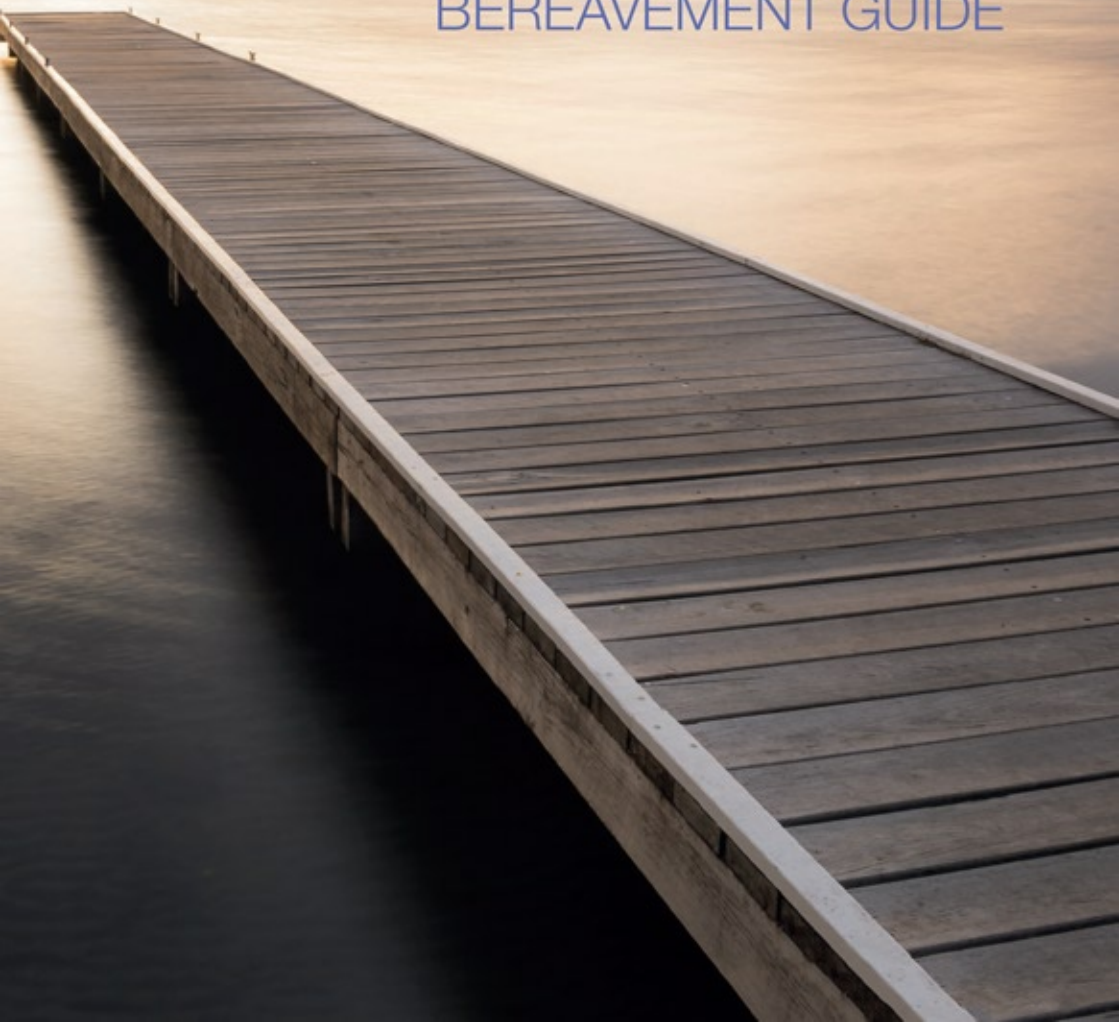




SHOOBRIDGE
FUNERAL SERVICES
INDEPENDENT FAMILY FUNERAL DIRECTORS

ADJUSTING TO LOSS NOW WHAT?

BEREAVEMENT GUIDE



Notes from the Author

We fully recognise and respect the difficult time that you and your family are experiencing.

Having experienced personal loss in our own lives, we feel we can identify with you by standing in shoes similar to yours.

We also recognise that, although there are similarities, what you are experiencing is unique to your own circumstances, situation and relationship with the person that has died.

Having read a tremendous amount of relevant material on the subject of bereavement – together with our experience as funeral directors, numerous facts emerge which reflect the practical feelings and experiences of all people whose origins are as varied as their opinions.

How the subsequent grief process is actually treated and addressed is also a matter of personal reflection and can equally be ignored or remain unattended to.

Using these factors, we, Shoobridge Funeral Services have produced what we consider to be a practical approach 'manual' with some shared experiences of those who have been affected in their own lives with confusion and distress but, survived.

The guide is designed to cut through numerous conditions and theories. Such conditions and theories haven't been dismissed but seen as non-relevant in light of the practical material that the guide contains.

Some aspects contained in the guide, are almost 'common' in their approach, which is an endorsement and confirmation of the processes contained.

The guide is not designed to be read particularly from cover to cover and sections can be accessed purely for their relevance to a situation or circumstance or as a reference.

Here at Shoobridge Funeral Services, we have a great deal of experience regarding the subject of bereavement and grief and will be pleased to assist you during this crucial time or, as the need arises in the future. It may not seem much of a comfort, but you are not alone – talking is often, at the very least, helpful.

We would also like to convey that, 'our door' is continually open for personal interaction, for advice or assistance with any part of the bereavement process. We are here for your comfort and help should you invite us and we would like to assure you that, your future journey is with our thoughts, empathy and assistance as required.

Terry, Penny and Paul

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Introduction

Your life just changed – dramatically! The reasons for the knowledge and habits that you have developed throughout your life, just disappeared. You weren't even given a choice!

We know life is unfair but this is different; this is finality. Whatever your circumstances were, they are no longer. Everything will be different. Some things will be harder, of that there is no doubt. Life as you knew it will remain but only as precious memories. But, it is not all desperate or hopeless despite the unknown course ahead. And, if you choose, it doesn't have to be a solo journey – there are others who are willing to help.

Losing your partner or family member is traumatic. The survivor is the one who has to deal with all the hardships of the day and of life. Love caused this – this situation of grief and bereavement. If you had felt nothing for the deceased, you wouldn't feel so alone and you wouldn't be upset.

If the role was reversed, how would you like the survivor to feel and act? Of course it will be difficult. Finding the strength is all very well in words but you have to get through each day with these feelings, which are a burden at best.

This brochure is designed to try to help you familiarise yourself with some of the realities of this new, undesirable, journey. You won't experience all that it contains but recognising some of the feelings and emotions expressed here, should help you bring some perception and balance to this extremely difficult situation that you are in, and are going through.

Adjusting to the loss of a loved one

UNDERSTANDING THE PROCESS

Though much is, and has been written on this subject, losing someone close to you, a family member, a friend, a child, someone with a terminal illness, a medical condition or indeed, anyone who has had an effect in, or on your life, is likely to be a new, and unpleasant experience. That many have preceded you is unhelpful. Their feelings were unique as yours will be. Sharing disasters in no way dilutes or diminishes them and nothing unpleasant is, enviable.

Unfortunately, liking or loving someone has consequences. In a world that is moving at an extremely fast pace, progress technologically seems to be alienating social aspects that were once, the 'norm.'
Analysing human beings gives leave to two situations or states-of-being: a logical being and an emotional being.

The logical side of us is easily explained and quantified though, not in depth in this publication; we are concerned with the inner core of our personal nature, our characteristics, conscience and motivations – our emotional side.

Recognising these personal aspects as being unique is quite obvious. That, as a race, there are similarities between us all, does result in a combination effect? We are going to examine these effects in a way that will lead to practical help – we are on an individual journey which will help demonstrate that you are not alone and that, in time, healing **will** occur. This will not dismiss the loss you are feeling - quite the opposite. It will address your feelings and actions by supplying an understanding, which will hopefully lead to a better situation awareness and a subsequent adjustment in your life.

Additionally, though cultural differences exist in our societies, suffering personal loss shares many similarities. These differences are notably present across various creeds, religions, beliefs, sexes, nations and even generations.

Fortunately, today, branches of medicine and indeed medical science have not only recognised the effects of death emotionally and physically on those who knew or loved the deceased, but have addressed the symptoms and knowledge bases both of the persons affected and of the professionals that deal and help those affected, in numerous ways.

Note: Reading complete articles may be unrealistic. The lack of ability to concentrate leads to re-reading paragraphs and sentences in a meaningless fashion. Do NOT force yourself to read; look at a passage that seems applicable to your feelings and personal situation and, when you feel able, simply read the paragraph or applicable passage.

Later, if you feel you want to, read some more. All the information is provided as a guide to assure you that, unhelpful as it may seem at times,
you are not alone and there is an end to this process.

Firstly, we will identify the difference between common words we often hear and take as read - grief, bereavement and mourning.

Grief Bereavement and Mourning

When a person loses someone important to them, they go through a normal process called grieving. Grieving is natural and expected. Over time, it can help the person accept and understand their loss.

Grieving involves many different emotions, actions and expressions - all of which help the person come to terms with the loss of a loved one but remember, grief doesn't look the same to or for everyone and, every loss is 'different.'

Bereavement is what a person **goes through** when someone close to them dies. It is the state of having suffered a loss. The person who has lost someone is said to be bereaved.

Mourning is the **outward expression** of loss and grief. Mourning includes rituals and other actions that are specific to each person's culture, personality and religion. Bereavement and mourning are both part of the **grieving process**.

Wearing black clothes is one practice followed in many countries. Those most affected by the loss of a loved one often observe a period of grieving marked by withdrawal from social events and quiet, respectful behaviour. People may also follow certain religious traditions for such occasions.

To summarise:

- Grief is the response or reaction to loss.
- Bereavement refers to the state of the loss.
- Mourning is the action you take following a loss.

Help is at hand

Shoobridge Funeral Services are more than willing to assist you in obtaining the help you need. We have resources available, time and the willingness to help reduce your stress by illustrating the direction forward for you at this difficult time.

The first few days

You have just lost someone very close. Having to cope with the next few days is a frightening thought. Your grief is a mixture of many different emotions. Some will hit you straight away. Others may come later. It may help to have some idea of what to expect. You may experience some of the following during the first few, traumatic days of grieving.

They are all normal, understandable feelings.

You won't experience them all!

DENIAL

Initial disbelief, refusal to accept the death.

SHOCK

Numbness - even after a long-term illness and an expected death.

CONFUSION

Loss of sense of purpose; poor memory; forgetfulness; unreliability; disorientation; distortion of time - it appears endless.

THE NEED TO CRY

Crying is an important part of healing, allow yourself to cry whenever you can.

ANXIETY

Restlessness; inability to relax.

DEPRESSION

Disturbed pattern of sleep; loss of appetite; inadequate diet or excessive overeating; lack of concentration; extreme fatigue; exhaustion; a sense of hopelessness; despair; thoughts of suicide.

ANGER

Towards G.P., hospital, oneself, the deceased person.

GUILT

Feeling more could have been done to prevent the death; regret that cross words were spoken; guilt over things not said or done; over wanting another relationship; at feeling relief over the death; a sense of emancipation.

The especially distressing circumstance of suicide produces very acute feelings of guilt and self-recrimination.

It is impossible to think beyond tomorrow

Try to manage one day at a time.

It seems that nothing can be normal again.

It takes great courage and hope to believe that this terrible time is the beginning of a long 'journey of recovery' that occurs gradually - over months.

The first few days and weeks **are** the hardest.

There are people around you who want to help.

You can contact a helper yourself or ask a friend or relative to do it for you.

The long journey of recovery

Bereavement causes a great intensity and variety of emotions, which may be felt for many months if not years after the death of someone close.

Many of these, you will have already felt. Below are listed some of the other feelings, which research suggests, can be present during the first two years of bereavement.

You may not experience all of the following.

Fact: no two bereavements are the same.

The amount of distress you feel after the death of someone close is not related to how much you loved him or her.

You may need to grieve less if the relationship was very strong.

*This leaflet is not meant to be a checklist of symptoms you **should** be feeling but rather a guide to understanding your grief and a reassurance that normal grieving includes a wide spectrum of emotions and physical symptoms.*

ILLUSIONS

Seeing the lost relative around the house, in a familiar chair or performing an activity.

LONGING

Overwhelming sense of loss; sadness; yearning; desperate missing of conversation or physical contact – sexual and non-sexual.

LONELINESS

Isolation with grief - no one mentions the dead person for fear of hurting those left behind; friends and neighbours cross over the street to avoid making conversation.

HURT

At being outcast because people cannot cope with those who grieve; social invitations stop; awkwardness at no longer being one of a couple.

INSECURITY

Lack of confidence; inability to deal with people and situations that were 'no problem' before; agoraphobia; vulnerability; difficulty in resisting pressure from well-meaning relatives to make important decisions in haste; helplessness.

A QUESTIONING OF ONE'S RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

This can cause a great many unsettling feelings, which *may* be of intense concern. This is natural as is feeling angry towards a deity.

Talking to a 'church elder' or counsellor can be beneficial.

FEAR

Of being alone; of being in an empty house; of the dark; of officialdom or form filling; of handling jobs always previously done by the deceased person; of financial insecurity; of being away from home where memories are so strong, even to the extent of feeling that the dead person is still there; of the future – there seems to be none!

Any of these fears may be so strong as to be paralysing in their effect.

THE NEED TO REMINISCE

About a past shared with the deceased; about the details of the death - over and over again.

A need for photographs although these may be too painful to view at first.

'INSANITY'

A belief that 'one' is going mad because so much of this present experience is new, frightening and extremely intense.

It is perfectly all right to talk out aloud with the person you have lost. You are not going mad, you are beginning a long adjustment to a drastic change.

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

Hollowness in your stomach; tightness in the chest and throat; oversensitivity to noise; a feeling of de-personalisation; going through the routine of the day on 'auto-pilot' whilst your mind is totally elsewhere; breathlessness; constantly feeling weak; lack of energy; dry mouth.

HEALING

The first 12 months are the hardest. Coping with birthdays and anniversaries can be especially difficult.

The second 12 months are easier but emotions can still be raw and feelings of depression – deep-seated.

These feelings are much harder to deal with now because they are less expected and may be interpreted as a, 'failure to cope!'

Talking with others similarly bereaved, can be of tremendous help in reducing the sense of isolation and despair. It may provide reassurance that, what is being experienced is normal and that time does eventually heal. There is no cure. The only relief from grief is time and courage.

An acceptance of death leads to adjustment, new confidence and the ability to cope. Memories become less painful and more precious. Life slowly becomes whole again, though never the same as it was before.



Hardship and suffering

Whenever we suffer a major loss in our lives e.g. the death of a loved one, a divorce, redundancy, a miscarriage, stillbirth, children leaving home or the end of a love affair – we need to go through a period of mourning.

Mourning is a normal and natural part of our human experience. It involves feelings of yearning, sadness, despair, anger, fear and other intense emotions. Then, slowly and gradually, we start coming to terms with the new situation.

It is a painful and often lengthy process – it cannot be rushed.

Unfortunately, until recently, we have lived in a society where death has been hidden away - in hospitals and funeral parlours; a society in which we are encouraged to be 'strong' and 'brave.' Our culture almost demands that we remain dry-eyed at the funeral of someone we love unless we are the spouse? *(It seems that over the centuries, peer pressure has discouraged men from crying?)*

These social pressures have ensured that 'normal,' 'healthy' grieving is often suppressed. This **can** lead to physical illness or mental health problems – sometimes years after the bereavement.

Suffering personal loss himself in the past, Dr. Bill Webster is an authority on the subject of grief and hosts seminars around the country in his efforts to educate professionals and the public alike. He has named the process, the 'Grief Journey' and has support in the form of a website which is designed to offer help at the time-of-need and in the difficult months that inevitably follow.

Please visit, 'The Centre for the Grief Journey'
<http://www.griefjourney.com>

The Centre for the Grief Journey

HOW DOES THIS HELP?

Identifying the initial feelings and illustrating what is to come or, what can be expected is fine but does it help our overall understanding?

Understanding any subject is helpful in finding a remedy or simply a method to deal with the new emotions we are likely to experience.

WHAT IS 'NORMAL' GRIEF?

Most people experience a bewildering range of thoughts and emotions after bereavement; sometimes the feelings are quite frightening because they are so painful and intense.

You might feel that you are 'going crazy' when in fact, you are going through quite normal aspects of grieving.

So, what is 'normal' grief?

If you have recently been bereaved – or have a bereaved friend or relative – what should you expect?

When we are bereaved, we **are likely to** experience **some** of the following:

- 'Seeing' the dead person in the street then realising it is not him or her
- Not believing that the death has occurred; thinking there must be some mistake
- Feeling numb; feeling strange; unreal; disoriented
- Feeling frightened; restless; panicky
- Searching for the lost person (despite knowing this is irrational) e.g. wandering aimlessly from room to room
- Crying and sobbing (sometimes 'out of the blue')
- Episodes of painful yearning for the dead person ('pangs of grief')

- Feeling depressed; feeling suicidal
- Repeating the sequence of events that led up to the death in great detail; thinking, "If only....."
- Wanting to make sense of the death
- Feeling that life has lost its meaning
- Thinking, "Why did it have to happen to me?"
- 'Seeing', 'hearing' or sensing the presence of the dead person in the house
- 'Forgetting' the person has died – for example, setting the table for them
- Feeling bitter and angry with doctors; with relatives; with God; with the dead person (which is very common)
- Feeling guilty or having regrets; wishing you had done more for the person in life
- Feeling you have lost part of yourself. "It's like losing a limb"
- Taking on characteristics of the dead person e.g. gestures, mannerisms, hobbies
- Loss of appetite
- Difficulty in sleeping
- Loss of interest in family; in work and other aspects of life.

These are all 'NORMAL' aspects of grieving.

DIFFICULTIES

For most people, the first year, especially the first anniversary of the death of a loved one, is a very difficult and painful time.

As previously mentioned, birthdays, other celebrations and family gatherings are equally sad and depressing times.

Long holiday periods such as Christmas and Easter can be very lonely whether you are in company or on your own. Doubtless, the distraction of company can help to ease or remove your focus for short periods of time.

During these events and on these occasions, modern thinking suggests that it is beneficial to spend a great deal of time thinking and talking about the person who has died.

Slowly, most people *do* come to terms with the finality of the death of their loved one and the feelings of pain and loss, start to diminish.

Bit by bit, day by day, we begin to adjust to our new situation. This could mean taking over the tasks which 'he' or 'she' used to do or finding another friend or relative who will 'fill-the-gap' a little.

Trying to achieve a 'better' outlook or beginning to adjust to the new sense of loneliness is extremely difficult but finding ways to be positive can be helpful. There are numerous professionals who can help you with ideas. Though it may not be your first thought, your funeral director has years of experience in the subject and may be able to point you to a volunteer organisation that needs your help. Often helping others is therapeutic in your own situation.



NEW BEGINNINGS

Eventually, you should be able to give your energy to new friendships – you may even, start, living for the future?

At first, many bereaved people feel guilty when they smile, laugh or enjoy themselves believing that this is somehow a betrayal of their love for the person that has died but, in time, they realise that 'he' or 'she' would have wanted them to be happy and that, 'life must go on.'

A little further on in time, you may feel able to make plans for the future and slowly begin to feel 'alive' again. Travel is a solution for some people - looking forward to an event aids forward thinking but of course, for others, can have the opposite effect. Keeping an open-mind to find the solutions that suit you is the 'key.' For some, decorating rooms, rearranging furniture or getting a new job might mark such a turning point.

FORGOTTEN

The dead person is never forgotten but experience shows that grief 'softens.' The deceased is seen as having a 'cherished place' in our past but no longer in our future.

The 'grief process' is often said to last 2 years but everyone is different and episodes of sadness and yearning might continue on and off for many years.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN GRIEVING GETS STUCK?

As with all positive actions, some advice is not always constructive for everybody. Recognising negativity when 'one' is upset is not always easy either. As an illustration, here are some of the ways of, 'coping with bereavement' which tend **not** to be helpful in the long-term although there are exceptions:

- Feeling continually numb and emotionally 'flat' months after the death
- Constant cheerfulness and high spirits
- Never crying, even when alone
- Feeling intensely guilty and self-reproachful
- Keeping the dead person's room and belongings just as they were several months after the death
- Quickly disposing of all the dead persons belongings, hiding photos and never mentioning the person again
- Moving house shortly after the death
- Quickly 'replacing' the person with a new relationship (or pet, or job)
- Denying that a spouse's death is a loss ("I never really got on with him.")
- Overworking, abusing alcohol or drugs, keeping over-busy, avoiding being alone or, avoiding seeing people months after the death
- Still grieving in an extreme way some years after the death

How to help

Help and support from family and friends is crucial after bereavement but sometimes, people are unsure how to help so if you have a bereaved friend or relative, here are some guidelines on how to help them through the crisis:

- Immediately after the death, physical practical help is needed as well as emotional support. The bereaved person will be in a state of shock and might be unable to cope with the many practical arrangements to be made as well as the necessities of everyday life. Offer whatever help seems to be needed.
The time surrounding the funeral was busy then, people went back to their own living demands and for the immediate partner or principal, everything went extremely, quiet.
- Spend time with the person without being intrusive. Encourage them to talk about the dead person – the events leading up to the death; happy memories, regrets, and so on. (Don't worry about 'upsetting' them - crying is an essential part of the grief process). Physical contact – a hug, a squeeze of the hand *can* also be comforting.
- Reassure them that their emotions and experiences are quite normal (e.g. feeling angry with the dead person or hearing their voice). Remember too that people grieve in different ways – all quite 'normal'.
- Don't suggest that their dead partner or child can be 'replaced' in years to come. Don't say you 'know how they feel' unless you've lost a partner or child yourself. Finally, don't try to look for something 'positive' about the death.
- Allow them to grieve. It takes a long time to recover from a death so be patient. Never suggest that they 'should be feeling better by now.'
- Don't forget about them after two or three months! Many bereaved people hit their lowest ebb about three months after the death and will need continuing support and comfort.

- Take care of yourself. It can be emotionally draining to support someone who is bereaved so you need to set limits on how much time and energy you can spare. If necessary, suggest that they contact one of the voluntary agencies for support or see their G.P.

The following article has been reproduced by kind permission.

SAYING “Goodbye”

“Saying “**Goodbye**” is never easy. Whether it's because a child is leaving home, our best friend has been transferred to a new job or, we are moving to a retirement home, there is often a great deal of sadness. There are other experiences of separation that are painful too but with all of them, there is always at least some prospect of seeing the other person again.

When someone we love dies however, it's different. We face the painful reality that the separation is permanent, at least on this earth. That's why, whenever possible, it is important to say “Goodbye” to the person before 'he' or 'she' dies.

Sadly, we don't always have the opportunity to do that. Even when we do, it's often not enough. We may need several more occasions to say “Goodbye” before we feel like we have really finished saying it.”

THOUGHTFUL PLANNING

“That's part of what the grieving process can provide.”

“Thoughtful planning by family and friends together with the funeral director, clergy, and other caring people, will maximise the healing that comes from lovingly saying, “Goodbye” to a person with whom we have shared our life.”

“Sometimes, there are obstacles to that process however. One that I have observed a number of times in my work as a pastor and as a chaplain, is the desire of the deceased person to have 'nothing done,' when 'he' or 'she' dies.

'Nothing done' usually means no funeral or memorial services. While no one wants to ignore the wishes of their loved one, it is important to consider the needs of those who are grieving as well. Perhaps agreement on a simplified funeral or even a memorial service can be reached. In that way, we can honour our loved one's hope to minimise the time and expense for us at this time, while giving others the opportunity to say "Goodbye" to him or her. While not all of our grief has to be shared in public gatherings and rituals, there is a great deal to be gained with such public expressions of grief. Wakes, or 'Calling Hours' as they are sometimes known, are an opportunity to help one another share feelings about the death of someone important to us.

Facing them now will help to avoid the sometimes, serious emotional consequences that can, and sometimes do, afflict us when we do not face death openly."



EXPRESSING GRIEF

"The rituals used by the various fraternal orders, civic organisations, and religious groups during this time, can be very helpful too. They remind us that our loved one's death affected other people and they need ways to express their grief as well. Even leaving the funeral home after a Chapel of Rest visit can be very helpful. The very act of leaving the room means that we must take leave or say "Goodbye" to our loved one. This can be a helpful preparation for what we will experience at the funeral service."

"The funeral or memorial service is another opportunity to say "Goodbye." Most of are aware that a lot of other thoughts are expressed in the average funeral or memorial service and they can be very helpful. However, the very act of gathering for the service is a public reminder both that we have all lost someone important from our lives and that we must soon say "Goodbye" if we haven't done so already."

LEAVING THE GRAVESIDE

"Even the graveside service is important in the process of saying "Goodbye." As suitably prepared as the graveside will be, it is still a reminder that this is one journey that we cannot accompany the person on – at least not yet. The Committal Prayer and other readings can help us to let go a little more. If there is an official, military contingent at the service, they too, help to say "Goodbye" by reminding us of comrades left behind. The playing of the 'Taps' ('Last Post') is an especially moving reminder of the finality of death and the need to say "Goodbye."

"After we leave the graveside, there are still ways to help each other to grieve. Several of the churches that I've pastored over the years had provided refreshments for the family and friends at the church. It is a help for the grieving families because it frees them from the need to plan a meal. It also gives everyone the opportunity to tell some of the stories of 'who' the deceased person was to them over the years. There is something very healing about telling these stories. They give us a way to affirm who the deceased person was as well as allowing us to express our loss in yet another way."

"One woman I knew several years ago demonstrated another way in which some of us may choose to say "Goodbye." Her husband died quite suddenly and she grieved very deeply over his death so she visited the cemetery every day for several weeks as part of her ritual of saying "Goodbye" to him. She told me how some people thought she was a little strange for doing that. I assured her that there was nothing unusual in taking either that much time or that way to say "Goodbye."

"As important as it is to say "Goodbye" in these group settings, we may also need to have times with greater privacy for our grief. We might choose to have a private or family viewing of our loved one's body (as mentioned above). We could also set aside some time to walk along a path we used to share with our loved one; to travel to some place where we enjoyed a view or an entire vacation or just to relive some memories by poring over photographs and other memorabilia. Even recording some of our feelings and thoughts in a journal can help us to work through some of our experiences of grieving."

GRIEVING IS A PROCESS

"Nor is there any specific length of time at the end of which we must be done with our grief. Weeks and months may be needed just to get past the worst of the pain. Even two years later, some of us will experience days when our grief returns. Anniversaries of our loved one's death can be especially sad for some of us. However, they can also be occasions when we recall and even talk about the goodness we knew in our loved one. Some people even have special worship services on these days if they belong to a church or synagogue."

"There's no one-way to say "Goodbye" that's right for everyone. There may be no one-way that will say it completely for any one of us at one time. Funeral directors, clergy, and others can help those of us who grieve to explore a variety of ways to say "Goodbye." **Grieving is a process.** Although time by itself does not heal our wounds, time is necessary for the healing to happen. My experience is that it really helps us to cope with our grief when we use a variety of ways and as much time as we need to complete our healing from the losses created by death."

(by the Reverend Larry La Pierre - USA)



The grief journey

Dr. Bill Webster is a very experienced and well-respected bereavement consultant. Working widely within the funeral profession, his association with trade organisations is, exemplary. Practically, having suffered personal loss, the experience, feelings and emotions he encountered have led him on a journey, a journey he now calls, the '**Grief Journey**'.

Speaking widely at seminars and assisting many people with their recognition of emotions, he has established and built a reputation for helping others to realise they are not alone, **are** quite normal but also acknowledges the pain that bereavement is. Additionally, he has built a website to enable people to access some of his services without direct contact – like most Internet services, this is provided 24 hours, daily.

Whilst acknowledging his contribution, due to personal and unique emotions, we suggest that you may find similarities in your present situation and we offer the addresses below as a possible help-aid – we are in no way affiliated to Dr. Bill Webster but applaud his continuing contribution to the public.

We do have further notes ourselves concerning your feelings and some of the emotions you may experience - we do stop short of promising help as one person's remedy may be contrary to another's but please enquire should you have a need.

Doubtless, there will be publications available from the Centre for Grief Journey whose address and contact details are listed below:

The Centre for the Grief Journey
9 St. Andrews Crescent,
Arbroath, Angus, Scotland DD11 5DF

<http://www.griefjourney.com>
info@griefjourney.com

Reflections

In writing about the subject of grief, no article can ever be described as complete. It is also true to say that, no one's journey is identical but as previously shown, there ARE similarities.

To reiterate, and bearing the above in mind, stages of bereavement are neither orderly nor logical. They are not a gauge of distance or pain, not a reflection on the depth of love or feelings for the deceased but a guide to those factors that commonly occur – notably, it's the timing of these stages that differ.

As we are all individuals, the person we have lost was an individual. It follows therefore, that our own personal journey will also not only be individual, but unique.

To illustrate how individual, personal and sometimes lonely bereavement can be, the author would like to conclude with a true, personal reflection.

"My father died suddenly in 1985. My mother re-married some years later but was taken into 'care' in approximately, 2004/5 - suffering from dementia. My brother and I had to clear the house and take charge of my mum's personal belongings. We found a diary or journal she obviously wrote, unbeknown to us almost three years after my dad's (Phil's) death - in it she writes:"

March 13th 1988

*"I do not know what title to give this piece of writing.
I just felt like putting pen to paper again.
I wrote it briefly a few weeks ago, in rough – a thing I don't usually do."*

"I write as I think."

"When Philip died in 1985, I had many feelings, not only of grief but of anger, guilt and a terrific sense of unfairness. Why should I still be here, with this house and everything that *he* wanted so much and had worked so hard for?

Since then I have read many articles on bereavement, religious and otherwise; talked to a lot of people in the same situation, but every person has a different way of **living** with such a loss – we are all individuals and we react differently.

Many friends tell me I am a strong character – but what does this mean? Am I 'hard' and not as caring as they have been with their partners – don't I miss Philip as much as they miss their husband or wife?

Admittedly I am a strong in determination, obstinate or stubborn in as much that I try to carry on caring for this house and garden (which I love) because they are there and if I don't look after them they will deteriorate or the task will fall to the family who are very supportive, but they have their own lives to lead and all the time I am fit, I like to manage as much as I can on my own. Apart from all that, Phil would expect me to do it.

Throughout thirty-nine years of marriage, we both had a slightly independent streak and I know if I had died, Phil would have carried on much as I am doing now. My 'strong character' outside doesn't show what I am like inside and the fears and panic if anything goes wrong within the house, the darkness of winter, the aloneness when I wonder if it's all worth it etc. but I get on with it and there are the consolations of having got through another day and satisfaction of accomplishing certain things.

I am writing this now because I find putting pen to paper is an outlet – thoughts that buzz around in my head can't be told to anyone and when I feel low, it helps.

I also had a very vivid dream about Philip (*writer's note*: my mum never really called my dad Philip – unless of course she was cross with him!), a few weeks ago which I wanted to record:

I was in a large house in London with Barbara, my daughter-in-law. The house was owned by her parents, Jo and Snip, friends of over

forty years. Actually they now live in a Villa in Lanzarote. I was going upstairs to run a bath for Barbara – the bathroom was the one I have here in Warminster. I just happened to look out of the landing window, the top of which was all stained glass. Going into the house opposite was Philip, in his anorak and with a newspaper under his arm. His hair and beard were very neat and tidy and I called to Barbara to have a look commenting on how well he looked. Barbara said, "He always goes for his newspaper, he doesn't have them delivered now that he's on his own." Philip went up the stairs and when he reached his landing window he raised the net curtain and looked at me, gave a nod as much as to say 'she's alright and let the curtain go. I felt quite pleased and said to myself – he will now cook himself eggs and bacon (his usual breakfast) and then read his paper. I then woke up!

When Phil died he had just washed but hadn't combed his hair. When they took him away I was so worried that nobody would know how he wore it and in the dream his hair, neatly combed as usual, was the thing I noticed most about him.

A few days after this dream I couldn't get Phil out of my mind so decided to sit and read magazines, which I hadn't done for months. I was astonished to read an article in 'Good Housekeeping' by Jill Truman, who was widowed whilst in her 30's and left with four young children.

For the first time there were many of my thoughts and feelings there for me to read – someone else had put into words exactly what I had been trying to say. She had felt a great need to talk to her husband and had written letters to him in an exercise book. They had been turned into a book entitled, "Letters to My Husband."

I am quoting a few of her remarks:

"Why did you have to die – five of us wanting you and you go and die. Typical of your bloody-mindedness. I expect you're sitting in heaven telling everyone that we're better off without you. Well we're not – so come back now."

"I am forced to be practical, to be in charge all the time, to be competent outside but a bleeding, screaming mess within. Where do people get their certainties from and why don't I find any?"

"We gave a lot to each other. I'm glad it was you I met and married, but those hours and hours, days and years we wasted together and never discussed things I long to ask you now."

When you are married you communicate little things, which are important and interesting to you both and utterly boring to other people – how the children are doing, when to decorate, even what's for dinner. When you are on your own there is no one to tell anything to anymore – that's one of the hardest things to put up with. You always wonder what has happened to them.

It's hard to believe there is an afterlife. For thirty-nine years – Philip was a 'body' to me that has now gone. I don't know what a 'spirit' is. If he's a 'spirit', in an afterlife, will he want to join my spirit?

One thing Jill Truman wrote was, "Keep on putting one foot in front of the other and you will survive." I think that is my motto too.

Since beginning this I have been in hospital, quite ill. It started with a peculiar 'turn' when I felt I had been struck by lightning, with subsequent headaches, getting worse each day until the pains were so intolerable. Within an hour of seeing the doctor I was in the ambulance en route to the Royal United Hospital, Bath with a suspected 'bleed' in the head. Tests proved negative, meningitis was then suspected, again negative. Final diagnosis was Viral Pneumonia with 103° + temperature.

For five days the pain in my head didn't lessen then, I began to improve. After eleven days I was home, having been told the pneumonia will be with me another four or five weeks.

When I felt my worst, my dream of Philip kept coming back to me – I could see him lifting that net curtain. Was he waiting for me? Am I beginning to believe there is something after the 'body' is no more? I honestly don't know!

Final thoughts

"My mum's 'journey' is not recorded in any reference works or medical journal. I personally felt sorry for my mum – years later when reading this, and also that I had, 'let her down.'

Your own journey will be personal and much has been written and addressed since 1985. Jill Truman's story was captivating but also illustrated her feelings of helplessness. Speaking for my mum, she did adjust over the years and her life did take new directions.

After reading her diary and considering my own position and situation at the time, I recalled my 'own' grief. I lost my dad at 64 years of age; he was just about to retire and give me the chance to get to know 'him' better, after all, our lives were so busy. I was married with three children and a reasonable job that demanded I work 54 hours every week. Additionally, I was also doing jobs after work to help our income like a lot of other people.

In the middle of my working day, I would suddenly, just start crying, uncontrollably – very unlike me. I was coping with my own journey of bereavement. No one knew mine either.

'Mum' was 70 miles away – I phoned her daily. We visited as much as we could (and could afford to).

We all got through it!

Looking back, I have worked out that, this is the consequence of love, having a family and people close to you.

If my personal 'suffering' is because of my love for those close to and around me, I will 'buy a ticket' every time!

We fully recognise and respect the difficult time that you may be experiencing. We would also like to convey that, 'our door' is continually open for advice or assistance with any part of the bereavement process."

NOTES



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BEREAVEMENT GUIDE