbox. Here are some other ideas that have been shared by others: play with a pet, exercise, shop, read, listen to or play music, pray or meditate, take a hot bath, go out with a friend. Perhaps you also share some of these same interests or have other tools to place in your toolbox.



So, what I know to be true is this: Life changes, people change, but at your core, your true self remains. The relationships you are in may change, but the love you shared will never die. As my friend always says to me, “In the end it’s between you and God anyway.” And this I know to be true.

Blessings,

Nancy

Resources

Use these resources to get the support you need. This is not an exhaustive list, but it's a good place to start.

Grief Resources

Crisis Hotline - Your phone book has the listing for a crisis hotline where you can reach out for immediate help. If in doubt on where to turn, call 911 and ask for assistance. Check with your local hospital, hospice or funeral home, as well. They often have current information about local grief resources.

GriefShare - A 13-week support group
www.griefshare.org

Compassionate Friends - an international organization devoted to supporting bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents.
www.compassionatefriends.org

Grief in Common - Online peer support
www.griefincommon.com

Grief.com - David Kessler's site with articles, events, and resource directory.
www.grief.com

For Grief - Grief support events, groups, and courses
www.forgrief.com

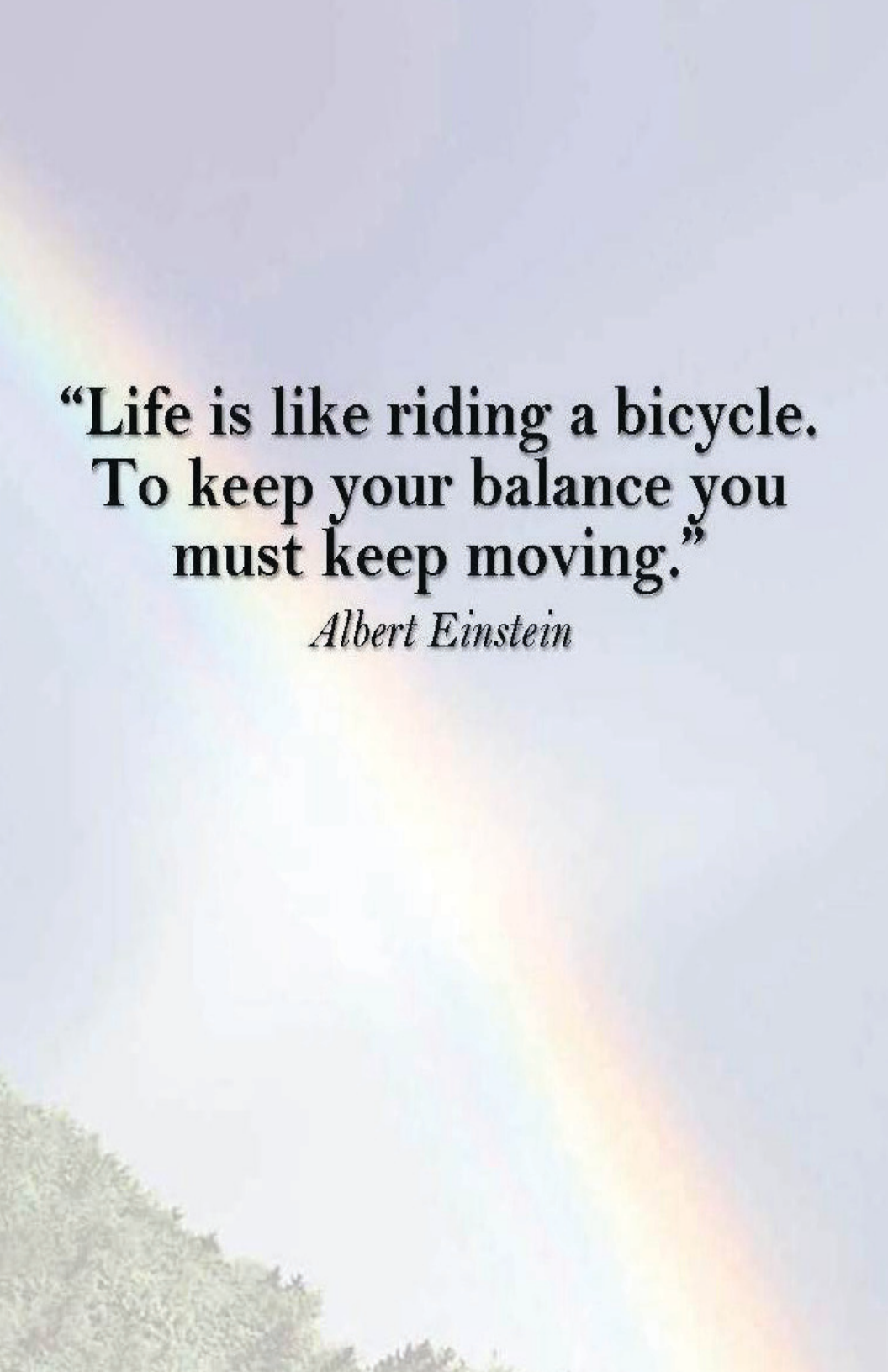
For additional loss specific grief resources, contact the author.

About the Author:



With Certifications as a Laughter Leader, Funeral Celebrant, Grief Services Provider and Grief Management Specialist, Nancy Weil is uniquely qualified in bringing new perspectives in ways to help heal from the pain of grief. Nancy has dedicated her life to helping people who have lost a loved one by providing them with the tools they need to navigate the journey of grief.

She runs a monthly virtual grief support group on Zoom. For information on the Healing Hearts Grief Support Group, please contact Nancy at NancyHealingHearts@gmail.com



**“Life is like riding a bicycle.
To keep your balance you
must keep moving.”**

Albert Einstein