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Chapters

turning the pages through grief



When life hands you too much

"WHAT NEXT?"

Written by
Paulette LeBlanc

Why does it seem that tragic circumstances come in pairs or sometimes even in waves? When my parents died, it was on either side of my divorce. Shortly after that, my house went into foreclosure, and then, when I thought I'd had all I could handle, someone rammed into my Jeep, which was pretty much the only material thing I had left, and totaled it. Likewise, a dear friend of mine lost her fiancé, her daughter, and then her niece. I have heard story after story, which if I didn't know better, would make me think that the universe had some kind of a vendetta. It can appear that way at times. A friend, who is a hospice nurse said that once the stinging pain and shock have subsided from a multiple loss, a person would likely begin to grieve each loss one at a time, in no particular order.

I could not even begin to grieve the loss of my twenty-year marriage after my mother died. They happened so close together that on her

deathbed, in my living room, my mother said she was sorry she would not be here to help me find my way, as it was obvious to her that my marriage would be ending soon after she died. My father passed away not long after my divorce was finalized and I was left with a pile of grief. I was extremely thankful for my long-time hospice nurse friend, who was very experienced at helping people deal with their grief. She told me that tragedy often seems to come in twos or threes for whatever reason and that I would likely feel more overwhelmed by some things on certain days and something else on other days.



"I have this dream where I land on my side."

If tragedy has struck more than once, or in too many places to number at this point, it can feel a bit like you've been bludgeoned over the head. Even if you don't know how you'll get out of bed in the morning, let me encourage you that humans are more resilient than we think we are. When I was at my lowest point of grieving, people kept telling me how strong I was. I

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All the art of living lies in a fine mingling of letting go and holding on.

— Havelock Ellis

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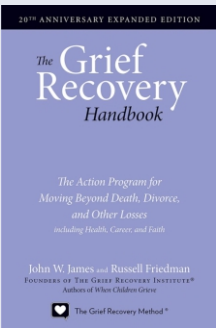
would smirk to myself and think, “You have no idea how close to the edge I am—how fragile I feel.” It was downright annoying that people assumed they knew me better than I did. As I look back now, however, I have to concede that they saw something I did not see or feel.

My friend had been right. I began to grieve one thing at a time, in no particular order. Our minds are so powerful I think they let go of certain things that may be too difficult to hold onto. I cannot recall many exact moments of that period of my life, just a strange memory of a very dark and

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lonely time that felt a little like trying to climb out of a hole.

Had I been told (and maybe I had) that I would love life again and one day feel happy, I may have said something I’d regret, or at least, walked away quickly. The truth is, I did begin to laugh again, and I have felt moments of happiness and elation. No one will ever take the place of either of my parents, and my marriage has now been over for many years, but the waves of grief that once rushed over me are more like ripples now, and one day they will be for you as well. Please remember to be kind to yourself in this season of grief. It won’t last forever.



The Grief Recovery Handbook, 20th Anniversary Expanded Edition: The Action Program for Moving Beyond Death, Divorce, and Other Losses including Health, Career, and Faith

By John W. James & Russell Friedman

Newly updated and expanded to commemorate its 20th anniversary, this classic resource helps people complete the grieving process and move toward recovery and happiness.

Incomplete recovery from grief can have a lifelong negative effect on the capacity for happiness. Drawing from their own histories as well as from others’, the authors illustrate how it is possible to recover from grief and regain energy and

spontaneity. Based on a proven program, *The Grief Recovery Handbook* offers griever the specific actions needed to move beyond loss. New material in this edition includes guidance for dealing with:

- **Loss of faith**
- **Loss of career and financial issues**
- **Loss of health**
- **Growing up in an alcoholic or dysfunctional home**

Amazon Review

bookmark

Overwhelming Loss

Grief is hard enough in its own right. The death of a loved one ushers in life-changing transitions for family members and close friends. Concentration frequently wanes, energy disappears, and a pervasive sadness sometimes sets in. Coping with the emotional and physical turmoil in the wake of loss can (though does not always) become an all-consuming task.

As difficult as the experience is of saying goodbye to a loved one, the accompanying losses are often devastatingly difficult. Perhaps the primary “breadwinner” died with inadequate insurance coverage, necessitating a move from the family home. Caregiving responsibilities overwhelm, requiring a move to a new city or neighborhood to be closer to family and other supportive resources. Health conditions long ignored while caring for a dying family member finally “catch up” and require attention.

Some bereavement specialists call these secondary losses because they grow out of the “primary” experience with the death of a loved one. To the people experiencing these losses, however, they are

* footnotes

just additional bad experiences stacked up on top of the loss already encountered—and they hurt. Sometimes, it is difficult to know which loss one is actually grieving. The easy answer: all of them. So how do we manage the many losses that grow out of a loved one’s death? Here are some tactics you may want to try:



by Bill Hoy

Label and list the losses. Give a name to every loss you have experienced as a result of this death and put it on a list.

Get input from experts. Reach out to trusted advisors who can help you make plans for the future. Prioritize your actions. Not everything that needs to be done must be done today.

Seek support from professionals. All around us are people who are willing and specially trained to help.

* Dr. Bill Hoy teaches at Baylor University in Waco, Texas. He is widely regarded as an authority on the sociocultural history of funeral rites, the topic of his most recent book: *Do Funerals Matter: The Purposes and Practices of Death Rituals in Global Perspective* (Routledge, 2013).

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