



HOW TO
HELP
YOURSELF &
OTHERS
HEAL
FROM LOSS

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Three Ways Rituals Help Us Heal



Rituals are not scary practices. We all have our morning rituals (e.g. shower, brush our teeth, coffee etc.) and our nighttime rituals (e.g. work out, watch TV, journal, read etc.) that we carry out faithfully. In fact, if we didn't do them something would feel off.

We also use rituals and ceremonies to mark milestones in life. Christmas, Thanksgiving, birthdays, weddings, and graduations are all events infused with ritual and ceremony. It's important to mark holidays and our "rites of passage" with celebration by taking time from our daily routine to do things differently.

So how can rituals help us to heal? Here are three important ways:

1. Rituals give us expression for our feelings and it is in expressing our feelings that we are able to move forward after loss.
2. Rituals will help us to feel the love we have for the person who has died and also to feel the love they had for us. There is no denying that love, above all else, helps us to heal.
3. Rituals performed daily will build structure into one's life. Loss is fraught with chaos and confusion so daily rituals can help us to feel more in control and therefore, reduce anxiety and stress.

Three Ways Rituals Help Us Heal

When it comes to a loved one's death, it's acceptable to commemorate their life with a funeral or memorial service. Within these events, families and friends gather for prayer, song, and tributes. It often follows with a tea or social where people speak with the family and share stories. Outside of the funeral, families are not usually invited to create additional rituals or ceremonies; however, it has been my experience, that people do, but opt to not say anything for fear of criticism. For example, a dear friend of mine makes barbecue ribs on Christmas Eve as a way to pay tribute to her mom who passed away a number of years ago. It has become her simple, but loving ritual every year that helps her face the holidays without her mother.

When both my daughters married, it was important to me to include their father in some way. They have a wonderful relationship with their stepfather and he escorted each of them down the aisle. To bring their father into the ceremony, the girls handpicked fellow peace officers he had worked with to attend in their dress uniforms. My eldest daughter had her father's Royal Canadian Mounted Police dress Stetson on display, and my younger daughter had his dress high-top boots and spurs on display. We didn't have to explain to the near two hundred guests at each of their weddings what this meant- they knew. It was moving. It was precious. And it helped us to face the day without him.

I am not promoting that people memorialize the deceased at every event. Sometimes, people create shrines or don't touch the dead person's belongings – ever! While I can't generalize the situation for everyone, but people can become stuck in their grief and this may require some intervention. What I am encouraging is that people listen to their heart, and if a family feels that including the memory of a loved one in a special event enriches it and helps to heal their loss, then they should do it. It doesn't matter what others think – they haven't walked in your shoes.

3 Tips to Release the Grip of Grief



Grief...

pays no heed to time

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How do I know for certain that grief pays no heed to time? Because recently it gripped me by the throat and it's been over two decades since my husband died.

An announcement came forth about major government funding to create guidelines for concussion and sports. I am always advocating for brain injury awareness and change. I should have been happy. Instead, I was angry and frustrated. Throughout the day I grappled with feelings that bounced from frustration to fighting back tears to anger and then to a feeling of a lump in my throat. I knew there was more to it than I understood on a conscious level and I needed to take time to work through it. That evening I immersed myself in prepping for a dinner party the next day. I listened to music while I chopped vegetables and cooked. In between thoughts my tears seemed to free fall with no regard of how stupid I thought all of this was.

When I dug deep into those feelings here is what I discovered:

3 Tips to Release the Grip of Grief

It was the 26th anniversary of my husband's death just a few days prior and the anniversary of his funeral was less than 48 hours out. After the deaths of my husband, my brother, and my friend (all within 18 months of one another), I committed to 'change the world' in their honour. I would do whatever I could and whatever it took to increase awareness about brain injury and to make a difference in the lives of the individuals and families living with the outcome of such a catastrophic event. And I felt as though I had failed. It felt like failure because nearly 20 years ago, I was promoting Universal Return to Play Guidelines that were, and remain, sound. The announcement of funding to develop new guidelines seemed unnecessary. Still, I understood that something deeper was festering for me. Suddenly, I realized that the anniversary of my husband's death is often my benchmark to measure and judge what I have done 'to change the world'.

This year I have passed the quarter century mark since their deaths and the grief that I thought was reconciled long ago had unexpectedly reared its ugly head. This has happened to me before and to my clients. It should not have been a surprise to me. Moreover, as I worked through my thoughts and feelings, I took time to implement the following tips to help loosen the grip of my unexpected grief:

3 Tips to Release the Grip of Grief

1. Understand that grief has no timeframe or agenda. It pays no heed to calendars, money in the bank, or your social status in the community. It only cares that you pay attention. **Carve out time to sit with the feelings** that are coming up for you and don't be afraid to examine them. Feel what you need to feel for however long you need to feel it and then consciously let it go. Stuffing the feeling may bring temporary relief; however, the grief you are experiencing will continue to lurk in the background and patiently wait for another opportunity to pounce.
2. If you do not have anyone to talk to, **write about what's going on**. Write it as a letter, an essay, a poem... whatever appeals to you. Writing is very cathartic. For many, including myself, writing something down equates to saying it out loud. Anything you can do to give expression to your feelings is a way of releasing the pain and sorrow.
3. Let nature wrap you in its loving arms! **Get moving**. Go outside and breathe in the fresh air. Turn on some music and let your body sway to the beat. Or do as I did and find something that you can do with your hands and allows you to work through your feelings at the same time. It's amazing what you can work through when cleaning a closet or cupboards!

In closing, please know that we are all doing the best we can with what we have from where we are at. It does not matter how much time has passed. It only matters that you continue to heal.

MUSIC AND MOVIES FOR HEALING



Music and movies contributed tremendously to my healing. I have listed my favorite ones here. I hope you will be encouraged to seek them out and listen to the songs or watch the movies. For me, they were heart healing.

Music

A Picture of Me Without You ~ Lorrie Morgan

Amazing Grace ~ Elvis Presley

MUSIC AND MOVIES FOR HEALING

Angel ~ Sarah McLachlan

Angel was written and recorded by Sarah McLachlan and was released in 1997 on her album *Surfacing*. It is reported the song was written in memory of Johnathon Melvoin, the touring keyboard player for the Smashing Pumpkins after he overdosed on heroin in 1996.

Angels Among Us ~ Alabama

Because of You ~ Kelly Clarkson & Reba McEntire

Because of You was written by Kelly Clarkson when she was 16 years old to help her deal with the emotional distress of her parents' divorce. Clarkson recorded this song in 2004 for her album *Breakaway*. She re-recorded the song in 2007 with Reba McEntire for Reba's album, *Reba: Duets*.

Believe ~ Brooks & Dunn

Bless The Broken Road ~ Rascal Flatts

Butterfly Kisses ~ Collin Ray

Calling All Angels ~ Jane Siberry & K.D. Lang

Calling All Angels – written by Jane Siberry and recorded as a duet with K.D. Lang on Siberry's album *When I Was a Boy*. This song was later re-recorded for the soundtrack of the movie *Pay It Forward*.

Candle in the Wind ~ Elton John

Candle in the Wind (Princess Diana Tribute) – originally written in 1973 by Elton John and Bernie Taupin. Elton John rewrote the lyrics in 1997 following Princess Diana's Death and performed it at her funeral.

MUSIC AND MOVIES FOR HEALING

Can You Hear Me When I Talk to You? ~ Ashley Gearing

Can You Hear Me When I Talk to You? was recorded by Ashley Gearing for her chart debut in 2003. When Gearing released this single she was 12 years old making her the youngest solo artist to enter the country charts, a record previously held for 46 years by Brenda Lee.

Dance With My Father ~ Luther Vandross

Dance With My Father – written by Luther Vandross & Richard Marx in 2003 after Luther Vandross suffered a debilitating stroke. It was written in memory of his father who died when Vandross was young. His beautiful memory of his father dancing in the house with his mom sparked the song. Vandross died July 2, 2005, as a result of the stroke.

Dancing in the Sky ~ Dani & Lizzi

Daniel ~ Elton John

Don't Take the Girl ~ Tim McGraw

Fly ~ Celine Dion

Go Rest High On That Mountain ~ Vince Gill

Goodbye ~ Celine Dion

Goodbye (The Saddest Word) – written by Robert John “Mutt” Lange was recorded and released on Céline Dion’s album, a New Day Has Come in 2002. Dion had heard the song three years prior but turned it down. After recording it she said, “Now, being a mother, I found the strength to sing it, but it was hard.

Hallelujah ~ Leonard Cohen

He Was My Brother ~ Simon & Garfunkel

MUSIC AND MOVIES FOR HEALING

He's My Son ~ Mark Schultz

Home ~ Michael Buble

Honey ~ Bobby Goldsboro

How Can I Help You to Say Goodbye ~ Patty Loveless

How Great Thou Art ~ Susan Boyle

I Can't Stop Loving You ~ Martina McBride

I Hope You Dance ~ Lee Ann Womack

I Know You By Heart ~ Eva Cassidy

I Know You by Heart – Eva Cassidy. This song was released on the album Songbird, two years after Eva Cassidy's death. Cassidy had a malignant mole removed from her back in 1993. In the summer of 1996, she learned the melanoma had spread to her lungs and bones. She died November 2, 1996, at the age of 33.

I Will Always Love You ~ Dolly Parton

I Won't Let Go ~ Rascal Flatts

I Know You By Heart ~ Eva Cassidy

I'll Stand by You ~ Carrie Underwood

If I Had Only Known ~ Reba McEntire

If I Had Only Known – written by Jana Standfield and Craig Morris. This song was recorded and released in 1991 on Reba McEntire's album For My Broken Heart, in memory of her touring band members who were killed in an airplane crash. In the album notes Reba stated, "A form of healing for all our broken hearts."

MUSIC AND MOVIES FOR HEALING

If Tomorrow Never Comes ~ Garth Brooks

If Your' Reading This ~ Tim McGraw

Just Once More ~ The Nelson Brothers

Knocking On Heaven's Door ~ Bob Dylan

Last Game of the Season ~ David Geddes

Let It Be ~ The Beatles

Light a Candle ~ Paul Alexander

Live Like You Were Dying ~ Tim McGraw

Love Can Build a Bridge ~ The Judds

Love Can Build a Bridge – written by Naomi Judd, Paul Overstreet, and John Barlow Jarvis; recorded by Naomi and her daughter Wynonna Judd and released in 1991. This song later became a covered charity single in support of the Children of Rwanda.

My Heart Will Go On ~ Céline Dion

Not Too Far From Here ~ Michael Crawford

On Eagle's Wings ~ Michael Crawford

One More Day ~ Diamond Rio

River of Time ~ The Judds

Say Something ~ A Great Big World

MUSIC AND MOVIES FOR HEALING

Season in the Sky ~ Terry Jacks

Somewhere Over the Rainbow ~ Katharine McPhee

Tears In Heaven ~ Eric Clapton

Tears In Heaven was written after the death of Eric's 4-year old son, Conner.

Tell Me Margaret (Who Am I Gonna Call on Sunday) ~ Johnny Reid

Thank You ~ Johnny Reid

The Dance ~ Garth Brooks

The Living Years ~ Mike & The Mechanics

The Lord's Prayer ~ II Divo

The Old Man ~ Phil Coulter

The Three Bells ~ The Browns

The Prayer ~ Charlotte Church & Josh Groban

There Goes My Life ~ Kenny Chesney

There You'll Be ~ Faith Hill

These Broken Hearts ~ Reba McEntire & Vince Gill

MUSIC AND MOVIES FOR HEALING

'Til I Can Make It On My Own ~ Billy Gilman

'Til I can Make It On My Own – co-written by Tammy Wynette, George Richey, and Billy Sherrill. This song repeatedly was Tammy Wynette's personal favorite and was released in 1976 on her album with the same name. This song has also been recorded by Kenny Rogers & Dottie West, Martina McBride, and Billy Gilman.

Till We Meet Again ~ Johnny Reid

Unchained Melody ~ Elvis Presley

Vincent ~ Don MacClean

What a Wonderful World ~ Louis Armstrong & Kenny G

When I Cry ~ Jann Arden

When I Get Where I'm Going ~ Brad Paisley & Dolly Parton

Where You Are ~ Josh Groban

Who You'd Be Today ~ Kenny Chesney

Why ~ Rascal Flatts

Will You Remember Me ~ Sarah McLachlan

Wind Beneath My Wings ~ Bette Midler

Working Man ~ Rita MacNeil

Working Man – written and recorded by Riita Mac|neil on her 1988 album, Reason to Believe. In 1990, the song hit No. 11 in the U.K. MacNeil lived in Big Pond, Nova Scotia. She died April 16, 2013.

MUSIC AND MOVIES FOR HEALING

You Raise Me Up ~ Josh Groban

You'll Be In My Heart ~ Phil Collins

You're Still You ~ Josh Groban

You're Still Here ~ Faith Hill

Movies

MUSIC AND MOVIES FOR HEALING

Beaches
Corrina, Corrina
Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close
Field of Dreams
Ghost
Goodwill Hunting
Gravity
Kramer vs. Kramer
Life As A House
Life is Beautiful
Lorenzo's Oil
Message in a Bottle
My Life
My Sister's Keeper
Mystic River
On Golden Pond
One True Thing
Ordinary People
Patch Adams
Philadelphia
Rabbit Hole
Saving Mr. Banks
Seven Pounds
Steel Magnolias
Stepmom
Terms of Endearment
The Big Chill
The Bucket List
The Descendants
The Notebook

MUSIC AND MOVIES FOR HEALING

Children & Youth Films

Bambi

Charlotte's Web

Finding Nemo

Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone

The Land Before Time

The Lion King

Up

We Bought a Zoo

Janelle Breese Biagioni is a Registered Professional Counsellor who was widowed at 34 years of age after her husband, a 17 year veteran in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police died from a duty-related injury. Their daughters were 12 and 10 years old. Janelle has dedicated the past 26 years to helping others reconcile grief and redesign life.