

Hello, Friends,

Another meeting in the books, with another good turnout. Thank you all for your continued support, and thanks to the new members for giving us a try. We welcomed Cornel, Joyce, and Stuart to the group, and hope to continue to see them.

Cindy Kocher gave a brief synopsis of upcoming tours. Spaces are filling fast, so if you are interested, please contact her as soon as possible.

We watched an encore video presentation "*Living Without the One you Cannot Live Without*" by Professor Natasha Josefowitz. She summarized her research and experience with grief with anecdotes and poems. This was presented last fall in our group, but I had some requests to show it again. We also have new members who haven't seen it before. I plan to show this once or twice a year because it holds some good advice. Following the video, the group discussed the topics she touched on in her presentation. If you are interested in watching (or rewatching) this, here is the link: [Living Without the One You Cannot Live Without - Research on Aging - YouTube](#).

Please note that you'll need to fast forward through the beginning of the clip to get to her presentation.

It was suggested that the group go to Silver Springs for the glass-bottom boat ride. Another suggestion was the Singing Riverboat Tour. If anyone is interested in these, please let me know so we can work something out. If you have suggestions for other outings, please let me know that, too. We're always looking for something we can do as a group. Here are links to both:

[Glass Bottom Boats – Silver Springs State Park](#)

<https://www.facebook.com/SingingRiverTours/>

I would like to find out from all of you if you'd be interested in listening to a presentation from one or more sources about pre-planning and prepaying funeral arrangements. This is an important part of estate planning now that we've lost our spouses. It's important to let others know what our preferences are and make it easier for them to make that happen. Please let me know if this would be of interest to you.

I need to get the room request in soon for the 2024 schedule, so the group discussed the meeting schedule for next year. We concurred that the current schedule of the second Friday of each month, from 10:30 – 12:30 in the Card Room should continue if possible. I'll let you know if there are any changes for 2024.

The most recent membership roster is attached. If you see errors, please let me know.

The **next group lunch will be Friday, June 23rd** at Cheddar's (located on SR200 across from Sullivan Cadillac). If you want to go, please let me know by the 22<sup>nd</sup> so I can give the restaurant an accurate count.

The **next meeting will be July 14<sup>th</sup> at 10:30** in the Card Room.


Until next time,

Shelley

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Natasha Josefowitz, PhD, describes the grief process as a series of stepping-stones to be encountered in no particular order and for no specified period of time. She has written a poem or two for each stage.

<b>Pre-Grief</b>	<b>1 Shock</b>	<b>2 Numbness</b>
<p><b>Still at Hospice</b>            We're still here because            his back is still hurting            he has prostate cancer            metastasized to his bones            so we're here to get some relief            but the relief comes at a cost            opiates put you to sleep            so he lies there, only half-            conscious            and as the hours become days            and the pain is only relieved            by increasing the medications            the days are turning into weeks            we came here, believing he            would get better            and come home            but instead            he only came home to die            in a different hospital bed            the one in our continuing care            unit            two floors up from our apartment            in our retirement community            he can see the ocean from his            window            and hear the waves            hospice people come here, too            adjusting the pumps            the nurses are at his bedside            day and night            at first he has trouble talking            then swallowing            then moving            then breathing            and finally            living</p> <p><i>--What I call "Pre-Grief" only concerns those whose spouses had been ill for weeks, months, or even years. Those who are caregivers often drop out of their usual activities and stop going out with friends. After the spouse dies, it is very difficult for them to reenter the social scene. They are grieving—even if relieved after a long illness—and initiating contact feels daunting. They feel disconnected and may need to ask trusted friends to help by organizing outings and events for them to participate in as a way to start reconnecting.</i></p>	<p><b>Where Are You?</b>            Give me a sign            blow out the candle            rustle the curtain            make a sound in the wind            touch my cheek            with a breath of air            give me a sign            so I will know            you are here            somewhere with me            please let me feel you            in the room            in the air            in the energy            pulsating in the universe            my love            where are you?</p> <p><i>--The first state right after the wife or husband dies is "Shock." Even if the death has been anticipated, the end of a life is jarring. During shock you fluctuate between unbearable emotional pain and the need to be rational and logical in order to deal with practical concerns such as funeral arrangements. Facing the reality of what needs to be taken care of pulls you away from the flow of tears and acts as a respite until a hug or display of sympathy causes you to break down again.</i></p> 	<p><b>Tired!</b>            Ever since he died            I have felt tired            I wake up tired            I may have a bit of energy            during the day            but then I'm exhausted            afterward            I have become a person            who drags her feet            pushes herself out of an            armchair            with a sigh            I walk slower,            think slower,            and everything matters less—            the way I look,            what clothes I wear,            whether I need a haircut,            I am also more forgetful            I have to keep checking            my calendar            lest I forget to go somewhere            or do something I've promised to            do            I forget who just asked me a            question            or what that question was            I walk into a room            and wonder why I'm there            I mix up names and faces            and worry whether            I'm losing my mind            I wonder whether I have MCI            "mild cognitive impairment"            but maybe it's not even            "mild" anymore            yes, I'm more tired and forgetful            than I was a year ago</p> <p><i>--After shock comes the second state: "Numbness." People say, "I feel nothing," "I feel like a ghost," "I walk around like a zombie." I suspect this is the brain's way of protecting against intense and disabling pain. What often makes this such a difficult time is that it is also the period when there are papers to fill out and sign, decisions to be made, financial questions. This is a time when you need a trusted lawyer or accountant, and someone to deal with the paperwork.</i></p>

### 3 Disbelief

#### Maybe

Maybe it's all a mistake  
maybe it wasn't real  
maybe it was a bad dream  
maybe it didn't happen  
maybe when  
I come home tonight  
he'll be there, saying  
"Hi, how was it?"  
and I'll tell him  
all about it  
except  
he wasn't there  
and he didn't ask

--"Disbelief" is the third state. Slowly numbness becomes cognitive dissonance. The phone rings, you think it's him—it isn't, he's dead. You get some news you want to share with her, for a split-second you plan on doing so, then you realize you cannot, because she is gone. Even though you know your husband has passed, you keep expecting to see him sitting on the sofa reading the newspaper when you come home or to hear him making coffee when you get up in the morning; you shop for two; you say "us" instead of "me." Your unconscious has not yet caught up with the new reality of your life, and it will take time to reprogram your reflexes and habits.



### 4 Reality

#### Pain

The pain comes on suddenly  
while I drive  
or eat dinner  
or talk to a friend  
the pain is terrible  
it starts somewhere  
in the center of my body  
and radiates out  
everywhere  
it's the pain of being aware  
of how I miss him  
in that moment  
the overpowering awareness  
of his forever absence  
and there is no one to turn to  
nowhere to go  
no getting away  
no possible refuge  
no stopping the pain  
it sits there  
enveloping me  
and I am helpless in its grip  
contemplating with awe  
the immensity  
of how much pain one can bear  
without dying from it

--Finally you are emotionally able to accept "Reality," the fourth state. You get in touch with the finality of death, with the permanent absence of the beloved spouse, with having to live without the one you cannot live without. It is a period of intense grief for most people. You may be plagued with guilt, the urge to blame someone, and unanswerable questions. "How could this have happened?" "Maybe we could have done more to save him." All the "could have," "should have," "why did I?" "why didn't I?" come surging into our consciousness.

You are left alone; there is no one to share the minutia of daily life. You have lost the witness to your life —no one knows what you had for breakfast, what you just read, where you went, what you thought, and, worst of all, no one really cares. The feeling of isolation is pervasive. You are no longer the center of anyone's life, nor is anyone the center of yours.

### 5 Alienation

#### Alone at a Party

Going alone to a party  
will the people there be friendly?  
will someone talk to me?  
or will I stand in a corner  
glass in hand  
scanning the room  
for a familiar face  
not finding one  
looking for a smile or nod  
approaching close-knit groups  
unable to enter?  
I am a stranger among the natives  
an alien in a foreign land  
I will go home early tonight

--Getting out of your comfort zone to meet the world is both difficult and imperative. When you first begin to make that effort, you experience the fifth emotional state, "Alienation." We tend to identify ourselves in relationship to other people—daughter, son, mother, father, wife, husband, friend... So if you are no longer a wife, what are you? You are single in a couple's world: you market for one, cook for one, walk alone, go to a party and stand in the corner with a glass in your hand watching happy couples. You're not a whole person; you are half a couple.



## 6 Reinvention

### Looking at Men

I caught myself  
looking at men  
I have not done that  
in seventy years  
then it used to be boys  
now it's older men  
in my age group  
I look and wonder  
whether they're married  
I would like to go out  
with a male companion  
for a quiet dinner  
perhaps a movie  
that we can talk about later  
I have women friends  
why isn't it the same?  
I'm somehow not sure  
I am allowed  
to feel this way  
he died just over two years ago  
is it too soon  
for me to wish for couplehood?  
am I being disloyal  
to him and his memory?  
I feel guilty  
for catching myself  
looking at men

### Caring about Not Caring

The things I used to care about  
I no longer do  
but I really do care  
that I don't care  
about the things  
I used to care about

*--You cannot live happily in your new, single life without changing your identity from half a couple to a whole person. You will need to reinvent yourself in order to move on, stand on your own two feet, and forge a satisfying future. Reinvention is the purposeful transformation of your perceptions about yourself and the world. It is normal to feel awkward at first; navigating in this new way may be uncomfortable for awhile. Ask friends to include you in their activities and help you get engaged again in your community. If you refuse invitations too often, chances are you won't be asked again. If you go to an event or a party, it is helpful to go with someone so that you don't feel stranded by yourself.*



## 7 The New Normal

### Amazing

Today I have decided  
that I am not half a couple  
mourning the one that's gone  
for I have integrated him within me  
and so I am a whole person  
standing on my own two feet  
independent and strong  
there is nothing I cannot do  
for there is nothing I can't imagine  
I have no fears  
not of living nor of dying  
I am doing the first  
the best I know how  
until the second stops me  
hopefully in my tracks  
I feel the wisdom of my years  
a learning that I can use well  
to make it easier for others'  
journeys  
as mine draws to an end  
I savor the moments  
in ways new to me  
a quietness has taken hold  
like a new distance, a perspective  
an understanding  
I know not exactly of what  
a comfort in my place  
a knowing of my time  
the word may be "serenity"  
it exists  
even in new adventures  
in willingness for risks  
in shoulder shrugs at failures  
in smiles at foibles  
and secret laughter  
at the amazingness of it all

*--Through reinvention, you have morphed into an okay single person. You have arrived at the next and final state: "the New Normal." You are not half of a couple—but a whole woman or man—less needy and able to experience life with all its pleasures and pitfalls. I am not saying that you don't miss your spouse, but you are really living again instead of just surviving.*

*Now life can be good again, and new adventures are not only possible, but also enjoyable. In this state you are able to form new friendships which are meaningful and enduring—friends to go out with, share a meal or travel with. You may be alone, but you are not lonely. Home is a refuge, not solitary confinement. You feel like a complete person, grounded, and secure in your ability to manage your life.*

## Post-Grief

### Missing Him Again

He has been gone  
for several years  
and I'm OK  
he does not live  
in my head anymore  
he lives in my heart  
and yet sometimes  
unexpectedly  
I feel I am back  
to just after  
he died  
I'm missing him  
I'm hurting  
I feel disoriented  
desperately wishing him back  
I remember  
all that I have lost  
that I will never have again  
it has been years since he died  
but it feels like yesterday

*--For years after the death of a spouse, you may regress into earlier emotional states. A song, a scent, or a photo triggers an instance of sharp pain, and this may impact your mood for a few hours or days. Anniversaries and holidays can exact an additional toll—others in a celebratory mood make the widow or widower even more aware of the loss, pain, and separation.*

### Something Has Changed

Something has changed  
I used to dread  
coming home in the evening  
to silent, empty rooms  
feeling so terribly alone  
tonight for the first time  
I looked forward to  
some quiet time  
in my quiet home  
after a busy day  
sitting down to read my mail  
checking my computer  
sitting down with a book  
sitting alone  
without feeling lonely  
something has changed

*--Grieving can be long or short. The emotional states I described are not immutable: some may never be experienced; others may exist that I have not encountered. They may not be sequential and may be repeated. I often felt like I took two steps forward and one step back, but grief does soften over time.*

