

***THE LIGHTHOUSE FOUNDATION OF NEW JERSEY, INC.***

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November 2008

It is with pleasure that The Lighthouse Foundation of New Jersey, Inc. and Lighthouse Hospice celebrate National Hospice Month with fellow Bereavement Professionals. It seems only fitting that we introduce you to our Bereavement Support Group Program during National Hospice Month.

The Lighthouse Foundation of New Jersey, Inc. was established in 2002 to create a venue for hospice families who wanted to make a donation in memory of a loved one. The Foundation supports end of life grief and bereavement services to patients and families. As a sister organization to Lighthouse Hospice of Cherry Hill, the mission of the foundation has been to provide funding for the advancement of end of life care through:

- Community Education
- Children's Grief Camps
- Educational Grants

The community educational initiative of the Foundation is an integral part of our mission. All programs and companion materials are offered to the public and professional community at no charge.


The activities of The Lighthouse Foundation of New Jersey are funded through donations made by friends of the hospice program who wish to support the Foundation in its effort to raise awareness of end of life care at local and state levels.

Despite the work of the Foundation, there remains much to be done to achieve our goal for the advancement of end of life education. We continue to invest funds wisely and rely upon our vision and promise to guide our program. We are diligent in how we spend the dollars entrusted to the Foundation and everyone who works with us is a volunteer therefore, expenses are less than ten (10%) per year.

With this in mind we honor the commitment of our mission to constantly improve community education and we are pleased to offer this new program as a gift to Bereavement Professionals. Under a grant awarded by The Foundation, this program was designed by Rev. Thomas Johnson-Medland, CSJ. Tom has dedicated the last year developing this program to better serve the hospice bereavement community.

We hope you find this program of benefit to your organization and the future of bereavement services throughout the hospice community.

Sincerely,

  
Sandra L. Cunningham  
Foundation Representative



*The Sovereign Order of Orthodox Knights  
Hospitaller Saint John of Jerusalem*

Dear Grief + Bereavement Specialists,

It is with great joy that I greet you and bring to you a gift from The Lighthouse Foundation of New Jersey. Over the last year, we have partnered to bring you this resource to add value to your end-of-life program.

It is given to you as a gift to celebrate National Hospice Month. Providing ongoing resources for the deepening of end-of-life care is a mutual goal I share with The Lighthouse Foundation of New Jersey. Our hope is that it supports your own concerns to provide deepening care.

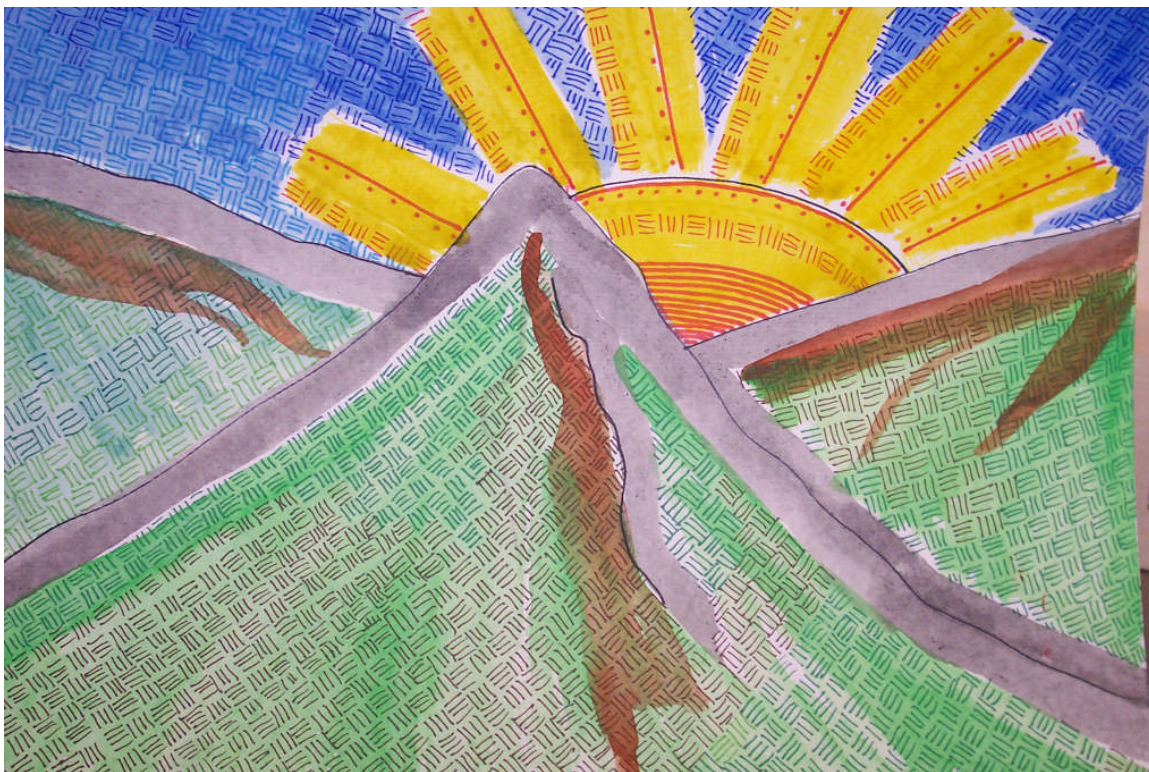
Blessed National Hospice Month, and thank you for the work you do to ease the suffering of the dying and the grieving.

Peace,

Rev. Fr. Dn. N. Thomas Johnson-Medland, CSJ, OSL  
Chaplain of St. John



*Father Dn. Thomas Johnson-Medland, CSJ + Chaplain of St. John +  
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# THE ART OF GRIEF:

Utilizing journaling and art to cope  
with and integrate our losses.

*8 Modules for facilitating  
Bereavement Support Groups*

Written by:

**Rev. Dn. N. Thomas Johnson-Medland, CSJ, OSL**

In partnership with:

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Celebrating National Hospice Month 2008

# The Art of Grief

## Introduction

“If you bring forth that which is within you, you shall be saved. But, if you do not bring forth that which is within you, it shall kill you.”

- The Gospel of Thomas

The act of creating any piece of art, whether it is a painting, a sculpture, a poem or a sonata requires bringing together ideas, sentiments, notions, tangible medium, and thoughts that are within us and all around us. It is much the same as the therapeutic process itself. Things must be brought up and out of us to enable healing and growth.

It makes perfect sense that as individuals in the path of therapeutic healing amid death and dying; grief and grieving, that we should turn to the use of the arts in order to replicate the process of therapy with the plasticity of form.

Grief support in the community has often found it's most noted and familiar application in verbal content / didactic formats. There is sufficient need in the community for the professional resources to enhance these verbal content /didactic formats with non-verbal content / disclosure

formats that enable self-discovery and self-disclosure. Therapeutic modalities that include art are critical.

Both formats are part of the healing process and should be available in therapeutic circles. People need to allow themselves to enter into nonverbal treatments and apply interior remedies—antidotes from within—as well as discuss the formal data on healing amid grief.

This program will be designed to address verbal forms of communicating ones grief and loss, while it will provide space for people to open up and do some interior work that will touch on often non-disclosed matter. This is supported and nurtured by the use of artistic media.

The modules will drift back and forth between verbal journaling content and non-verbal content. One week will focus members' attention on verbal descriptions of feeling, while another week will prompt them to express feelings via drawing, painting, or montaging.

Helping people discover ways to bring out of them what is inside, and invest it into some concrete creation is not only helpful for the sake of process alone, but it clearly offers people a way being able to interpret what is going on inside by seeing what it looks like on the outside.

What you have in your possession now is an eight module program designed to help people navigate through some of the looming issues amid the grieving process. There are activities, readings, lessons, checklists, and plans that will

enable you to facilitate the process of helping people create outside what it is that is going on inside. You have the high task of participating in the outing of this material as well as the rare honor of being able to view in the sacred space of creating what it looks like to feel.

Some of these sessions will help people out emotions and feelings that you are already familiar with in the process of coping and healing amid grief. Because we will shift from one artistic medium to another, you may also experience the outing of totally new responses to traditional paths of grief.

Art provides a synthesis of so many things. Obviously there is the synthesis of concrete media: wood, paint, paper, pen, feathers, plaster, and sound. But, there is also the synthesis of ethereal media as well: feeling, emotion, thought, desire, and the larger more soulful grist such as love/hate, angst/hope, and fear/coping.

With all of these things at peoples' disposal, it is no doubt you may experience some new combination or ordering of things that you may not have experienced in traditional or verbal grief work. This is to be expected.

What you can also expect as a grief therapist/worker is that you will grow in this group like in no other group. This ongoing exposure to the creating of things amid grief will touch on new areas and new discoveries for you. We do not traditionally look for our own development in these settings, but I am alerting you to the fact that it will occur

here in a way you do not expect. Art changes people. And, being a part of the process of the “outing of the stuff of art” is something that also changes people. There is something sacred about this process.

It is why we are so moved by second-graders crayon drawings and 90 year olds’ watercolors. Something of the individual leaks out in the process and we are given a glimpse behind the “temple veil” of the person. You will know what I am talking about when you see it or hear it.

It is recommended that people attending this group should have already been through a traditional bereavement support group or individual counseling. It is intended for people who have had some basic identification of the grief process and mourning process. It may be entirely too overwhelming and or intricate for the newly bereaved.

The themes for the 8 Modules are as follows:

- Memories of the one who died
- How life has changed
- Things we did that gave me strength
- Places we connected
- People who try to comfort
- What has been my strength now
- How do I hear them now
- What have I learned about myself

It is our hope – that of the author and The Lighthouse Foundation of New Jersey – that his material will inform the work you do to enable families and friends to mend amid their grief. It is dedicated to all of the patients that we have all cared for - from the dawn of time – and the family and friends that have mourned their departure.

The Author  
7 May 2008  
Cresco, PA

*The work in this program was developed by the author for the Lighthouse Foundation of New Jersey through a grant with the expressed intent of distribution to NHPCO partner hospices throughout the country in honor and recognition of National Hospice Month. All liability for its use lies with the implementing hospices that are required to provide their own accredited bereavement therapists to run the program.*

# Bittersweet Wonder

by Father Thomas Johnson-Medland  
Cherry Hill, New Jersey

There is an odd thing that happens in our grieving, and there is an odd thing that happens in our mending amid grief. The memories and emotions that emerge in our grieving – those memories and emotions that lead us into sorrow – lead us full-circle through the pain into a tender peace.

It is an odd gift that loss has left us. We find that the very memory of walking hand in hand with our loved one makes us cry in the absence of them and those moments, but that very remembrance of them and those moments opens our hearts to a deep awe and gratitude as well. We miss them, but oh how sweet it was to have had them at all.

We have come across this bittersweetness throughout our lives. It is the sense we have when we realize that our own gifts are often our own curse; or the very wounds that we carry through our lives are the very place where we are able to touch others and bring deep healing. Pleasure and pain; at once a bittersweet wonder.

I remember holding Mary's hand as she went on and on about the gardens she and her husband had planted. Through her sobbing she told me of the gathering of plants and rocks from all of their many trips with their children. "This one is from Pennsylvania, and that one from China. It hurts so much to see them, but they are so beautiful and they remind me of all that we shared. When I think of the memories, it actually gives me the



strength I felt when we were there, together, doing those things."

You have sensed the oddness of having your tears actually be your nourishment.

Ask me how it works; I do not know – but that it aids the mending, I do know that.

If there is no bittersweet wonder in our grief, then we are stuck. But if there is a bittersweetness to our healing, then we are mending.

If our grief is dry and arid, we probably just need to listen a bit more – listen to our minds and our hearts tell the thousand memories they hold of our loved ones. We need to look at pictures and cry. This bittersweetness is present in our perceptions of those who offer to help us mend. What people say often alarms us and we feel it not the right thing. And then we have the feeling that we are glad they cared enough to try.

Back and forth, up and down, around and around is the process of mending amid grief. Sometimes we laugh when we think of Uncle Harry's crazy hat collection, and then we sob because we don't get to watch him make those crazy faces anymore. We cry when we think about our mother having cared for us as children when we were sick

with chicken pox, and we breathe a sigh of relief when we realize she no longer is suffering with her confusion and horrible labored breathing.

These memories and these emotions are both our bridge to the people we have lost and our bridge to our own healing. They enable us to arrive at a place where we may mend and do it slowly, tenderly and with grace.

All of the things that we have done together; all of the love and conflict and growth meld into one and give us pain in their absence, and strength to go on ahead. Try to figure out how the trees and roses can make you cry and laugh at the same time. I cannot. See if you can imagine how blue skies and white clouds can remind you of a loved one's death. I cannot; but they do. And somehow the colors of the rainbow, and peoples' faces, and friends shaking hands, and babies crying all give us sadness and hope at the same time. (Thank you, Louis Armstrong, *What a Wonderful World*).

When I see balloons,  
memories of happy times  
always drift to you.

haiku by Diantha Ain

# THE ART OF GRIEF

## MODULE 1:

### “Memories of the One who has died”

#### *Introduction to Module:*

Since it is the first session, it must be remembered that people still do not know each other and there will be some natural barriers to them wanting to share intimate details and emotions. We should not expect too much from the attendees, but should allow them the opportunity to share if they are able.

This means we have to develop connections between group members this session. We can do this by having some ice breaking activities. It will be helpful to have ice breakers at every meeting to help people loosen up and focus on the work ahead of them.

First meetings of groups need to also contain some contracting work. Somehow the group needs to talk about why it is gathering, what its goals are and what parameters it operates under. This will require you to make up a list of group purposes, group goals, and group rules. It should be simple and it should be printed.

You will also want individuals to chime in about their own personal senses of the purpose, goals and rules to the group. Some of them may be individual ideas that are just for them to hold on to throughout the process. Still others may be great ideas that you may have forgotten in your listing – and you should add these to the sheets and update them for the next meeting.

These items should also be posted in the room if you have space and resources. Using a Post-It type flipchart would be ideal. This gives you a visual cue and reminder, as well as an image to draw reference to when the group strays from its contract.

Groups fail because they do not clearly identify these contractual issues: purpose, goals, and rules. They also fail when facilitators do not bring the group back around to these contractual issues.

In this module it will also be critical to help people plug in to the memory center within them. What would be helpful for you to do is to invite all of the group members to bring something that has a fond memory of their loved one locked in side of it. It could be a photo, a favorite shirt, a fishing rod, a knitting needle, a favorite poem or song or painting.

You are helping them to build a bridge to the place in them that stores things. You will also help them to build a bridge to the place in them that expresses, listens, and heals. Keep in mind that it is these bridges that will help the participants grow and mend when they are not with the group.

It is important for you to remember to bring boxes of tissues because people will clearly begin to unload tears as they unload memories and stories. The members of the group will all be at different stages of their own work, but being around others who share similar grief will provoke tears that they themselves may not expect.

The outlines and instructions for each session are contained in the modules, but the time frame for each area is not listed. You will have to decide how long your sessions are and then how much time you will spend on each section of the session. This will be influenced by how many groups you have led in the past, your skill

level and comfort level with the materials, and the number of people in the group.

Two hours is too long for sessions as they are emotional. One hour is probably not enough time. Ninety minutes is probably just right. But, again this is a ballpark and will be affected by the mitigating circumstances mentioned above. Just go through and assign a time frame for each item on the agendas.

So, let's get ready to begin the work that we are here to do. Check out the sections below and don't forget, open your heart to what is ahead.

***“Don't Forget” Checklist:***

- \_\_\_\_\_ A box of tissues
- \_\_\_\_\_ Email or call everyone to remind them of meeting and to bring something that holds a fond memory
- \_\_\_\_\_ To have one sure way of getting in touch with every member in case of cancellations
- \_\_\_\_\_ Have plenty of paper, pens, pencils, journals and art supplies on hand (markers, paints, crayons, poster paper, brushes, finger paints)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Get name tags and sharpies
- \_\_\_\_\_ A Post-It type flipchart and markers
- \_\_\_\_\_ Handouts of Purpose, Goals and Rules for the Group
- \_\_\_\_\_ Posters of Purpose, Goals and Rules for the Group
- \_\_\_\_\_ Handouts of local and national grief resources
- \_\_\_\_\_ Folders or binders for people to collect items in
- \_\_\_\_\_ Soft, “wordless”, relaxation music and CD player
- \_\_\_\_\_ Candle and matches – ***for center of circle***
- \_\_\_\_\_ A referral list for yourself to make referrals when

\_\_\_\_\_ peoples' grief becomes complicated or dangerous

\_\_\_\_\_ Buy a copy of: *Healing After Loss: Daily Meditations for Working Through Grief* by, Martha W. Hickman (and have copies available for the members, too)

\_\_\_\_\_ Choose a poem, song or ritual that you will use for your closing of each session. You must close with the same closing every week throughout the sessions.

\_\_\_\_\_ Assign time frames to the agenda

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Closing Activity, Reading or Song:

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# THE ART OF GRIEF

## MODULE 1

### AGENDA OUTLINE:

- Welcome and Introduction of all members– play music softly in background until the meeting actually begins

The chairs should be in a circle. Go around the room and have each member introduce themselves by stating who they are, where they are from and why they are here. They should also mention the name of their loved one who has died.

- Ice Breaker

Start with a silly ice-breaker; have everyone go around the room and re-say their name and list 3 things they would take on a picnic that start with the first initial of their first name: “My name is Tom and I would take: tomatoes, turnips and a Tyrannosaurus.” Obviously, silliness is “in” and should be encouraged by the leader. This is clearly a mnemonic-type silly way for people to bond and learn names.

- Reading from Healing After Loss

#### ***LIGHT CANDLE***

This book will provide educational data and an organizing point for the group grieving process. It is

important to read it twice, once now, and then again toward the end of the session. It is best to just read the selection that is set aside for the date you are meeting, but you certainly can choose another to read. You should either purchase one for each group member or have them purchase one themselves. This is a vital tool.

- Discussion about “Contracts”

Let people know that it is important to discuss why everyone is here and what is expected for people to gain from these sessions. There are “purposes, goals, and rules to how a group should run. Remind them that there are “agency purposes, goals, and rules” for this and “individual purposes, goals, and rules” for this. Start out the discussion by stating the agency goals (listed below on the handouts). List them on “Post-it Flipchart” paper and hang them up. Add to these (in a different color) items listed by the group members themselves.

- Discussion about “Memories”

Go around the circle and ask people to share a simple childhood memory from school days. Ask them where it is stored in them. Most people say the head. Remind them that memories may be stored in other areas of the body and that they will clearly plug into emotions that may be stored elsewhere. Our memories may often come from the head, but in telling them, we often touch our heart – in joy, sadness, angst, relief and a thousand other ways.

Have everyone share the item they brought to the group to share. Ask them to explain how it is connected to their loved one. What is the story behind it? And, if they are able, what emotions are attached to the event or the object.

People are allowed to pass if they are not able to share.

- **Journaling/Art Time**

Now it is time for them to journal about their object. Ask everyone to split up and go to a table by themselves. Have them take out their journals and write or create (make sure the “creating” tools are available for each session) one or more pages in their journals. Have them create a story or work of art that either describes the object, the event or the person and the fond memory attached.

Leave your qualifiers for the project vague like they are listed above so that people have the freedom to interpret and create in whatever direction they are able or led to go. Tell them that it is their impression of what they think the assignment is that is most important. They should create based on what comes to mind when they hear what the assignment is.

- **Sharing our “Creations”**

Go around the room and share the creations with the group. Allow people to elaborate or remain vague based on their desires and capabilities at the moment. Remind them they may pass if they do not wish or are not able to share.

- Reading from Healing After Loss

Reread the earlier selection.

- Closing – *Extinguish Candle after Closing*

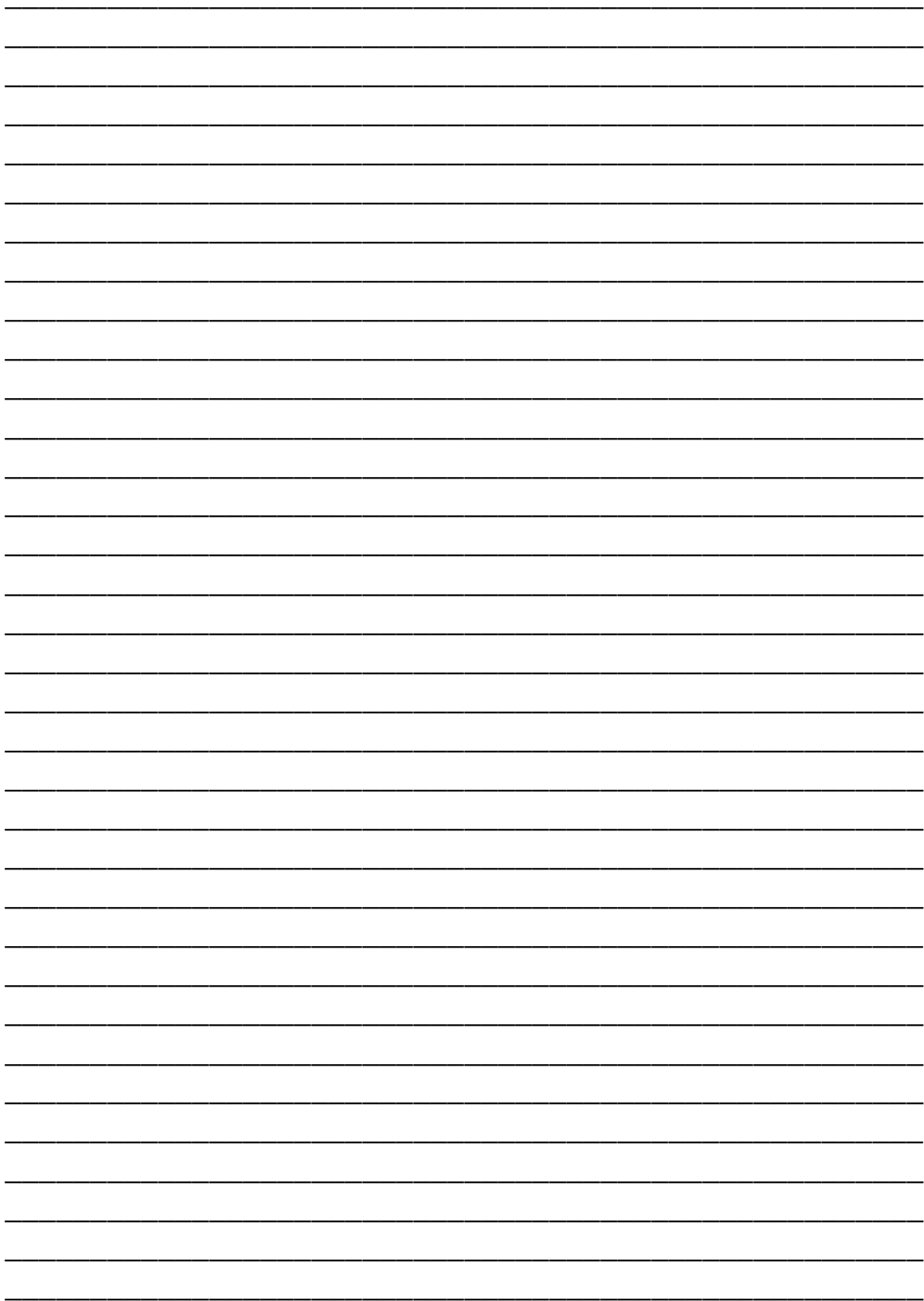
Use the closing of your choice – use it every week.

NOTES: \_\_\_\_\_

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# THE ART OF GRIEF

## WEEKLY TOOLBOX

Ideas, Links, Activities, and Readings for Group Members

- Begin a Memory Album of photos
- Build a Memory Box for keepsakes
- Collect scraps of clothing for a Memory Quilt
- Write down memories – in your journal - that come to you this week
- Check out the Quote Garden quotes about “Memory”  
<http://www.quote garden.com/memory.html>
- Share one of your memories with someone you love
- Check out: <http://www.grieflossrecovery.com/index.html>
- Read “Giving Voice” at:  
<http://www.lighthousehospice.net/articles/GivingVoice.pdf>

# THE ART OF GRIEF

## PURPOSE:

- The purpose of our group is to give everyone a safe and neutral space in which to allow their feelings of grief and loss to come out.
- It is also our purpose to connect with other individuals who have experienced deep loss so we can feel normal and connected to people who do understand.
- It is also our purpose that we will be available to help people resolve and solve issues when they are ready and ask for help.
- It is also our purpose to allow people to try new forms of expression. These forms include (but are not limited to) painting, journaling, sketching, drawing, sculpting, montaging, writing poetry/story/song, and performing.

## GOALS:

- To enable people to express what is going on inside
- To enable people to feel they are being heard
- To enable people to create
- To enable people to heal amid their grief and loss
- To provide a routine and safe environment for mourners

## RULES:

- We begin and end on time
- One person speaks at a time
- We do not try to solve anyone's issues unless asked
- We do not monopolize a conversation or session
- We are allowed to pass in discussions if we are not able to share

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# *From the pulpit*

## Giving voice

*Father Dn. Thomas Johnson-Medland, CSJ*

*If you bring forth what is within you, what you bring forth will save you. If you do not bring forth what is within you, what you do not bring forth will kill you.*

-The Gospel of Thomas, verse 70

The path of grief and grieving is in effect no different from the path of any psychotherapeutic process of healing: if we do not allow that which is within us concerning our loss to emerge, it will overcome us and eat us alive. Like a dragon devouring a knight, grief will rear its ugly head and consume us if we do not clear the pathways within and allow it to come up and out of us.

When trying to understand where the things trying to get out of us are, I find it helpful to break

down the aggregates that make us up as people. Although I list four here, there may be more, or there may be a different way of breaking them down for each individual.

I believe we are a composite of mind, heart, soul, and body. We think, we feel, we desire, and we have a specific locus on this earth that we begin from and operate out of. Each of these aggregates in our lives has a way of being when life is allegedly "normal" and a way of being when we are in crisis, in growth, and in grieving.

Traditionally, we hold the mind to be the part of us that thinks. We also believe this part of us sorts, organizes, remembers, stores, catalogs, retrieves, chooses, decides, interprets, researches, questions, and believes. When it is affected by a loss and is grieving, just like a calm pond that is disrupted by the dropping of a pebble, it is disturbed, and ripples flow across its surface and into its depths.

The disturbance leaves the

mind disheveled and disorganized. The affected mind forgets, loses, becomes disoriented; it is confused, tired, aimless, and unable to muster enough strength to believe.

Traditionally, we hold the heart to be the part of us that feels. We also believe this aspect of our personality senses and intuit what is going on. It loves, hates, forgives, is jealous, finds humor and sorrow; it is fond, it is romantic, it seethes; it is peaceful, patient, gentle, and kind. When it is affected by a loss and is grieving, just like a calm pond that is disrupted by the dropping of a pebble, it is disturbed, and ripples flow across its surface and into its depths.

This disturbance halts the heart's ability to love; to forgive; or to be patient, gentle, or kind. It may move toward the opposite emotion much more quickly than it would normally, or it may just not be able to muster the strength to feel and so becomes numb.

Mind stories/memories	Heart stories/emotions
Soul stories/hopes and dreams	Body stories

**Figure 1. Grief workshop grid.**

Traditionally, we believe the soul (not the spirit) to be the part of us that desires. We also believe this portion of ourselves hopes and is united to others; it dreams, longs, yearns, and is soothed. It is the center of our passions, deeper than all emotion. It is the part of us that is deeply moved by music and events. It is the most tucked away, hidden, guarded, and cherished part of us. It is Pandora's Box, the Holy Grail, and the Ark of the Covenant within. When it is affected by a loss and is grieving, just like a calm pond that is disrupted by the dropping of a pebble, it is disturbed, and ripples flow across its surface and into its depths.

The disturbance causes the soul to lose its drive and perspective. The affected soul despairs, has no dreams, will not be comforted, can find no consolation, and feels abandoned.

Traditionally, we view the body as the part of us that manifests us in the physical world. We also believe this part of us eats, sleeps, procreates, exercises, and moves from here to there. When it is affected by a loss and is grieving, just like a calm pond that is disrupted by the dropping of a pebble, it is disturbed, and ripples flow across its surface and into its depths.

The disturbance leads the body to eat or sleep too much or not enough; it gets lost and wanders, it

cries and sobs, it stops taking care of itself; it gets sick, it fails, it hurts. The affected body feels as if it can not go on in the face of death, for it too shall someday die.

We understand how the aggregates of the personality function when all is seemingly "normal," and we can expect that there will be some disturbance in these functions when there is a loss. What is vital is to acknowledge these changes and to allow them to be noticed—to give voice to them so we can recognize their presence and keep sacred trust.

Although this seems a daunting task and many refuse to give voice to the shift in being out of fear that they will not be able to stop the flow that comes forth and shall surely die, it is something that can be done simply and genuinely, without much fanfare.

When one comes back to the house or hall after a wake or funeral or interment, there is often an ominous, hushed, deep emotion that feels unshakeable. A shift occurs in the gathered community only after one person risks enough to tell a story.

We tend to start with a hilarious tale of the deceased. This is strong enough to shift the mood and crack the hearts and minds and souls of many, sometimes enough to move them to share as well. What comes forth from

these gatherings is the beginning of the "giving voice" process.

We tell stories that come from our minds. The stories elicit emotion and feeling. The stories touch us in a place where we share common hopes and dreams. The stories comfort our tired and fearful bodies.

In the hospice workshops I head, I offer a grid to help people begin the process within. I ask the groups gathered to start by choosing a person they all know who has died. I ask them to tell me a story they remember about that person. I ask them to tell me how that makes them feel. I ask them to tell me common hopes, drives, and dreams these renderings exhibit that link them to the deceased. I ask them what they will do with their bodies to grieve this loss.

As they begin to list the things that are coming up and out of them, I ask them to jot them down in the appropriate boxes. Making these things tangible helps us to believe that we are actually doing something with what is happening on the inside. This is an important part of the process; we are making it conscious.

If we can begin to move things up and out of us, we can begin to be free and unblocked. It does not take away the sharp sting of loss, but it is a way of tending the garden of grief. Working with these issues again and again over time can help us cope with loss and grieve wholly.

These things that long to come out of us are stories that each area of our lives has to share. Telling stories has always been valuable and central to what it means to be a person. Telling these stories can help us to give voice to grief.

# THE ART OF GRIEF

## MODULE 2:

### “How life has changed”

#### *Introduction to Module:*

There will probably be a lot of things that people have experienced since your last session. Knowing that they will have a place and an opportunity to discuss them will either prompt a positive or negative sense of expectation. People may be either really chatty or very quiet. Folks may be feeling a bit uneasy about things they have shared last week or things they experienced since that session.

Remember it is ok to gently prod someone by saying “we’d love to hear how that was for you” but don’t push for answers. People always have the option to pass.

As a clinician, you will want to pay attention over these next sessions for signs of complicated or complex grief. Also, begin to note when people share signs of “not doing well”. Sleeplessness or excessive sleeping, binge eating or starving, excessive dependence on substances, suicidal ideation may appear at any time throughout the sessions and your agency should have a concrete plan in place for how you will deal with these issues.

Having a referral list is just the bare bones of a plan for dealing with these issues. You need to be clear on protocols and actual concrete steps that will be taken and discussions that will be had,

outlining who is to be involved at each point. Not having a plan ahead of time is not acceptable.

You as a clinician should feel confident that there are steps in place. It is also critical to have something in place so you may respond with speed. If you have to make a plan when you are in the midst of a crisis, you're apt to miss something or take too much time planning.

This session will provide people a chance to review how each and every day is somehow different from the way it was before their loved one died. Some will identify the routine issues that have been affected, others may jump to the larger days – like holidays – and how they have changed.

Looking at how the holidays have changed since the death is a valuable thing to pay attention to. Remember, holidays are large events that have some sort of ritual behind them. These events are also loaded with expectations and proper responses. They are good examples of how people interact with their families or small communities. They are also events that will provoke a lot of strong emotion and response. Make sure to check in with how people are feeling about these changes. They will need to express their fears.

When we talk about holidays, people are often very quick to say “I cannot go to ...”, or “I am not planning on celebrating...this year.” Some people will need the break from the celebration, others will need to be there, and there is no STANDARD answer.

Remember, that in these discussions about changes and how people will adapt to the changes, what is really being spoken about is people's fears of how they will cope – how they will be without this person in their life. Validating this fear or this emotion for them will be vital. You can do this by saying things like: “That'll

be hard”, or, “It sounds like that first year will be difficult”, or, “Pieces of that will be sad.”

Often, what people are looking for when they are talking about not doing something they used to do, is a chance to look at and talk about how they will cope with the loss and the changes that have and will ensue. They want a chance to explore what it will look like. What will people say? How will things be different now? Will I cry the whole time?

A lot of peoples’ time will be focused on the possible scenarios of how each routine day or how each special day will go without their loved one present. We recognize how vital it is for people to get these discussions out on the table, and how essential it is for people to listen to these concerns. These moments are sacred. Remember to let people know you have heard what they have said.

Simple, regular and routine activities and tasks are suddenly called into question after a death. People are unsure of how they will make through a church or temple service without falling a part. They want to know what people will say to them: will it be painful? How will other people feel?

Thousands of thoughts and questions will race through their hearts and minds. All of this can be exhausting, making it seem easier not to attend or participate in routine situations. Still others will feel the need to get themselves back into the thick of things.

***“Don’t Forget” Checklist:***

\_\_\_\_\_ A box of tissues

\_\_\_\_\_ Email or call everyone to ask them to think about

CHANGES that have occurred because of the death and things that have NOT CHANGED– and to think of a childhood change that impacted them

- \_\_\_\_\_ To have one sure way of getting in touch with every member in case of cancellations
- \_\_\_\_\_ Have plenty of paper, pens, pencils, journals and art supplies on hand (markers, paints, crayons, poster paper, brushes, finger paints)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Have name tags (use these until session 5) and sharpies
- \_\_\_\_\_ A Post-It type flipchart and markers
- \_\_\_\_\_ Handouts of Purpose, Goals and Rules for the Group
- \_\_\_\_\_ Posters of Purpose, Goals and Rules for the Group
- \_\_\_\_\_ Handouts of local and national grief resources
- \_\_\_\_\_ Soft, “wordless”, relaxation music and CD player
- \_\_\_\_\_ Candle and matches
- \_\_\_\_\_ A referral list for yourself to make referrals when peoples’ grief becomes complicated or dangerous
- \_\_\_\_\_ A plan with specific protocols for dealing with peoples’ complicated grief and mourning
- \_\_\_\_\_ A copy of: Healing After Loss: Daily Meditations for Working Through Grief by, Martha W. Hickman (and have copies available for the members, too)
- \_\_\_\_\_ A closing reading, song, or ritual
- \_\_\_\_\_ Assign time frames to the agenda

Additional Needs:

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# THE ART OF GRIEF

## MODULE 2

### AGENDA OUTLINE:

- Welcome and Check-In Time– play music softly in background until the meeting actually begins

The chairs should be in a circle. Go around the room and have each member introduce themselves and share a little bit about their week. They can share how it went on a scale of 1-10, or a tough spot they had, or perhaps something they found themselves turning to write in their journal to process this week. This is time to check-in and to unload. This helps groups to grow in trust and in accountability.

- Ice Breaker

This second week, share another silly icebreaker; have each member share two truths and one lie about them. The group members have to guess which one is the lie. “I love to read. I love to hike. I have built an ultra-light plane.”

- Reading from Healing After Loss

### ***LIGHT CANDLE.***

This book will provide educational data and an organizing point for the group grieving process. It is important to read it twice, once now, and then again toward the end of the session. It is best to just read the selection that is set aside for the date you are meeting, but you certainly can choose another to read. You should either purchase one for each group member or have them purchase one themselves. This is a vital tool.

- Discussion about “Contracts”

Review the chart and handout that contain the “purposes, goals, and rules” for this group. Make sure you do not skip this because it feels too awkward, business-like or rigid. This contract is in place to help keep the group focused and on track. It needs to be done at each session.

- Discussion about “Change”

Go around the circle and ask people to share a childhood change from school days. Have them share about what the change was, how it affected them and made them feel, how they coped with it, and if they learned something about themselves as a result.

People are allowed to pass if they are not able to share.

- Journaling/Art Time

Now it is time for them to paint in their journal about what has CHANGED and what has NOT CHANGED because of the death. Ask everyone to split up and go to a table by themselves. Have them take out their journals and create (make sure the “creating” tools are available for each session) one or more pages in their journals. Have them create a work of art that either describes what has CHANGED and what has NOT CHANGED because of the death. They may use a separate paper if they do not want to paint in their journal. They may also journal when they are done.

Leave your qualifiers for the project vague like they are listed above so that people have the freedom to interpret and create in whatever direction they are able or led to go. Tell them that it is their impression of what they think the assignment is that is most important. They should create based on what comes to mind when they hear what the assignment is.

- Sharing our “Creations”

Go around the room and share the creations with the group. Allow people to elaborate or remain vague based on their desires and capabilities at the moment. Remind them they may pass if they do not wish or are not able to share. Don’t forget to ask how the CHANGES make people feel.

- Reading from Healing After Loss

Reread the earlier selection.

- Closing – *Extinguish Candle after Closing*

Use the closing of your choice – use it every week.

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

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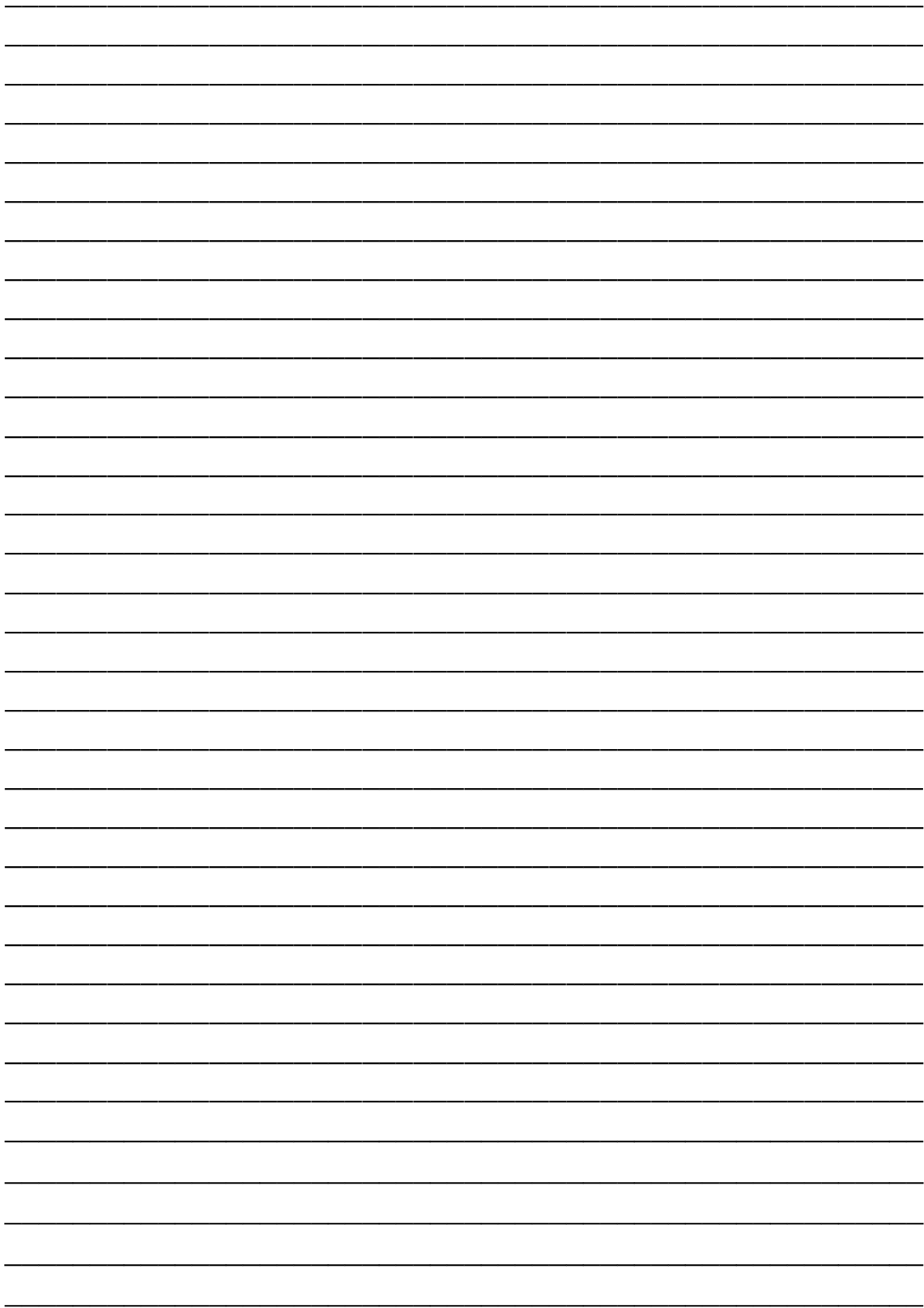
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Before you can lead others with their CHANGE sharing, you should write out yours – THIS IS NOT TO SHARE, just for you to experience the exercise. What has CHANGED in your life because of the death? And, what has not changed?

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.



# THE ART OF GRIEF

## WEEKLY TOOLBOX

Ideas, Links, Activities, and Readings for Group Members

- Check out how other people cope with change and loss at:  
<http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/familydevelopment/components/7269-3.html>
- Write down changes – in your journal - that come to you this week and continue the list of things that have not changed as well
- Check out the Quote Garden quotes about “Change”  
<http://www.quote garden.com/memory.html>
- Share one of your memories with someone you love
- Check out: <http://www.grieflossrecovery.com/index.html>
- Read “Good Grief” at:  
[http://www.lighthousehospice.net/articles/good\\_grief.pdf](http://www.lighthousehospice.net/articles/good_grief.pdf)

# THE ART OF GRIEF

## PURPOSE:

- The purpose of our group is to give everyone a safe and neutral space in which to allow their feelings of grief and loss to come out.
- It is also our purpose to connect with other individuals who have experienced deep loss so we can feel normal and connected to people who do understand.
- It is also our purpose that we will be available to help people resolve and solve issues when they are ready and ask for help.
- It is also our purpose to allow people to try new forms of expression. These forms include (but are not limited to) painting, journaling, sketching, drawing, sculpting, montaging, writing poetry/story/song, and performing.

## GOALS:

- To enable people to express what is going on inside
- To enable people to feel they are being heard
- To enable people to create
- To enable people to heal amid their grief and loss
- To provide a routine and safe environment for mourners

## RULES:

- We begin and end on time
- One person speaks at a time
- We do not try to solve anyone's issues unless asked
- We do not monopolize a conversation or session
- We are allowed to pass in discussions if we are not able to share

# Good Grief, It's the Holidays

*Grieving and integrating our losses is an important part of life—especially around the holidays.*

*Hospice pastor Tom Johnson-Medland says, "Our lives are intricately woven, wired and connected. It seems everything that happens is somehow a part of, or a step to, some other place in our lives."*

BY TOM JOHNSON-MEDLAND X'83

W

hen I had to co-officiate the funeral for my grandfather, I was a wreck. Besides blubbering my way through one of the readings and a piece of the homily, I nearly fell into the grave prior to the interment. I hit that astro turf they placed around the grave with all my nerves and a new pair of slick, leather wingtips. Zoom! The abbot who had been officiating with me grabbed me by the arm, breaking my fall and averting a scene. As he pulled me up and steadied me, he leaned into my ear: "One at a time please, Tom. It's not your turn."

I shared that memory at a local pastoral care workshop on death and dying; clergy are interested in such workshops because of their continual ministries with the dying and the grieving. I talked about coping with the holidays, recognizing that those special times can send shivers up the spines of many people—not just those of the clergy. The anticipation of being forced to celebrate amid the mending process of grief can be daunting.

The holidays are times when we gather together as families, friends and a society as a whole. They are times to gain a sense of connection to the various communities we belong to. And, depending on the holiday and its meaning, there can be time for deep awe or gleeful abandon.

Holidays always carry emotion, and because of that we connect deeply with the people around us who celebrate those festivities at any level. Consequently, when someone is suddenly absent, we miss them deeply around those

special times. It can take many years to integrate the loss of a loved one into the holiday celebrations and all of life. That kind of integration comes as we learn to live in the absence of our loved ones while still holding them present in our memories.

One of my biggest challenges in this regard was relearning to celebrate my grandfather at Thanksgiving and Christmas. Pop-Pop made the family eggnog for all the major holidays, and several years in a row he included me in the preparations. I was 18 when I was invited into the inner circle of family lore and allowed to co-celebrate the sacred Levitical task of making the nog. Of course, at that age I had no eye to the future and didn't care about writing down the recipe.

You know where this is headed. Pop-Pop died with the family recipe in his head—and nowhere else. Over the past six years I have memorialized Pop-Pop at the holidays by spending time alone in my kitchen with all the ingredients I can recall. I dive into his remembered presence and pray I'll call forth some mystic recipe that will come close. I haven't come close, but I drag my attempts to the grave site, raise my cup, have a drink and pour some out for Pop-Pop and Mom-Mom every year—sometimes twice a year. I share a few stories, chuckle at some memories and pray for a better batch next year. It's silly, but it's my integration, my little ritual.

What tends to get us the most in preparing for the holidays is the anticipation. Our fear tends to grow as we anticipate facing family, friends and traditional customs without our loved ones. Will we say and do the right things, or will we fall apart (as if falling apart is not the right thing)? Will somebody say something that will upset everyone? How will we get through? All of this builds and intensifies and forces us into a corner from which we would just as soon forget the whole mess and hide out.

Although the holidays will be different because of our losses, and some changes may occur (like a new eggnog recipe or a new turkey carver or cook), it's not the healthiest choice to forego old customs altogether. There are a few steps you can take to help gain back a little of the control you will need to integrate your loss. It's not good to squash the feelings; instead, provide a healthy space for them to happen within. You need to feel, but not be overwhelmed by the feelings.

Talking with friends and family about memories you have of your loved one will help. You can share stories that come from celebrating the holidays with them—the foods they



HEIDI MARQUES '93

liked or the special decorations they insisted on (or even how they hated something about a holiday).

Talk about ways the holidays will be different without them. Decide together how that could look. Perhaps someone else will need to make the pumpkin pie or carve the turkey. Maybe you could even invest that person with the new sacred task of doing it in memory of or in honor of your loved one: "Sally, we'd like you to be the one who bakes Mom's pumpkin pie for Thanksgiving. I think she'd want it that way, and I know we'd be proud." Or maybe you'll need to go out for dinner since Mom always cooked it all and everyone feels it would be too much this first year to try it without her. Then plan to have a go at it the next year.

You could give a special gift to someone, donate money to a worthy cause, plant a tree or send flowers in memory of your loved one. Because some holidays are filled with gift giving and presents, including your loved one in this can help integrate the loss by celebrating his or her life.

Looking at pictures and videos is always a part of good, healthy family development. It's a way of marking our days together and seeing how we've grown. Make sure to include some photos or footage of your loved one who is no longer with you. Sure, people will cry a bit, but allowing ourselves to feel the grief will keep us from sublimating the loss and being eaten alive by the overwhelming attack of buried emotion.

Be gentle with yourself. Sit down and decide which of the holiday tasks will be tough and which ones easy. Write out a list of the tasks you need to do: buy gifts, get a tree and candles, send cards, etc. Beside each task, list some of the emotions you feel while thinking about the task: sadness, joy, fear, warmth. This will help you identify the different ways you were connected to the person and will help give you a piece of control via self-awareness.

Get plenty of rest. Eat reasonable amounts of healthy foods. Stay away from excessive use of alcohol and other drugs. The wrong amount of any of these things is a form of trying to medicate yourself by obsessing on one thing (food, sleep, etc.) and avoiding the feelings of loss. Spend a balance of time with people and by yourself, with large groups and small. Go for walks and exercise. Breathe deeply. Cry. Laugh.

Above all else, remember it will be very different. It will be tough. You have lost someone you love. Take your time,

**What tends to get us the most in preparing for the holidays is the anticipation. Our fear tends to grow as we anticipate facing family, friends and traditional customs without our loved ones.**

and don't load yourself with anywhere near the amount of preparation or activity you would usually be involved in. Even if you didn't love the person you lost, remember that we make connections and bonds based on repetition as well as fondness. Spending 40 years with someone you dislike intensely will still build thousands of memories that will get jostled and displaced when that individual dies. Things will be different.

After each day or event is over, make sure to check on yourself and on others who were close to the loved one you've lost. Think about the event and identify things you thought or felt or said. Then ask how you did with that—how you coped. Talk about it with others who know you or have experienced a similar loss. It might be a good idea to speak with a grief therapist or go to a grief/bereavement group. Check with your family doctor, a local hospital or a church for referral information. Processing these things won't remove the pain of loss, but it will give you some control over your reactions.

If you or someone you love is not eating, is sleeping all the time, skipping work or social events regularly or without giving notice ahead, abusing alcohol or drugs, or threatening to do harm, there could be serious and alarming problems. It may mean grieving is not going well, and while grieving is very different for everyone, some people will be dangerously close to the edge. Contact a doctor, clergy or therapist if you suspect these symptoms apply to you or someone you care about.

The purpose of good grief is to integrate loss into the rest of life and to find appropriate ways to change the lives of the survivors, as well as to honor both the absence and the memory of the loved one.

It's the next step on the journey God has placed us on.

*Reprinted with permission from Bereavement Magazine, Colorado Springs, November/December 1999.*

Father Tom serves as an Orthodox clergyman at SS. Peter and Paul Carpatho-Russian Parish in Levittown, PA, and is full-time spiritual care coordinator at Lighthouse Hospice in Cherry Hill, NJ. Tom attended Gordon 1979-81. He has published numerous articles, poems and the book *Turning Within: A Book on Christian Meditation*. His wife, Glinda, is a social worker for Easter Seals, and they have two boys—Zachary, 5, and Josiah, 2.



# THE ART OF GRIEF

## MODULE 3:

“Things we did that gave me strength.”

### *Introduction to Module:*

Throughout all of our lives we have all done things that give us strength. When we are children, we may gain strength – inner strength – from running around outside and rolling in the grass. As teenagers it may be obtained by doing reckless activities with peers – like mountain biking, surfing, and climbing. As young adults we may gain strength by taking on seemingly “adult roles” like buying stock or visiting the theatre, applying for credit or buying a home.

The activities we do to gain that inner hope, fullness and courage may change throughout our days, but we still seek to find things to do to replicate and feed the feeling. Those activities are forms of coping with the changes that come from each new day and the thousand and one things that advance on us in life, demanding our attention.

Growing close to people and including them in our regular activities will at some point mean they will be involved in activities that we do in order to cope with difficulty. As this happens, we will bond with people and they will become a part of that coping.

It makes sense that when those people die, we will feel as if we have lost some of our coping. It is true. What we have not lost,

however, is the ability to still cope, and utilize many thoughts, emotions and activities to do that. People find some degree of comfort in simply being able to identify that this is why they feel some ambivalence toward certain activities. Often, simply naming something can give you an inner courage and strength to feel you have some control again.

Our aim in this session will be to help people make the connection that they have pathways toward coping all through their lives – in both space and time. We will also want people to identify how they have included the one who has died in these pathways. Giving voice to the areas that may be sensitive to the touch can help them understand what it is they are feeling. Feeling sometimes just needs to have a few words stir it up from the bottom so we can see more clearly what it looks like.

Some people probably sat around and talked to cope with things. Others may have gone on trips, or fishing, or sailing. Other people may have found escaping to a movie together helped them gain some perspective; while still others may have gone out to eat and drink and mingle in large, chatty crowds.

However people involved their departed loved one in their attempts to cope with life, it will be critical to help people name them. Our reflective skills will help them hear things they are saying, in perhaps new ways that will cement them more firmly in their hearts and minds.

We may need to say things like: “It sounds like you gained strength together by just walking and chatting as you ambled.” Or, “Seeing movies together seems like it gave you both a chance to put things back into perspective; helped you see that life is larger than just that immediate crisis.”

### ***“Don’t Forget” Checklist:***

- \_\_\_\_\_ A box of tissues
- \_\_\_\_\_ Email or call everyone to ask them to think about things they did with their loved one that gave them strength; and also about something they did in childhood that gave them strength
- \_\_\_\_\_ To have one sure way of getting in touch with every member in case of cancellations
- \_\_\_\_\_ Have plenty of paper, pens, pencils, journals and art supplies on hand (markers, paints, crayons, poster paper, brushes, finger paints)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Have name tags (use these until session 5) and sharpies
- \_\_\_\_\_ A Post-It type flipchart and markers
- \_\_\_\_\_ Handouts of Purpose, Goals and Rules for the Group
- \_\_\_\_\_ Posters of Purpose, Goals and Rules for the Group
- \_\_\_\_\_ Handouts of local and national grief resources
- \_\_\_\_\_ Soft, “wordless”, relaxation music and CD player
- \_\_\_\_\_ Candle and matches
- \_\_\_\_\_ A referral list for yourself to make referrals when peoples’ grief becomes complicated or dangerous
- \_\_\_\_\_ A plan with specific protocols for dealing with peoples’ complicated grief and mourning
- \_\_\_\_\_ A copy of: Healing After Loss: Daily Meditations for Working Through Grief by, Martha W. Hickman (and have copies available for the members, too)
- \_\_\_\_\_ A closing reading, song, or ritual
- \_\_\_\_\_ Assign time frames to the agenda

Additional Needs:

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# THE ART OF GRIEF

## MODULE 3

### AGENDA OUTLINE:

- Welcome and Check-In Time– play music softly in background until the meeting actually begins

The chairs should be in a circle. Go around the room and have each member introduce themselves and share a little bit about their week. They can share how it went on a scale of 1-10, or a tough spot they had, or perhaps something they found themselves turning to write in their journal to process this week. This is time to check-in and to unload. This helps groups to grow in trust and in accountability.

- Ice Breaker

Autograph Sheet – This activity will help group members ask other members simple questions about certain traits and then get them to sign a sheet alongside the slot that describes a trait of theirs. Check out <http://www.kimskorner4teachertalk.com/classmanagement/icebreakers.html#Sites> for additional ideas for icebreakers if you do not like this one.

See attached sheet for the **MASTER COPY**

- Reading from Healing After Loss

***LIGHT CANDLE.***

This book will provide educational data and an organizing point for the group grieving process. It is important to read it twice, once now, and then again toward the end of the session. It is best to just read the selection that is set aside for the date you are meeting, but you certainly can choose another to read. You should either purchase one for each group member or have them purchase one themselves. This is a vital tool.

- Discussion about “Contracts”

Review the chart and handout that contain the “purposes, goals, and rules” for this group. Make sure you do not skip this because it feels too awkward, business-like or rigid. This contract is in place to help keep the group focused and on track. It needs to be done at each session.

- Discussion about “Gaining Strength”

Go around the circle and ask people to share a way in which they gained strength in childhood / school days. It should be something they thought, felt or did in order to cope with tough stuff or difficult situations. Some people may have items that involve other people, some may be solitary items: like playing jacks by myself, or playing pirates with the neighbors.

People are allowed to pass if they are not able to share.

- Journaling/Art Time

Now it is time for them to write in their journal about what they did with the deceased person that gave them strength. What thoughts, words, feelings and activities were shared by them in the process of coping? Ask everyone to split up and go to a table by themselves. Have them take out their journals and create (make sure the “creating” tools are available for each session) one or more pages in their journals.

When they are finished, ask them to make a sketch in their journal that exemplifies strength. Have them sketch themselves into this image. It may be a simple stick drawing or an elaborate pen and ink.

Leave your qualifiers for the project vague like they are listed above so that people have the freedom to interpret and create in whatever direction they are able or led to go. Tell them that it is their impression of what they think the assignment is that is most important. They should create based on what comes to mind when they hear what the assignment is.

- Sharing our “Creations”

Go around the room and share the creations with the group. Allow people to elaborate or remain vague based on their desires and capabilities at the moment. Remind them they may pass if they do not wish or are not able to share.

- Reading from Healing After Loss

Reread the earlier selection.

- Closing – *Extinguish Candle after Closing*

Use the closing of your choice – use it every week.

NOTES: \_\_\_\_\_

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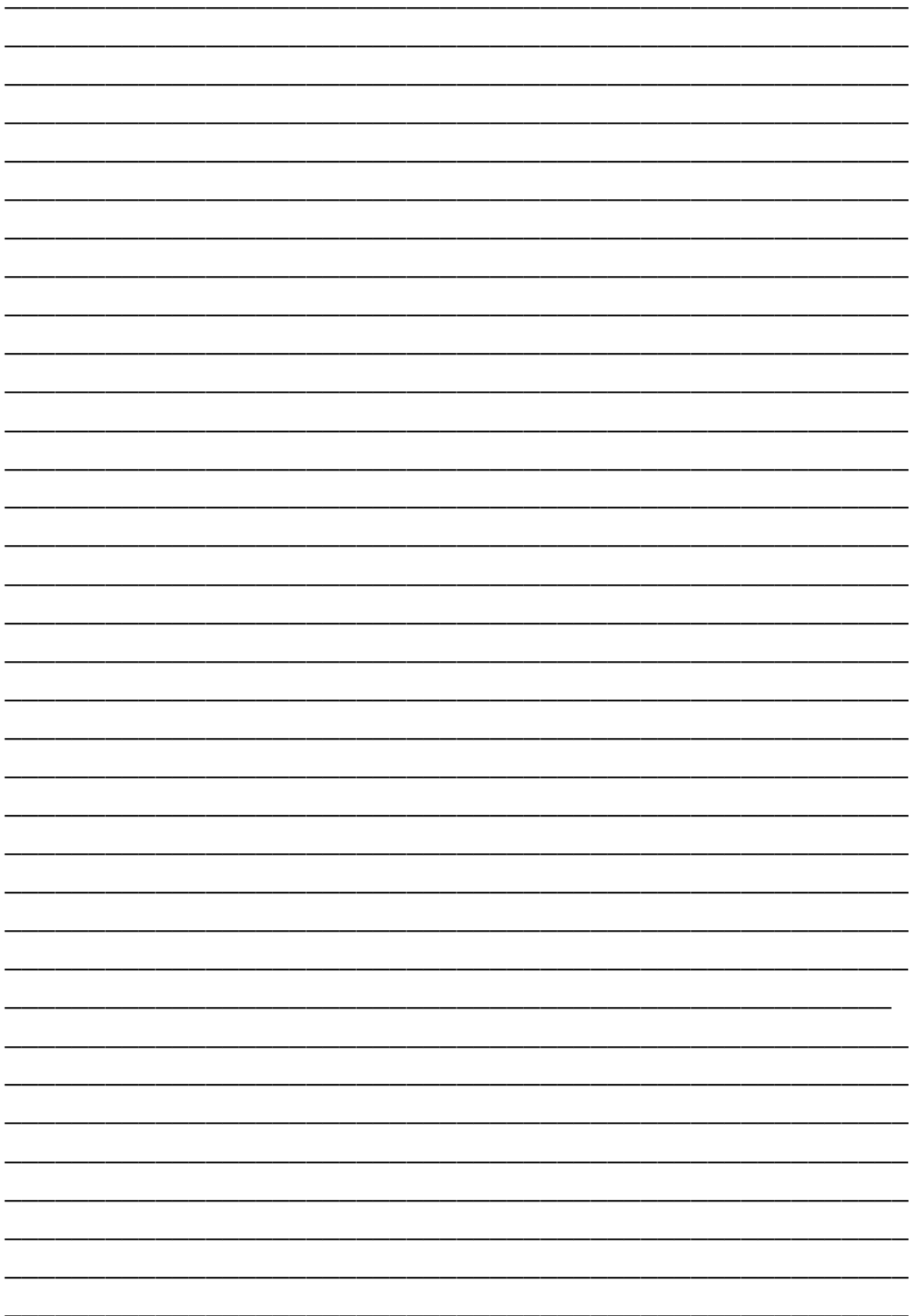
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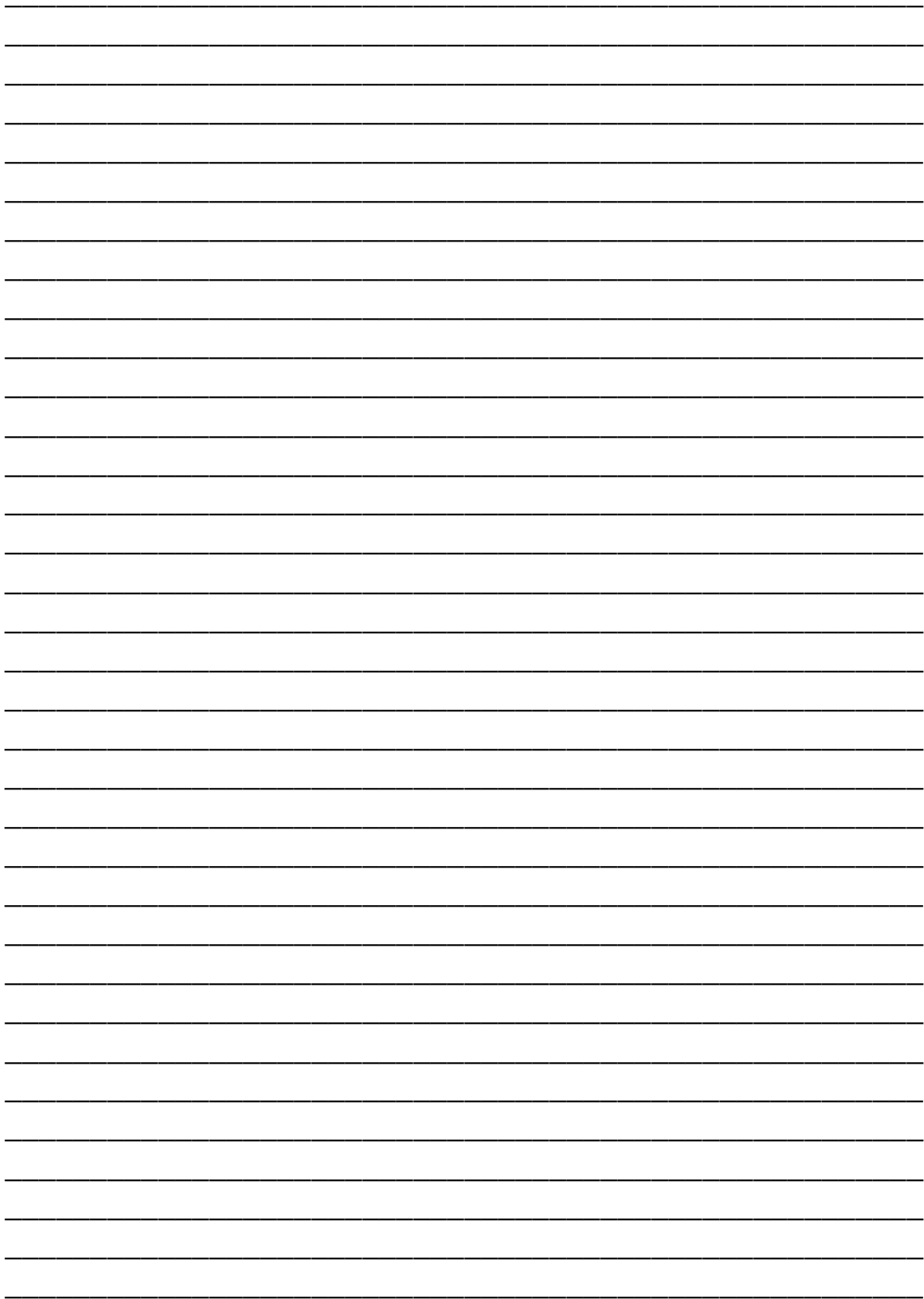
Before you can lead others with their strength issues you should use this space to write out your responses to the issues presented:

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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_





# THE ART OF GRIEF

## WEEKLY TOOLBOX

Ideas, Links, Activities, and Readings for Group Members

- Check out how other people cope with change and loss at:  
<http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/familydevelopment/components/7269-3.html>
- Make a list of things you do when you are under stress
- Make a list of things you do to help other people when they are under stress
- Check out the Quote Garden quotes about “Stress”  
<http://www.quote garden.com/memory.html>
- Check out:
- Read “A Hand Before the Eyes” at:  
<http://www.lighthousehospice.net/articles/Hand.pdf>
- Check out the Guide to Grief:  
[http://www.hospicenet.org/html/grief\\_guide.html](http://www.hospicenet.org/html/grief_guide.html)
- Check out “Coping Skills for Transitions” at:  
<http://www.uoregon.edu/~counsel/transitions.htm>

# THE ART OF GRIEF

## PURPOSE:

- The purpose of our group is to give everyone a safe and neutral space in which to allow their feelings of grief and loss to come out.
- It is also our purpose to connect with other individuals who have experienced deep loss so we can feel normal and connected to people who do understand.
- It is also our purpose that we will be available to help people resolve and solve issues when they are ready and ask for help.
- It is also our purpose to allow people to try new forms of expression. These forms include (but are not limited to) painting, journaling, sketching, drawing, sculpting, montaging, writing poetry/story/song, and performing.

## GOALS:

- To enable people to express what is going on inside
- To enable people to feel they are being heard
- To enable people to create
- To enable people to heal amid their grief and loss
- To provide a routine and safe environment for mourners

## RULES:

- We begin and end on time
- One person speaks at a time
- We do not try to solve anyone's issues unless asked
- We do not monopolize a conversation or session
- We are allowed to pass in discussions if we are not able to share

# AUTOGRAPH SHEET

## ICEBREAKER

**AUTOGRAPH SHEET:** Participants are given a sheet with various traits on it. The objective is to find a person in the group who fits one of the descriptions and get that person's autograph next to the trait. When making up the list, be creative, but include traits pertinent to the group. Each person may sign each sheet only once. Here are some examples:

Likes broccoli \_\_\_\_\_

Balances his/her checkbook \_\_\_\_\_

Has been to a fortune teller \_\_\_\_\_

Speaks another language \_\_\_\_\_

Cuts their own hair \_\_\_\_\_

Loves to garden \_\_\_\_\_

Is a good cook \_\_\_\_\_

Is a grandparent \_\_\_\_\_

Likes liver \_\_\_\_\_

Has a birthday in December \_\_\_\_\_

## *From the pulpit*

# A hand before the eyes can obscure a mountain

*Rev. Fr. Thomas Johnson-Medland*

I have looked back over my shoulder a thousand times to the ricocheting sounds of ice breaking and frozen tree limbs tapping as the wind forces her way through the woods along the Delaware River. Whenever I look back, all that is behind me speaks to me about who I am, where I have been, and what I have done. History is rich in nutrients and fiber.

I have also looked up to see the black depth of space peppered with silver blue balls of gas that shimmer and swirl with color and life. I find it hard to believe that those small, distant lights are worlds separate unto themselves. Mystery is rich in awe.

Yet I cannot grasp the totality

of existence all at once. I must choose a focus, and determine how doggedly I will stay with that choice. For that choice will change the vantage points from which I look over my shoulder or up at the sky.

The Talmud teaches that the greatest of mountains can be obscured from sight by the smallest of hands placed in front of the eyes. I first read these words 30 years ago in a collection of Talmudic wisdom. These words have never left me; in fact, they have been accentuated by my proximity to death during my career in hospice.

Small things, minuscule things can hide the most majestic sights. What we focus on is important. Do we see the hand or the mountain? Some of the things we choose to focus on in life may seem impressive, but they are merely gnats, pestering us, keeping us from

noticing the vista that would inspire awe and bring us to tears.

Hands in front of mountains. Do we look at our hand, or do we escape the confines of the immediate and view the mountain off in the distance? When I look over my shoulder to see the place from which the wind has come to crack the ice and rattle the trees, I forfeit my chance to see the bridge ahead of me. Straining to catch sight of a shooting star in the vast darkness above, I neglect the pebble at my boot. Loss and gain. This for that. I must choose what to focus on. And in so doing, I alter the meaning of my life.

Somehow, this is both awesome and comforting. We cannot have it all; we must select a focus. The selections we make are tied up with the history and mystery we are always tromping around in. Who we are is wrapped up in

where we have been and which choices we have made.

This morning I was walking along the Delaware River—the divide between Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Eight hours later I am in the chapel of a Franciscan Retreat house in Scottsdale, Arizona.

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*T*ime is valuable to dying patients," she told me.  
"If you say one minute, mean one minute."

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I must choose again where to focus. I am in Scottsdale to spend time with Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, the guru of death and dying. (If she heard me call her that, she would kick me hard in the backside.) Having been friends for only six years, and always at a distance, should I wonder why this great teacher, whose health is failing, has asked me to come see her? Or should I hear the call of one person to another, one caregiver to another, for the kind of support we cannot attract, or find within our hearts to accept from others?

Elizabeth and I discussed the nature of errant spiritual (and sometimes psychosocial) care; the errors in care that occur when therapeutic workers forget the most important part of the job: *listening*. Elizabeth linked listening to another important skill: *sticking to your word*. Listening and honestly communicating both open an integrity that is central to two people truly being with each other.

When we provide care, or when we are simply with people, we tend to get into our own little

worlds. We are looking for what we want to find, or are trying to find a way to say what it is we want to say. We need to spend more time hearing anew what people say—they may be saying different things than we are hearing.

Sticking to your word is, in a deeper sense, a call toward

remaining faithful to what we tell people. This skill, like listening, revolves around focus. We owe it to our patients—to those we are community with—to focus on what they say. We also owe it to them to focus on what we say . . . and to follow through.

Elizabeth made this clear. She asked me to poach an egg for her—a task she said she had repeatedly tried to teach to interns. "Only one has gotten it right," she said. I headed to the kitchen, feeling a little pressure. I said, "I'll be back in 10 minutes."

Twenty-five minutes later I came back into the room. Elizabeth scolded me for not being back on time. "Time is valuable to dying patients. If you say one minute, *mean* one minute. If you say 10, *mean* 10."

She was right and I knew it. It hit me hard, though. Not just because I had misrepresented myself to Elizabeth, but also because, in the midst of a care-related issue, I was able to feel the gravity of time and its importance to the dying. *Time is precious*.

We joked about me being a clergyman. In announcing my

arrival, her aide had told her, "Your friend the clergyman is here." Elizabeth told her she didn't have any friends who were clergymen. When she heard my voice, she told her aide, "That's Tom, let him in."

Several times she has said to me that she can smell clergymen. "They are all OCD, and I can smell them a mile away." I told her that I agreed with her about the OCD thing, but that she had missed my scent.

We reminisced about the first conversations we had ever shared, about how to best provide therapeutic spiritual support for patients and how to help pastors learn to listen. Back then, Elizabeth had been very direct and very clear. Years later, she had not changed. I reminded her that her advice for me back then for the other clergy was to "scare the hell out of them. Get them to put down their prayer books and listen to what the dying are telling them."

She asked about my prayer beads. Prayer ropes are a part of traditional Orthodox spirituality and I am in the Orthodox priesthood. We pray the Jesus Prayer (a short devotional prayer) on each of the knots tied into the rope as they pass through our fingers. My beads, which I had picked them up at a Buddhist temple, were a pleasant switch from the usual knots. Elizabeth asked if she could wear them. I *had* to give them to her; they looked perfect on her. At that moment I had a sense of deep joy and resignation. She has done so much, had so many wonderful moments. This is the force behind her drive.

My visit was not only about being with a friend who wanted

to discuss some spiritual issues, reminisce over some work we share, and laugh at some good stories. It was about learning how to value where we have been and what has passed through our lives. A look at meaning and response.

Elizabeth had been trying for years to get me to read Victor Frankl's book *Man's Search for Meaning*. Every year she would

recently published articles. I knew that Elizabeth was unable to hold them and focus long enough to get through them all. I asked her if she would like me to read them to her. I will never forget her smile as she listened to me read them. It was such a "meaning-full" event for me to read these words to the teacher who had taught me how to think, feel, and listen in new ways.

did, she gave me a swift kick in the backside. "There, it is finished. Take me outside for a cigarette." And that is what we did.

My time with Elizabeth was another reminder that the choices we make affect the way we weave the tapestry of our lives. Everything is connected. All of it makes up the meaning of our lives. The choices we make determine what comes next. Where we look matters. Friends matter. Listening matters. Following through with what we say matters. Trust matters. Feathers matter.

As I was waiting for my van back to the airport, the wind blew from behind, from over my shoulder. When I turned to acknowledge the presence of that breeze—of that something from my past—what blew in was the serenity that this had been what I was meant to do.

I was glad I had come to be with a friend. I was doing what I am here on earth to do. This one choice was about all my choices. This trip had meaning, and that meaning was connected to *my* meaning.

I will always be about the task of caring for those close to the veil. Somehow, death and dying is what I am here to work with. Living in the midst of the dying is my call . . . my vocation. Sharing stories with anyone who cares to offer, who cares to listen, is what is most important. I am here to listen. I am here to tell tales. I am here to be friend and community for those around me.

### Acknowledgment

*The author would like to thank Lighthouse Hospice for making his trip to Arizona happen, and Hospice Pharmacia, the company that Lighthouse works with for its patients' medications and for pharmacological education.*

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*There is a drive in all of us to seek happiness and meaning. We are . . . most happy when we feel we have been "meaning-full."*

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ask if I had read it. Although I had always wanted to, I had never gotten around to it. So the one thing I had to do before going to see her was to read the book. The day she told me I had better come soon, I finally bought it. By the time I had finished my arrangements for the trip, I had finished the book. Thank God. Elizabeth was right in all she said about helping people hear the meaning in their own lives. She was right about *listening*. Meaning is most important.

There is a drive in all of us to seek happiness and meaning. We are most stable when we are able to recognize our meaning; we are most happy when we feel we have been "meaning-full."

We spent time talking about rabbits, pets, and wild animals. She asked me to find her a hawk feather. She loves feathers and misses being able to find them for herself. I was able to find her one and sent it to her for Valentine's Day this past February.

I had brought some of my

It was deeply healing for both of us to share what I had learned—from her. My words reflected my process, a process that Elizabeth has been a part of, and sharing what I had learned from her was an acknowledgment that friendship is a circle. When I finished reading my articles, I asked if she thought I "got it." She said, "Yes, Tom, you do."

I told her there were thousands of us now: many, many workers in hospice and other professions who understood the work that she had begun. I told her that we would carry on in this same vein. I asked her to trust us to do the *great work* that she has begun and to give us her blessing, so she could do what she needs to do—which she now says is "to get out of here."

She began sprinkling me with imaginary fairy dust, or holy water, saying, "Mazel tov." I thanked her for all she has done for us—for me. She told me she was not done with the blessing, to "turn around." And, when I

# THE ART OF GRIEF

## MODULE 4:

### “Places we connected.”

#### *Introduction to Module:*

Place has deep and intrinsic meaning for all of us throughout all of our lives. We attach ourselves to certain places and become dependent on their environs for feeling secure and or stable.

Some people bond to the country and need to have trees and lakes around them. They feel a oneness with nature and require its loud chatter, powerful winds, and moments of stillness to feel whole.

Other people bond to the city and need to have the constant activity and commotion of thousands of people living in close proximity. They feel connected to all the hustle and bustle and thrive in an active and chaotic environment.

Neither place is better than the other. People often are able to blend their appreciation of both places. What takes real skill is learning what your particular balance is. Some people know they need to have one day a week or one wee a year in either the city or the country. If they don't get their fix, they feel lost.

It will be important for people to become aware of the places that they have spent time with their departed loved one. Where did they live? Where did they travel to? Where did they go with other

people? What were their favorite spots? What are the favorite spots of the living loved ones?

Because there is a connection to the departed in these places, some people will find some strong ambivalence about going to these places by themselves – without the deceased. Other people will have strong needs to go to those places so they can feel connected to the departed. As with all of our grief, each person will do it differently.

Like in other weeks, we will begin to talk about place in terms of where we made connections when we were young. Where did we go away on vacation to? After we delve into those thoughts, we will draw our attention to place and its impact on our current lives and our relationship with the departed.

Place is so important in the life of people that whole regions develop their own cultures based on place and how it impacts them. Think of Appalachia in America. An entire culture and way of life has emerged there that has its own folklore, music, poetry, stories, foods, crafts, clothing, government, architecture and legends.

Every place we go eventually develops these same things, and we become connected and woven into them. It is not uncommon for people to almost feel like a new individual when they visit familiar places because the cultures may be so different from what they live in every day. This is how people find a sense of refreshment there.

In many ways, the drive to create a consistent and routine environment in our bereavement groups is for this exact purpose. We are trying to build a culture that provides a place for people to be and to mend.

### ***“Don’t Forget” Checklist:***

- \_\_\_\_\_ A box of tissues
- \_\_\_\_\_ Email or call everyone to ask them to think about places they went with their loved one and places they went in childhood
- \_\_\_\_\_ Gather together a box of magazines – try to find travel magazines or magazines that show a lot of places that people go for recreation and vacation
- \_\_\_\_\_ Bring poster board for each member of the group
- \_\_\_\_\_ Bring glue and scissors
- \_\_\_\_\_ Have plenty of paper, pens, pencils, journals and art supplies on hand (markers, paints, crayons, poster paper, brushes, finger paints)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Have name tags (use these until session 5) and sharpies
- \_\_\_\_\_ A Post-It type flipchart and markers
- \_\_\_\_\_ Handouts of Purpose, Goals and Rules for the Group
- \_\_\_\_\_ Posters of Purpose, Goals and Rules for the Group
- \_\_\_\_\_ Handouts of local and national grief resources
- \_\_\_\_\_ Soft, “wordless”, relaxation music and CD player
- \_\_\_\_\_ Candle and matches
- \_\_\_\_\_ A referral list for yourself to make referrals when peoples’ grief becomes complicated or dangerous
- \_\_\_\_\_ A plan with specific protocols for dealing with peoples’ complicated grief and mourning
- \_\_\_\_\_ A copy of: Healing After Loss: Daily Meditations for Working Through Grief by, Martha W. Hickman (and have copies available for the members, too)
- \_\_\_\_\_ A closing reading, song, or ritual
- \_\_\_\_\_ Assign time frames to the agenda

Additional Needs:

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# THE ART OF GRIEF

## MODULE 4

### AGENDA OUTLINE:

- Welcome and Check-In Time – play music softly in background until the meeting actually begins

The chairs should be in a circle. Go around the room and have each member introduce themselves and share a little bit about their week. They can share how it went on a scale of 1-10, or a tough spot they had, or perhaps something they found themselves turning to write in their journal to process this week. This is time to check-in and to unload. This helps groups to grow in trust and in accountability.

- Ice Breaker

**GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION:** Each group member is from a different geographic location, but together they will form a map. Once a map has been established by the group, each group member will stand where he/she thinks they belong to make the map as close to scale as possible. So, if Sally is from Camden, she stands in a place that represents Camden. Sue, who lives five miles East of Camden, will stand in a place corresponding to that location. People need to work together and spatially figure out locations.

See attached sheet for the *MASTER COPY*

- Reading from Healing After Loss

*LIGHT CANDLE.*

This book will provide educational data and an organizing point for the group grieving process. It is important to read it twice, once now, and then again toward the end of the session. It is best to just read the selection that is set aside for the date you are meeting, but you certainly can choose another to read. You should either purchase one for each group member or have them purchase one themselves. This is a vital tool.

- Discussion about “Contracts”

Review the chart and handout that contain the “purposes, goals, and rules” for this group. Make sure you do not skip this because it feels too awkward, business-like or rigid. This contract is in place to help keep the group focused and on track. It needs to be done at each session.

- Discussion about “Places We Connected”

Go around the circle and ask people to share places they went in childhood. These may be vacation spots, visiting spots, places they lived, or where they had family. Ask them to share some memories from those places and then how those places made them feel.

People are allowed to pass if they are not able to share.

- Journaling/Art Time

Hand out the magazines and poster board and ask people to make a collage of places they have connected with their loved one. When they are finished the

collage it is time for them to write in their journal about places they went with their loved one who is now deceased. Have them list the places out and then write a small memory they have from all of those places. Ask them to add how those places made them feel.

Leave your qualifiers for the project vague like they are listed above so that people have the freedom to interpret and create in whatever direction they are able or led to go. Tell them that it is their impression of what they think the assignment is that is most important. They should create based on what comes to mind when they hear what the assignment is.

- Sharing our “Creations”

Go around the room and share the collages and journaled items each member created. Have them share the places, memories and feelings of that place. Be sure that as people share you provide instruction on the value of space and how some people will have different responses to whether they will return to those places without their loved ones. Use the words from the introduction above to help guide the discussion.

- Reading from Healing After Loss

Reread the earlier selection.

- Closing – *Extinguish Candle after Closing*

Use the closing of your choice – use it every week.

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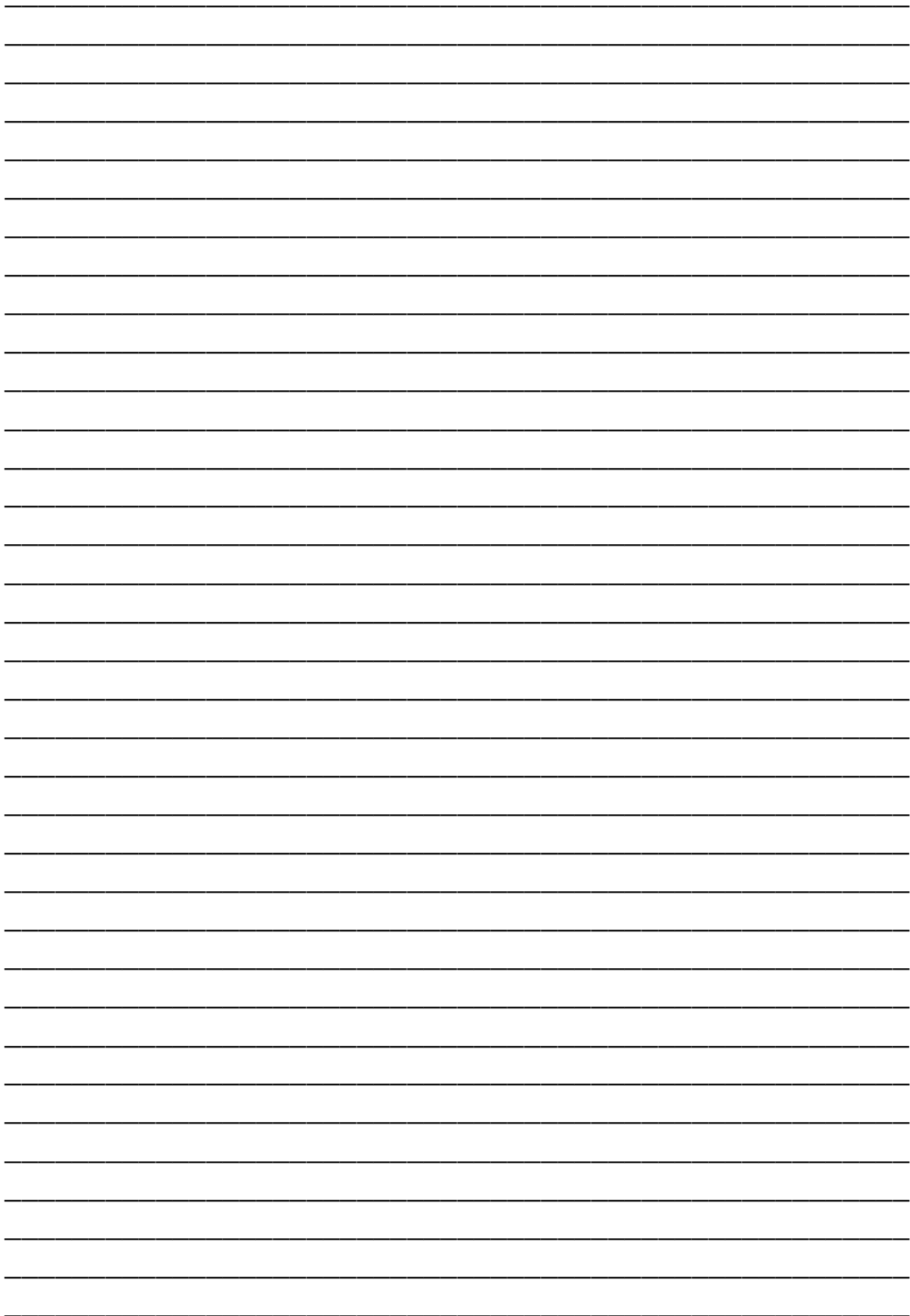
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Before you can lead others with their PLACE sharing, you should right out yours – **THIS IS NOT TO SHARE**, just for you to experience the exercise. What has PLACES did you go with a loved one that has died and what did you do there?

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# THE ART OF GRIEF

## WEEKLY TOOLBOX

Ideas, Links, Activities, and Readings for Group Members

- Check out how other people cope with change and loss at:  
<http://www.susangoedde.com/articles/coping2.htm>
- Make a list of places you would still like to visit
- Make a list of places you would like to visit with other people
- Check out the Quote Garden quotes about “Places”  
<http://www.quote garden.com/memory.html>
- Read “In the Same Place” attached:
- Check out this site on Grief:  
[http://www.helpguide.org/mental/grief\\_loss.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/grief_loss.htm)
- Check out “No one told me about vacations” at:  
<http://www.tcfcanada.net/articles/holidays/vacations.htm>

# THE ART OF GRIEF

## PURPOSE:

- The purpose of our group is to give everyone a safe and neutral space in which to allow their feelings of grief and loss to come out.
- It is also our purpose to connect with other individuals who have experienced deep loss so we can feel normal and connected to people who do understand.
- It is also our purpose that we will be available to help people resolve and solve issues when they are ready and ask for help.
- It is also our purpose to allow people to try new forms of expression. These forms include (but are not limited to) painting, journaling, sketching, drawing, sculpting, montaging, writing poetry/story/song, and performing.

## GOALS:

- To enable people to express what is going on inside
- To enable people to feel they are being heard
- To enable people to create
- To enable people to heal amid their grief and loss
- To provide a routine and safe environment for mourners

## RULES:

- We begin and end on time
- One person speaks at a time
- We do not try to solve anyone's issues unless asked
- We do not monopolize a conversation or session
- We are allowed to pass in discussions if we are not able to share

# *Healing techniques*

## In the same place: Therapeutic ground- ing in poetry groups

*Father Thomas Johnson-Medland, CSJ*

*"We spend our whole lives in  
the same place and never  
leave . . ."*

—Charles Wright,  
"Returned to the Yaak  
Cabin, I Overhear an Old  
Greek Song" in *Appalachia*

In this line, Charles Wright identifies both who we are and the Appalachian Mountains. These mountains, some of the oldest on the planet, have not strayed from where they have always been. They have slowly changed shape—some erosion here, and an alluvial fan

there—but they have not gone away.

Our lives are like those mountains. We tend not to stray too far from where we are. There are pieces of our identity that follow us through all the days of our lives. Some of this is a result of our family ties, our social orientations, or our faith; however, some of it simply seems to be part of this magnetic collection of cells and atoms we call "I."

I have noticed this steadfastness and grounding more and more each day I am alive. I have also noticed it in the lives of the elderly. Many of the men and women living as institutionalized elderly are not having their basic needs met. By basic needs, I

do not mean their food, clothing, medicine, or shelter. Instead, I am talking about their basic need to remain attached to the lives they have lived.

At this moment, our lives are built on all of the countless moments that have gone before. Each event we have experienced and each trial we have surmounted comprises our present day identity. We are, like the universe, the sum total of our matter—some of that matter exists down in the basement of our years, out of sight and hidden from the present time. However, we tend to neglect the past in order to focus on our present. Nevertheless, the past continues to inform who we are and how we behave.

People spend their lives attached to things around them and things that come their way. Sometimes these things include a song, at other times it is a poem, story, painting, letter, person, place, or pet. You could add to this list for hours; but, my point is, there are things that make up who we are, things that inform our identity, that alter and enrich our lives.

Five months ago, our hospice began a program designed to add value to the lives of residents in facilities within our service area. This program offered a poetry reading once a month in three different facilities. The poetry readings lasted from 15 to 30 minutes and were offered to all those who were interested.

Thus far, interest in and attendance at these poetry readings have been wonderful. Although I felt this project would add some dimension to life in an institution, I was unaware of how deeply the connection to art was needed in the lives of the elderly.

Bringing art back into their lives produced some encouraging results. Participants in our poetry groups have been reminded of their many days gone by. Simply hearing a line about "cold white snow" produced five minutes worth of conversation about childhood memories of snow and winter. A line from a poem about a "warbler" produced a 10-minute talk about walks in

nature and color.

The mere mention of Robert Frost, Goethe, or Tagore opened the eyes of the men and women with brightness. I was amazed to see previously silent attendees sit up and talk about poets I did not believe they would know. These were people that had formerly only listened, but when their ears heard a name from the annals of their past, they engaged with vigor—acting like 20- and 25-year-olds.

The new vitality that these simple poetry sessions have added to the lives of the residents has astounded me. The original goal of the poetry sessions had been to decrease isolation among the residents; however, the impact of these groups has been more extensive than I had hoped. They have connected people to a fuller version of their lives—to their greater selves. They have enhanced resident's memories of how large their lives really are. They have bridged the gap to the person they had forgotten they once were. This has been true even for the Alzheimer's patients. I often wish that the entire staff of the facility could be present at the poetry sessions so that their residents would dumbfound them as well. I am sure that their presence would alter the mix, though.

So deep and so wise are the hearts of the people for whom we provide care. During one session

in which we read the haiku of Basho and Issa, a resident perked up and added, "I like these. My daughter wrote one a long time ago. It went something like this, 'Your tear falls on my ear, that I may know your pain.'"

I was rendered to tears myself. This particular resident had never spoken during the first two sessions. Her words, which came from a deep place within—a place that we tend to forget does exist for those who are institutionalized—brought tears to the eyes of many in attendance that day.

There are numerous other examples I could give to demonstrate the value of these poetry sessions. As a result, we have decided to devote more effort to this program. We have found volunteers to work with us to help expand it. We challenge churches, schools, and our community to send us volunteers.

Coping with who we are at the present moment is only possible if we consider all that we have collected along the way. Our present is informed and enhanced by our connection to the larger "I"—all in the past that has made us who we are. When we recognize this bridge to fullness and commit to its value, then we move further away from the helplessness and depression that the institutionalized elderly often feel. Reintroducing poetry has been an effective way of doing just that.

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