

The 5 Misguided Things That Most People Do After A Death

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in pain and turn their
loved one into a
distant memory in time

Kristie West

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By Kristie West

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Introduction

The death of someone you love can be one of the most painful, difficult, confusing, life-changing things you ever go through. It can change your life completely, turning everything upside down, changing the way you feel about others, changing the way you see the world, changing the way you feel about yourself. You might feel totally numb, bereft, lost. You might feel ripped apart violently. You might feel like nothing at all makes sense anymore. You might even feel strangely calm and ok.

But you have found your way to this booklet, which means I probably don't need to tell you what it can be like. Someone you love has died. So you already know. So let me start by sending you lots and lots of love. I've been there too so I know.

We are usually told that after a death there are certain feelings we will experience...but the reality is you can be feeling absolutely anything and everything...or sometimes nothing...and it may change week to week or minute to minute. There are no set emotions, stages or patterns, despite what we have been told, and it is incredibly unique to each person. An important thing to know is that no matter what is going on for you it is normal. All sorts of stuff can come up after a loss--not just the things we expect to feel. None of it is out of place or wrong and it is all part of us trying to process what is happening.

During the first few weeks or months after someone you love has died the most important thing you can do for you is to slow down and come back to the basics of looking after yourself. The importance of drinking enough water, eating well, getting a little exercise, sleeping and resting enough, being honest with yourself about your feelings (journaling helps), and asking others for help when you need it (while still being realistic about what they can offer) are not to be underestimated. Self-care and self-love need to become a priority during this time...for your sake and the sake of those you love.

If this is an area that you need help with right now then get in touch with me at kristie@kristiewest.com--I have a specific booklet focusing on this that I will send to you.

But once this foundation is strong enough under you it is time to think about the emotions you are going through. It's time to consider, when you are ready, what to do to start healing your heart so you can love them without it hurting and so you can keep their memory alive and strong. Unfortunately this is where most people fall down. Society's understanding of what to do around a loss and how to hold on to the memories are actually backwards. *The most common things that we do and that others advise us to do after a death can actually keep us in heart-breaking pain and can ensure that, over time, we will start to forget the loved one we lost.* If you do these 5 common things too you may find that you think about the person less and less over time and as the

months and years pass you find you barely think of them at all anymore unless something very specific reminds you of them or someone brings them up. And it often still hurts when this happens. It may take 1 year, 5 years, 10 years, 20 years...but the memories of them will usually fade if you follow this path.

Nobody wants for this to happen but unfortunately the things that most people so innocently do, thinking that they are helpful, ensure that they stay in pain and that they start to push their memories aside, gradually remembering less and less.

I will explain what these 5 common things are and how you can avoid doing them. By reading this booklet carefully and beginning to change your actions accordingly you will start on a path *to freedom from your pain AND to ensure that the memory of your loved one is kept clear and beautiful and alive with you always*. This is a path that many don't even believe exists...but you are standing at the beginning of it with your feet on the first step...and starting down this road can make your experience totally different from what is considered the norm.

I have included suggestions or an activity in each section. Read this book at your own pace and do the activities as you can. If an activity seems quite challenging then it is definitely worth doing but it may be good to go to another activity that seems easier and do that first if you need to. There is no set way to use this booklet--use it as best works for you.

If any of the points I explain feel less than crystal clear to you or you have questions about what you read or how to action these suggestions properly, then please feel free to get in touch with me at kristie@kristiewest.com . Understanding these 5 things and doing them differently can make a positive change in your experience of this death of your loved one that you may not even realise is possible.

Grief or G.R.I.E.F?

You will notice throughout this booklet and throughout all of my writing that I don't talk about 'grief'. Instead I refer to 'G.R.I.E.F.' Here is what I mean by that.

G.R.I.E.F is very different to how traditional grief is understood.

Grief (no dots) is generally understood as the experience you go through after the death of someone you love as you come to terms with or find a way to cope with your loss and the way that you are feeling.

It is considered a negative experience and, at its simplest, is a journey from a lot of pain...to, hopefully, a lot less pain.

At best people tend to expect, with the passing of time, to be able to live their lives but still to be in some pain, even just a little, over their loss. Quite likely for the rest of their lives.

This is not what it has to be like. Not anymore. And this is not what I want for you. So it is time for a redefinition of what the experience of losing someone you love can really be.

G.R.I.E.F

Both grief and G.R.I.E.F start out looking the same. But where they end up is where the difference lies. A G.R.I.E.F journey is a much bigger and more profound thing. It is about finding the meaning and beauty and truth in a death in your life, to best honour yourself and to best honour the life (and death) of the person you love so much.

It is not just finding a way from lots of pain to not-as-much pain.

G.R.I.E.F is the journey from pain and loss to...

Gratitude--for those you love, the person you've lost, for your own life and even some of the tougher things that have happened

Real Connection--to the person you've lost

Inspiration--to be inspired by the events in your life & where you are going

Empowerment--to step forward and fully live your precious life

Freedom--from most, if not all, of the emotional pain you are in

Neither grief nor G.R.I.E.F have anything at all to do with stages, despite what has become common understanding (the 5 stages model has been thoroughly debunked many, many times. If you would like more info about this, email me and I'll happily share articles and information with you.)

The death of someone you love begins a journey of meaning-making, which is

what grief really is, and therefore is highly individual to each of us, which is why each person's experience of a loss is very different, and why your experience of losing one person may be totally different to your experience of losing someone else.

And meaning can change.

If you would love this experience of loss to be a journey from pain and loss to gratitude, real connection to the person you've lost, inspiration, empowerment, and freedom from pain...then you are in the right place.

#1

Focusing on only the good things about them and the good memories

Our common reaction after a death can be to try and focus on the good about them and to remember the good times. We've been told so many times 'not to speak ill of the dead' that it becomes automatic. We might try not to think about their death or illness; try to focus on the happy things and best bits of them. At their funeral we talk about how amazing and wonderful they were. If we do have anything negative to share we often keep our mouths shut or say it quietly to someone we trust with a 'this sounds awful but...' or a 'I know I shouldn't say this but...' to start with.

But doesn't that make sense--isn't it nicer to remember all the good memories? Isn't it more respectful? Won't that keep their memories alive for you more easily?

Unfortunately not.

It can be very challenging to try remembering the bad times and the difficult or unpleasant things about someone who has died. It seems painful and it can seem disrespectful. So let me share with you the 3 reasons why **remembering the bad as well as the good is the key to remembering them so much more clearly and honouring them even more.**

Think right now of the living person who is closest to you and knows you best. Is it your partner/spouse? Your best friend? Your own parent or child? Got them in mind? Ok, so they know the best things about you, right? If I wanted to know what makes you amazing, special, inspiring, and fun, this person would be able to tell me. But they also know all the worst things about you, right? They know what things about you make you difficult or annoying sometimes. They know why some people won't get along with you. They know what bad or weird habits you have. They know what you've done and what you do that hurts others. They could blackmail you with some of the dirt they have on you. But they won't...because they love you very much. And you have enough dirt on them that it wouldn't be worth the risk. They love you loads...they just happen to know you very, very well too. In fact, this is why they love you. Because you're a whole good-and-bad person. Just like them. Knowing all of these things about you doesn't stop them being close to you. In fact it's one of the important things that allows it.

Now imagine that you were to die and after you are gone they are trying to think about you. And imagine that instead of just honestly thinking about you as you really were they now decide that you were only good and fun and lovely and refuse to remember the bad things about you. Because to do anything else would be to dishonour your memory, right?

1. By blocking out the bad when thinking about the person you've lost, you push them away.

For someone who loves and knows you very well, to try to imagine you as an angel they have to take a few steps back from you. Standing close to you they can still see your warts (as in 'warts and all'--why they love you, remember). So they have to stand far enough away from you that you get a bit blurry. And then they have to squint. Really hard. Because up close they can see you. All of you. The real you. The terrific and the terrible. And that is what they are trying to avoid doing.

If you are trying to imagine someone you've lost as a little more angelic than human then you have to do the same. You have to distance yourself from them--you have to push a lot of the memories away. You have to stretch out the connection between you and them. The more you try to focus only on the good the less access you'll have to all your real memories as you are pushing a good chunk of them away and refusing to look. Every not-so-wonderful personality trait or memory that you have of them that you refuse to acknowledge is a part of them that you give up.

Trying to remember the person you lost as an angel, instead of the wonderful, beautiful human that you knew and loved, will cut you off from memories of them.

2. By remembering only the good you are remembering a very different person

You have created someone different in your mind and this is the person you are thinking about...not necessarily the person you lost. They may be a lot different, or just a little different, but the fact remains that they are different.

I spoke to a woman who heralded her daughter who had died as an absolute angel, with no faults, who never set a foot wrong or harmed anyone in her life. Even her best friend said to me that this woman had turned her daughter into a creature she never actually was, and was clinging to this hologram for dear life. The saddest thing about this is that it was a thoroughly misguided attempt to do what she thought would let her hold on to her daughter. The reality was that she was pushing real memories of her daughter out of her mind and instead focusing all the time on this character she had created. In her attempt to remember her daughter she was actually forgetting the *real* her.

If I had called you up and asked you about the person you've lost 6 months before they died, and you had answered me really honestly, you may have told me a different story about them than you would now.

Blocking out the bad suggests that these things were unlovable and not worth remembering...and that isn't fair. Everything about them deserved to be loved. So in our attempt to honour them we actually dishonour them.

I want to know that if I die before my mum that she can remember all the good stuff--but also how stubborn and bossy I can be. I'd like her to

remember what a short fuse I can have, how bad my language can be sometimes, and how she said she could 'never, ever' live with me again. You know why? Because that stuff is me too. At the end of the day, alive or dead, I want to be loved just how I am. Don't you? Well so would the person you've lost.

3. Blocking out the bad around their death blocks out part of their life

This applies particularly to you if the person you lost went through a difficult illness and you would prefer to remember them 'as they were before' rather than as you saw them near the end.

Again this is something we are told to do and that we imagine is the best way. But this can just block out a whole big chunk of them to us and also take meaning away from a very important part of their lives. I met a man who told me about his mother. She had died of cancer and he told me that the last year of her cancer was particularly brutal so he tried never to think about it, attempting to focus only on her before she got sick. The problem with this is that this year of cancer was a year of her life. It is part of her story--just like any other year. It may have been hard and painful and traumatic but it was still one whole precious year of her life. And if anything, being the last year makes it more worthy of remembering, not less.

And that frail vulnerable sick woman in bed who couldn't brush her hair, or even feed herself near the end--that was *her* too. Just like she was once a baby. Just like she was that woman going through labour. Just like every other part of her life...this was her too. To block that out is to block out a part of her and to block out an entire year of her life. And that is very sad.

One of the biggest reasons you'll start forgetting people you've lost, is that you start blocking off access to your own memories. You censor some, deciding that they are inappropriate. You make up other memories or change them accordingly. You paint a different colour over the picture of them and wonder why you can't quite see them anymore.

If you want to remember them...I mean really remember them clearly and feel closer to them then get honest. Stop blocking out memories. Start remembering everything you can--good and bad.

What to do:

To start to free yourself from pain and to keep their memory alive

Take some time to sit down with some paper and draw a line down the middle of it. On each side make a list. One side is the good/happy/wonderful side where you record every positive personality trait, nice thing they did, good memory you have, etc, etc. The other side is where you write down every bad/difficult annoying or painful personality trait, thing they did or memory. Basically it's two lists of bullet points on a page--one side is for 'good' stuff,

the other for 'bad'. Challenge yourself to sit and write for 30 minutes. The trick here is that the lists must stay even. Write 10-20 on one side and then switch to the other side and catch up. It might be easy to write 50 good things but then you may get to the bad side and get stuck. If this happens to you, know that it isn't that there is nothing to write...it is just that you are fighting doing it. Also don't justify what you write with 'but they weren't like that all the time' or 'they only did that because of X,Y, Z'. To do this just means you are trying to explain parts of them away and justify behaviour instead of just acknowledging it--remember why you are doing this: to love them and honour them just as they were.

Now you may be in a situation where actually you have more bad memories than good about someone who has died. The same applies--it may be really easy to write the bad side...but the good needs to stay even with it.

If you have not done this before it may feel difficult or painful to write the bad list out and remember those things. But sit with it for a while and you will realise how much more clearly you can see and remember them as you do this. They deserve to be remembered and loved fully. And you deserve to be able to do that.

#2 Leaving it to time to 'heal' you

We've all heard it. We've probably all said it or some version of it. "Time heals all wounds".

But quite simply...and unfortunately...no, time doesn't heal. And it definitely doesn't when it comes to grief over having lost someone you love.

Why not?

Firstly let's think about what 'heal' actually means: to cure, to remedy, to restore to soundness. If you break a bone, and that bone then heals, it causes you no pain anymore.

So does time do the same thing to your grief? Does it 'cure' it and completely take away the pain? No way José.

Many say 'time heals' but few believe it actually truly heals. Curled up in the belief that time heals is usually the deeper belief that actually nothing can heal this...and that hopefully time will just ease it. And it may well do that...but not in a very desirable way.

The beginning of G.R.I.E.F is a complicated and painful mix of emotions, thoughts and beliefs...and time alone will not change these.

Many people I have spoken to tell me time has helped them and indeed they do not experience the pain they once did. But when I ask them whether they actually feel better about the death and the loss in general or whether they just don't think about it as much or it doesn't feel as close to them, most will acknowledge that time hasn't made them feel better or ok about the death at all, it has just meant they think about it less and that those thoughts don't hurt as much as they used to. That isn't healing.

So what does time do?

What time does is creates emotional distance...and it buries stuff. Again, not healing.

It can sometimes feel like big things that hurt a long time ago have healed to a degree...but often when you discuss them, or are reminded of them, the same old pain bubbles up. I talk to people who lost someone they love 10...20...30...40 years ago...and still when they talk about it (which may be rare) they can become upset...and change the subject. Because all time has done is push those thoughts, memories and feelings deep down. It isn't uncommon for someone to have another death happen in their lives and that bring up pain around an older bereavement. In this case it was always there...it was just buried.

And this is the saddest part of this belief that 'time heals'. If you leave it to

time, what happens is that initially you can be in enormous pain. But humans generally move away from pain--it's in our nature to do so for self-preservation. So over time your brain--to help you function- will start hiding away all the thoughts that hurt you. These painful thoughts of this loss in your life don't evaporate or heal...they just get pushed away gradually and hidden where they won't cause anymore pain. They get locked away somewhere in you where they can't do you too much more harm. Over time, on some occasions, they may come out again...but in general they tend to stay locked away a lot of the time. And unfortunately often the good memories have to get hidden too because these often lead to the thoughts of the death and loss and hence to pain. You remember one Christmas that was wonderful with them...then that reminds you they won't be there this Christmas...and this hurts...and becomes another off-limits memory. This is how even the happy thoughts can lead to painful thoughts...which can then end up being buried or pushed away to save you from hurt.

If time does anything it is to slowly help you forget. The pain seems to fade...as the memories do. Which is the last thing any of us want when we have lost somebody we love.

So what does help then if time doesn't?

The first thing to know is that the journey from pain and loss to gratitude, connection and freedom from pain is possible. To the point where you are able to think and talk about them whenever you like...without it hurting. But time alone will not bring this to you.

So what does help? Instead of being about the time...it's about what you *do* with that time and the actions you take.

Healing comes not from simply expressing the emotions of your pain...it is important to express them but it is like continually bucketing the water out of the boat without ever fixing the leak. True change comes when you change your emotions. You cannot change this death...but you can change it's meaning--in your life and theirs, and your perception of it. And doing this will allow a connection to those you have lost that you may not even realise is possible.

Time will fade your pain as it fades your memory of them. So this too is where our memories of them and our connection to them get lost. In fact the more it hurts the more we tend to bury memories over time.

Like with many areas of life--whether that is getting fit, achieving financial success, or working on your G.R.I.E.F--it is often wise to find someone who has achieved what you would like to and follow their path. Be wary when choosing someone to help you. In areas of emotion we can often be drawn to someone who feels the same way we do about what we are going through. In our pain we may find someone who can discuss their own current pain over loss appealing, as we can relate. But remember that you would not choose a personal trainer who has similar weight struggles to yours, a relationship expert who doesn't have a successful relationship, or a financial advisor who is

still figuring out their money issues. In these areas we choose someone who is where we would like to get to **because they can only take you where they have been themselves**. A bereavement professional who is still in lots of pain can take you no further than they have gone. Think practically about finding someone who can take you somewhere different, rather than just someone who can only relate to where you are now.

The very first step is to understand that time is not the answer, that you do have other options, and to be willing to start to look at things in a different way. That alone can start you on a completely different journey.

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### **What to do:**

#### **To start to free yourself from pain and to keep their memory alive**

*Firstly, if you want to, give yourself a set period of time. If the death is very recent you may feel you need some weeks or months before you want to or can do anything about this. If however, the death was some time ago then now might just be the very right time. Or it may have been recent but you want to start taking an active approach now.*

*My recommendation would be to find a course of action and commit to it. Whether there is a particular person you would like to work with, an amazing book on the subject you would like to read and follow, a group you would like to join, or simply the commitment to look for and find something around your G.R.I.E.F or someone that can help you. Do some research as to what help is available around bereavement. Understand that to get to a place where you are in little or no pain and you can remember the person you've lost clearly--to get a result most people don't get--you need to do something most people don't do. Most people wait for time to heal them. Remember it has nothing to do with the time and everything to do with the action you take.*

*And give yourself huge credit right now--reading this booklet carefully and doing the exercises is already a big action step and a sign that you don't want to leave this to time.*

### #3

## Holding on to your pain and believing that the pain is your connection to them

This is a biggie. There are so many quotes out there about 'grief being love not wanted to let go', 'grief being the price we pay for love' or 'love lasts and do does loss'. When you believe that your pain over their death *is* your love for them, or your connection to them, or the way that you are able to remember them, you will not want to give up your pain. In fact you will hold on to it very tightly, whether consciously or not. Why on earth wouldn't you?

Many people I speak to get confused by the idea of not being in pain anymore because they think to give up their pain is to give up or forget the person they have lost. **This could not be further from the truth.**

Holding on to pain is probably the biggest thing that keeps people stuck in pain and slowly forgetting the ones they have lost. I remember doing exactly the same thing myself and being afraid to work through anymore of my 'stuff' around dad's death. I remember saying out loud 'I'm not ready to let go' because I thought that letting go of pain meant letting go of him, which was not something I ever wanted to do. When I learnt the truth and released my hold on my pain, no longer desperate to keep it, everything changed. The G.R.I.E.F journey I was on was able to go in a totally different direction and once I no longer had pain I was greeted by a clearer memory and sense of my dad than I had experienced since his death.

Your pain is not a part of the person you have lost. It's just *your* pain. It's not your memories of them. It is nothing more or less than your emotional response to their death. Your pain is a part of you--not them--and it does not keep them with you or bring them closer. In fact **it pushes them away**. Even if that

is the last thing you want. Because, quite practically, you need to get on with life and your brain will take steps to make sure you can.....pushing the memories further and further away over time, where they can't hurt you. And often when you do remember them from a place of pain it is memories of their death, awareness that they aren't here, or thoughts that they should be. These are not really memories of *them* at all.

**Holding on to pain simply keeps your pain with you.**

In fact what your pain really does is disconnect you from them. When we have painful or negative emotions around someone it becomes harder to think about them clearly, to feel any sense of them. In pain we feel disconnected. In pain we are aware of the absence of them. This is not a space that we remember them clearly and easily from and it certainly not a space we can connect well with them or their memory.

***"You cannot let go of anything if you cannot notice that you are holding it"***

*- Neale Donald Walsch, best-selling author*

Conversely, when you are able to stop actually holding on to the pain it allows shifts to occur that could not have happened otherwise. This is not about snapping your fingers and the pain disappearing, but until you are ok with being without it, it will not go very far. While you are holding on to it and believing you need it, no amount of time, counselling, coaching, prayer, reading, attending groups, etc will take you very far as your reasons to stay in pain are still too strong.

When you can see that your pain *does not* connect you to them, and that actually it *disconnects* you from them, you are in a position to start to let it go.

When you are in a space where there is no pain you are in a place where no memories of them are off-limits. You can reflect and cherish every single memory of them that you have and have full access to all of them--there is no need for you to protect yourself from any. They can come to you easily and naturally the way thoughts of anyone else that you love do. You will not have to create the time to remember them, not the special rituals. It will be a much more natural, less forced, process.

What I am asking you to do is not to give up the pain, but to start to give up the *desire* for the pain. To start to give up the *need* for the pain.

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What to do:

To start to free yourself from pain and to keep their memory alive

Exercise: Let me ask you this question: if I had a magic wand and I offered to wave away every last speck of your pain over this death, would you want me to?

Answer honestly.

What are you worried would happen if you didn't have this pain anymore? (Hint: if you are still in pain then you will have reasons to hold on to it. I am yet to encounter a single person who didn't have multiple reasons/negative things they believed would happen if they gave it up).

Ask yourself a few times and list what you come up with. I can tell you, without seeing your list, that they will be beliefs, not truths. Pick one and ask yourself the question: is this really true? Think about it logically and try to pick it apart yourself. You may find you can do this easily enough but if not then give yourself time and patience to think about it more deeply, or feel absolutely free to get in touch with me by email for some insight at kristie@kristiewest.com

#4

Trying to be positive and focus on the future

This one is probably the least common of the 5 things in this book...but you may still have found yourself there.

Through your pain over the death of your loved one have you tried to be positive and look forward instead of back? Have you thought or said 'they wouldn't want me to suffer, they would want me to live' and tried to smile and push through? And have you managed this successfully?

Trying to *just* be positive and focus on the future can be another way that people inadvertently disconnect themselves from memories of the person that they lost and stay stuck in pain.

Now there is nothing wrong with focusing on the future and there is nothing wrong with looking forward and thinking about what you want in life. These are wonderful things to be doing. **The problem comes when you look forward while trying to ignore what is behind you.** Think of yourself like a hot air balloon. Pulling towards the sky, ready to float up to freedom. Now you can focus on the sky, and look only at that, pulling and pulling and pulling towards it. But if you have ropes still tying you to the ground, or too many sandbags aboard, then you either won't be moving at all, or you will but not as fast as you might like, and every time you get a bit higher you might then get dragged down again. Refusing to acknowledge or do anything about the ropes and sandbags (you may not even know how to do anything about them) does not make them go away. They need your attention too.

So too when we are in the painful part of our G.R.I.E.F if we decide to be positive and just look forward at our bright future we can create problems for ourselves. The future is an important focus, but if this is an avoidance technique or you are just ignoring your pain (again, maybe because you don't realise there is anything you can actually do) then once again you are in a situation where the pain is unresolved (and buried) and you have to consciously or unconsciously push away anything negative or painful, which the memories of your loved once, and certainly their death, can become.

The answer is neither to focus completely on the future or to focus completely on the past. Both require your attention--so that you can get your balloon to fly AND do something about the things that might be tying you to the ground. I am not talking about your loved one, their death, or your memories of them tying you to the ground, but your unresolved pain. And a refusal to look means you have no power to do anything to change it.

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**What to do:**

**To start to free yourself from pain and to keep them memory alive**



*...you require balance. A balance between forward and back focus. This death becoming your total focus for months or years is unhealthy. This is one element of your life but there are many others. So too can looking forward without doing the work still left to do behind you be unhealthy.*

*If you find you are trying to be positive all the time and you know that there is pain you are not dealing with then it may be time to stop and spend some time in the G.R.I.E.F dynamic, even though it can be very painful. Very positive thinking in this situation can just be a way of not dealing with the death of your loved one and not dealing with what is going on for you around the death.*

*I would recommend finding a safe and supportive space to start to explore your feelings, especially if you have been trying to ignore them. This may be a conversation with a certain friend or some time journaling curled up in bed or in a café if you prefer to be around people. Be gentle with yourself and take it easy. You don't need to throw yourself headlong into your emotions all in one go. Just try to spend a little time there and honestly examine what you are going through.*

## #5

# Thinking ALL of your pain is about the death of your loved one

Most of us are too nervous about the G.R.I.E.F of others to ever question it. It might be considered disrespectful to ask if all of their pain is related to the beginning part of G.R.I.E.F that they are going through after losing someone they love...or if there is something else going on. If you are grieving this may not be a question you have asked yourself. And you've probably not been encouraged to. Until now.

But the risk of not practically questioning your experience is great. If there is other stuff going on, and it gets ignored and considered part of your G.R.I.E.F, then whatever it is has little chance of being resolved and just adds to your pain.

### Question your grief

I worked with an elderly lady who has lost her husband. She was really struggling without him and not at all enjoying learning to live a different, independent life. Now it would be all too easy to say "well, she has lost the love of her life, her partner for over 50 years. Of course she is suffering and struggling to be alone"...leaving things as they are i.e. leaving her with all her pain, whatever the source. And that's not fair on her. She deserves to make the most of the rest of her life.

I suggested to her that while lots of her pain is about her husband (and not taking away from the severity of that)... part of it was also about not enjoying her own company and having a hard time learning to live alone which, though linked, is a separate issue. I could see that her pain was not *just* about her husband's death. It was also partly just about her and how she felt about learning to really be by herself--a concept that had always frightened her. And she agreed.

Once we asked these questions together and worked out what was really going on we were able not just to look at her husband's death but also look at her new life and the potential it holds for her. It was important for her to look at this too. She was able to come out with a totally different perspective on her husband's death, as well as a positive outlook on the life she is now living.

A man I worked with admitted that before two very traumatic deaths in his life he had been experiencing different problems. But since the deaths all of his problems had been attributed to these losses. Every time he was unhappy or struggling, everyone (including him) would put it down to the deaths in his life. He admitted that at times his G.R.I.E.F became his excuse whenever he was unhappy, instead of acknowledging that there had already been problems that needed working on. And while he was unable to pull these different things apart and work out what was directly about the deaths and what was separate,

he was unable to work on any of it.

As an extreme example I have heard of someone who was getting sicker and weaker after a death in her life. Her family assumed it was the death that had done this...until she was found not breathing on the bathroom floor...in need of a pacemaker because of a heart-condition noone had been aware of.

There are all sorts of different pains that that might be mixed in with your G.R.I.E.F that are actually separate things, for example:

- You might be angry at a partner or ex-partner who has left you close to or since the loss
- Upset at friends and family who aren't supporting you the way you want
- You may feel guilt at how you behaved towards them before they died or some way you treated them in the past (again, not directly about their death, but something separate to acknowledge and work on)
- If you were a carer for the person you lost there can be a great deal of pain not just around having lost this person, but having lost your purpose too, which is a separate thing and needs to be looked at separately.

These are all separate issues that, though related, are not your G.R.I.E.F. The danger of never questioning your experience is that you will never identify these extra parts. It's like getting a terrible flu and then writing off a sore back as part of that when you have actually pulled a muscle.

If there is different pain in there...and it's quite likely there is... it needs to be identified and resolved separately. Leave it as part of your G.R.I.E.F and it remains another unresolved emotion to get buried deep down and keep you in pain. And all of this pain remains attached to your loved one--even though it is not all about them--and becomes another reason, whether conscious or unconscious, to push the memories away.

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What to do:

To start to free yourself from pain and to keep them memory alive

Don't be scared to treat your emotional pain the way you would a physical pain--analyse it, ask questions about it, don't just accept that it is what it is. There is usually more to it than we realise. Ask yourself what it feels like, where it is coming from, what triggers it, and whether it all stems from the same place.

Exercise: Sit down in a comfortable safe space and make a list of all the things that are hurting you or causing you problems or stress right now. A lot of it will be about this death in your life--write it all down. And question it more deeply too. There are all the things that are about the person you have lost and how you feel about their death...but examine what parts might be about you too. If

you are feeling lonely without them then consider that is partly about not having them but also partly about you not being comfortable alone.

Write down other things that are stressing you out--these might be around other people or other areas of life.

Becoming aware of what is going on for you and being able to identify which parts of your pain are about the death of your loved one, which parts are related to their death but are more about you, and which things are totally unrelated, puts you in a position to start to resolves some of these things.

Choose 1 or 2 things on the list that it is in your power to start to do something about now and decide what you can do about them now to improve your situation. For example, if you have stress around another person is there a conversation you can have with them? If you are feeling lonely is there a friend you can make an effort to see more of? If your time feels empty or you feel purposeless is there something you can do with your time that would be enjoyable or feel purposeful.

From the author

I truly hope you have found this book useful and can take away from it something new to work on.

These 5 things are actually very simple to change and can make an incredible positive difference to you as you stick to them...but seeing as they are quite different to what we commonly do and are told to do it can be a great idea to revisit this book to remind yourself regularly. Doing just these 5 things in a new way will start to allow you to let go of your pain and help you to effortlessly keep the memories of your loved one alive and close to you.

Please feel absolutely free to pass this book on to anyone you feel it would help.

And I would love to hear how you found it, how it helped you, or to answer any questions you might have. Contact me at kristie@kristiewest.com

If you want to read more you will find over a hundred blogs and videos on my website www.kristiewest.com

Also if there is anything relevant that you would like to read there but can't find just let me know and I will happily blog about it for you.

You can also follow me on twitter: <https://twitter.com/kristiewest> and join me on my Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/kristiewest.griefspecialist>

For even more support sign up to my mailing list, if you haven't already, and you will receive weekly articles, tips, exercises, and encouragement to help you positively change your experience of losing someone you love so that can talk about, remember and love them, without it hurting anymore.

With much love,

Kristie

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