One of the tasks of mourning, according to grief theorist William Worden (2018), is to process the pain of grief. This is a very difficult task, as the pain of grief is the most challenging when you are recently bereaved, because the emotions can feel so erratic and out of control. You feel as though you are on a roller coaster ride. One moment you feel up and in the next moment you feel down. Even after the acute grief reactions subside, you can be triggered emotionally by something that you see, hear, smell, taste or touch that reminds you of your deceased family member or friend. This is all part of grief. Do not be alarmed.
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As we journey through this season of spring and take time to notice the leaves and flowers unfold and bloom, consider that growing through the pain of grief is slow, like the slow and imperceptible unfolding of those tree leaves and flower petals. There is one interesting flower in the plant world that can be a paradoxical symbol of growth through the dark pain of grief. The plant is called the Princess of the Night (selenicereus grandifloras). The mind-boggling thing about this cactus plant is that it blooms a beautiful, radiant white, fragrant flower once a year and only at night. Sometimes growth and healing happen when we least expect it.

Image by Robert John Thornton (1768-1837)
In my work with grieving clients, I am often asked about signs — those incidents or moments indicating the presence of someone who has died. I have noticed that even the most cynical of individuals will tell me they saw a cardinal appear at the exact hour and minute that their person died and wonder if it means something. My response is quite simple. Throughout our lives, when incidents occur, our interpretations of them are informed by previous experiences, our current circumstances, and our particular mindset. I observe that if the event they describe brings them comfort, it does not matter if it means something. In that moment it is meaningful to you. And as a griever, take the comfort where you can.

In 1995, authors Judy Guggenheim and Bill Guggenheim published their book *Hello from Heaven* (Bantam, 1997) after interviewing more than 2,000 people about their experiences with after-death communications (ADCs). They define an after-death communication (ADC) as “a spiritual experience, which occurs when you are contacted directly and spontaneously by a deceased family member or friend, without the use of psychics, mediums, rituals, or devices of any kind.” The Guggenheims estimate that between 20 to 40 percent of Americans have had some kind of ADC. This area of research is quite limited, but the authors suggest that possessing an awareness of ADCs can be beneficial.

I don’t disagree.

In mid-March I went to lunch with my sister-in-law. We visited a small town in Connecticut unfamiliar to either of us. As we wound our way through quaint shops, we asked every shopkeeper where we should have lunch. Everyone said, “Oh, the River Tavern.” We weren’t really in the mood for tavern or pub fare, but we agreed to check it out. We walked through the door and were greeted with large windows, natural light, and a very un-tavern-like atmosphere. My sister-in-law first noticed a painting by Sol LeWitt on one wall. We were seated and I noticed a small photocopied image of another of his paintings on the bottom of the menu. We asked our server what the restaurant’s connection was with Sol LeWitt and learned that his wife, Carol, was the restaurant’s landlord; she had filled the space with her husband’s art. The server left to place our order. My sister-in-law and I were quiet for a moment before we both acknowledged how much Adam (her husband and my brother) loved Sol LeWitt’s work. Adam died suddenly in January and this was the first restaurant meal my sister-in-law and I were sharing.

We reasoned it was purely coincidence that we ended up surrounded by paintings by one of Adam’s favorite artists in a restaurant we had not heard of… in a town we did not know. And yet, it felt like we were meant to be there. Sign? Maybe. Coincidence? Probably. Meaningful? Absolutely.
I intellectually understand and believe that we are all here in this earthly space for a limited time, but emotionally it seems impossible to accept when I lose my loved ones. One of the most difficult losses I have experienced is the loss of my beloved husband. One definition for the word loss is “the state of feeling grief when deprived of someone of value." I surely value my husband.

On February 22, 2021, my husband unwillingly stepped away from his earthly life. He was taken; he suffered a massive brain trauma. Yes, I was instantly deprived of him, that is what death does. I was left feeling totally without a sense of who I am. Immediately, I lost my sense of self, purpose, identity, hopes, and future.

I was abandoned even though it was not intentional. He was killed, it wasn’t his choice. Nevertheless, that did not change my feeling of abandonment. I carry the same feeling for more than forty years when my father stepped away due to cancer. I felt abandoned then and I feel abandoned now.

The grief is intense and it takes over my entire being. My mind constantly wonders about everything. The why of his death…the who that caused his death. Simple decisions are now complicated. Every step I take is now delayed because I no longer trust myself, anything, or anyone. People, places…nothing is the same.

I often question my mental health because the loss of my husband consumes me daily and for many hours in each day. And, in the beginning, which was over one year ago, all day long I was thinking about what happened to my husband. The questions of death just repeat in a cycle. The beginning being two years ago or a moment ago. The loss of my beloved husband makes me question everything I had ever known. I repeatedly questioned my God: why? My world is very different. This world is very different. Death and loss left me without a foundation. I am like a house when its foundation is damaged due to an earthquake. His death was one of my shattering earthquakes.

Daily, I now work on my foundation in order to find myself again. There are moments that the loss of my husband consumes me and I wonder if I will ever be whole again. His death shattered my mind, body, and soul. I aged instantly when I was told by medical personnel that they will not do anything for my beloved husband because “he had no prognosis.” Yes, my foundation was shaken and it almost crumbled.

Nevertheless, I am standing two years and a little more in from that day. I am working moment by moment on the foundation of my house, this mind, this body, and this soul. Day to day, moment by moment, I am putting the shattered and scattered pieces of my life together again; even though I know the pieces of my life will never fit together as they did prior to the loss of my beloved husband.

Yes, LOSS consumes, LOSS confuses, LOSS hurts, and LOSS leaves me adrift at times; but the memory of my husband’s love encourages me to continue as he would have wanted me to do. Yes, LOVE heals, LOVE hurts, LOVE encourages, and LOVE is never lost even when our loved one steps away or is taken away from this physical life. Love remains and holds you even when the physical person is no longer here to hold you. “In His Name, Ronald George LaCruise.”
Precious Moments (6-9 year-olds)
Monday: Jacqueline 4:00PM - 5:00PM

Tweens (10-12 year-olds)
Tuesday: Jacqueline 5:00PM - 6:30PM
Thursday: Jacqueline 5:30PM - 7:00PM

Teens (13-17 year-olds)
Thursday: Jacqueline 4:00PM - 5:00PM

Death of a Child Bereavement Support:
2 Years and Beyond
2nd & 4th Thursday
Joanne 12:30PM - 2:00PM

Death of a Child
Monday: Joanne 5:30PM - 7:00PM

Adult Death of a Parent
Thursday: Joanne 5:30PM - 7:00PM

Death of a Sibling
Tuesday: Joanne 5:30PM - 7:00PM

Death of a Spouse/Partner
Tuesday: Joanne 1:00PM - 2:30PM

Death of a Spouse/Partner
Wednesday: Joanne 5:30PM - 7:00PM

Spanish Speaking Group
Wednesday: Yvette 1:00PM - 2:30PM

Men's Discussion Group
1st Thursday: Jackeline 12:30PM - 2:00PM

Supportive Connections:
Parents/Guardians of Bereaved Children
3rd Monday: Jacqueline 6:00PM - 7:30PM

Death of a Sibling
Tuesday: Joanne 5:30PM - 7:00PM

Death of a Spouse/Partner
Wednesday: Joanne 5:30PM - 7:00PM

Spanish Speaking Group
Wednesday: Yvette 1:00PM - 2:30PM

Men's Discussion Group
1st Thursday: Jackeline 12:30PM - 2:00PM

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Yvette Ramirez, Chaplain
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Teens (13-17 year-olds)
Wednesday: Jackeline 4:00PM - 5:00PM

Young Adult Group
Wednesday: Abby 6:00PM - 7:30PM

Death of a Spouse/Partner
Thursday: Abby 4:00PM - 5:30PM

Death of a Young Spouse/Partner
Thursday: Abby 6:00PM - 7:30PM

Adult Death of a Parent
Tuesday: Jackeline 6:00PM - 7:30PM

Death of a Child
Tuesday: Abby 6:45PM - 8:15PM

Mindfulness & Movement for Grief
Wednesday: Jacqueline 6:00PM - 7:30PM

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**CONTACT US**

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Precious Moments (6-9 year-olds)
TBD

Teens (13-17 year-olds)
TBD

Adult Death of a Parent
Wednesday: Jackeline 6:00PM - 7:30PM

Death of a Young Spouse/Partner
TBD

Death of a Spouse/Partner
Monday: Edgardo 11:00AM - 12:30PM
Thursday: Jackeline 6:00PM - 7:30PM

Death of a Spouse/Partner to COVID19
Wednesday: Edgardo 6:00PM - 7:30PM

Death of a Parent to COVID19
Tuesday: Abby 5:00PM - 6:30PM

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INDIVIDUAL COUNSELING

Calvary Hospital's Bereavement Department would like to acknowledge how challenging the past few years have been, especially when grieving. As a way to extend our support, we are now offering individual bereavement counseling for a nominal fee. If you would like more information, please contact Jackie.

FOR GENERAL INQUIRIES, PLEASE CONTACT:
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TREE OF LIFE

Through the Tree of Life, we can recognize your significant naming gift in a permanent and meaningful manner. Your significant person's name will exist in perpetuity with the lifetime of the Hospital. This is a loving way of memorializing someone special to you or saying thank you, because your gift of love helps patients and families today and for many years to come.

For more information, please call 718-518-2689.

Calvary Hospital complies with applicable Federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex.

THANK YOU FOR READING!

Calvary In Touch has been made possible by a generous bequest from Michael Camara.