

A Workbook by Hold The Door For Others, Inc.

Edited by Robert J. Fazio, PhD and Lauren Fazio

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**HOLD THE DOOR  
FOR OTHERS™**

# FINDING YOUR WAY THROUGH SUDDEN LOSS & ADVERSITY



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# Dedication

This book, created for those who are grieving the loss of a loved one or facing adversity, is dedicated to my younger brother, ***Graham Stewart***, who died suddenly at the age of 19.

Healing from the death of a loved one is an incredible journey. And although I've always strived for empathy and compassion towards those in mourning, it has taken my own recent loss to make me realize now how little I understood about the intense sorrow and anguish one experiences until they are able to reach the point where healing begins.

My brother Graham was a kind and gentle soul. Blessed with a natural humor and quick wit, he invited laughter with impeccably timed jokes and a brilliant smile. Graham was smart, good looking, and athletic. He loved life and adored his family.

I know that despite his tragic death, my brother would have wanted our family to heal and forge ahead. Our sadness has rendered this difficult, but with the help of family, friends, faith, and great resources like Hold the Door For Others, we are learning to do just that.

We wish to celebrate a life and honor a memory by proudly dedicating this resource to Graham. We hope that you, like our family, can find solace within its pages.

The Hold The Door For Others Team would like to thank Lindsay Haley and the Stewart family for sharing their kind and inspirational words.

***“The Only Distance Between Your Dreams and Your Reality is You!”***

# Welcome

***Welcome to our Family.*** The fact that you are taking the time to read this is a small step toward a long journey of healing and growth. I want to let you know how sorry I personally am that you have experienced loss or adversity. I know it may seem weird to hear that a stranger is personally sorry for your loss, but I am because I too lost someone suddenly. I lost my dad on September 11<sup>th</sup> and although the loss, accident, sickness, or adversity you are facing may be very different, there are connections and similarities. I will share more of my story with you as we progress, but I wanted you to know that what you are about to read comes from my heart and then from the research and experience our team has been learning from over the past 4 years.

It is likely that you have been experiencing a range of strong emotions from deep sadness, to anger, to guilt, to sorrow. If you lost someone, you may even experience periods of relief and even happiness when you take a minute to remember funny things that your loved one may have done. I am here to offer you some very practical ways to live with your loss and believe it or not, one day grow as a result of the experience. As you will learn to grow, loss is a very personal experience and it can get a bit complicated. All I am here to do is to help guide you in the right direction. I encourage you to read as much as you can with an open mind when you feel up to it. I am writing this for you and because I whole heartedly believe that if you learn some basic concepts and challenge yourself a little you will be able to honor your loved one, heal in a healthy manner, and be able to grow through your experience. You are free to read this or leave it alone and come back to it, or to give it to someone else, or even throw it out.

All I ask is that you give it at least one real chance. Take one real chance at connecting with me and believing in what I have to say. I have seen a lot of people go a lot of different directions when sudden loss and traumatic events happen. Although there is no “right” way to grieve or heal, there are more healthy ways that will allow you to feel better on a more consistent basis and lay a strong platform for your future health. I want to apologize in advance for talking about the future so soon. My guess is that the future may not even been something you want to even consider right now, and right now that is completely understandable.

I will work my hardest to provide you with the best practices, the latest research, and I will pull in insights and writings from the best people I know in any field that I feel will help you in your journey. In the next page or so I will provide you with an outline of what to expect on our journey together. In this first page I have one objective and that is to try and invite you to understand that even though I do not know you personally, I can help you help yourself, and I will put all of my heart and energy into doing what I can to do so. Unfortunately, we are part of a family that no one asks to be part of. It’s the family of people who have experienced unexpected or sudden loss. I want to invite you to eventually become a member of another family that I am very proud of, and that is the family of people who have lived with loss and grown through the experience.

If you find a way to trust the person who is sitting in front of his computer right now in Center City Philadelphia, I will find a way to trust that you will take a chance on me and read these words with an open mind and walk with me on this journey. Welcome to our family. Please make yourself at home, put your feet up, and relax. We have a long walk ahead of us, but we will get where we want to go with some challenges and a lot of hard work.

So, let's take our first step together and begin by learning what we can expect in the following pages.

Warm Regards,

Rob

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read 'R. J. Fazio', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Robert J. Fazio, PhD  
President and Co-Founder  
Hold The Door For Others, Inc.  
[www.HOLDTHEDOOR.com](http://www.HOLDTHEDOOR.com)

***DAD - 1-4-3***

***“Surviving Loss Happens. Thriving Despite Loss is Your Choice.  
Make the Choice to Thrive!”***



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**This resource would not be possible without the creative efforts of  
Angie LeVan and Susie Fife.**

*This resource is intended to be used for your personal educational purposes. It is in no way meant to replace professional help. In the event that you may become overwhelmed as a result of utilizing this resource, we encourage you to seek professional assistance (contact information for professionals can be found in Appendix C).*

# Our First Step

There is no doubt that there will be times as you read through what I wrote, that you will experience a range of emotions and thought. I am not asking you to feel or think anything. I am asking you to become more aware of what you are feeling and thinking over time and to challenge yourself to manage your emotions.

This resource, *Finding Your Way Through Sudden Loss and Adversity*, will include a variety of lessons on loss and growth as well as practical suggestions on how you can live with loss in a healthy way and grow from the experience. The workbook is broken up into three main sections that focus on living with loss, growing through loss, and preparing for loss. You can think of this workbook as a “choose your own adventure” type of resource. In other words, you do not necessarily need to read through the resource in any particular order.

Below is a brief outline of what will be included throughout the *Finding Your Way Through Sudden Loss and Adversity* interactive workbook:

**Team Hold The Door:** You will see a number of times when I refer to our team. This team includes people who have contributed to this resource and have helped us research what helps people live with loss and grow through the process. When you see “I” it refers to me (Rob).

**Reflections:** As you can see below this text there is a space provided for you to reflect upon what you are reading. I will be working with you to provide you with support and information, as well as challenge you throughout our time together. It is important that you make this journey your own and meaningful. The more energy and effort you put into our work together the more you will get out of it. The reason for taking the time to reflect is that it will increase your understanding of yourself. You will read a number of times in this resource that I believe learning about yourself is essential to healing in a healthy manner. Therefore, I invite you to take the time right now and write down any reflections or reactions you might have.

REFLECTIONS:

**Interactive Lessons:** In order to offer you the best possible way for you to learn in such a challenging time our team will provide you with exercises that will help you apply the most important messages within this workbook. The benefit of participating in the interactive lessons is that you will ensure that you are learning what is important as opposed to just passively reading. In addition, you will be able to teach some of these lessons to others, which may be helpful when a family or friend is in need.



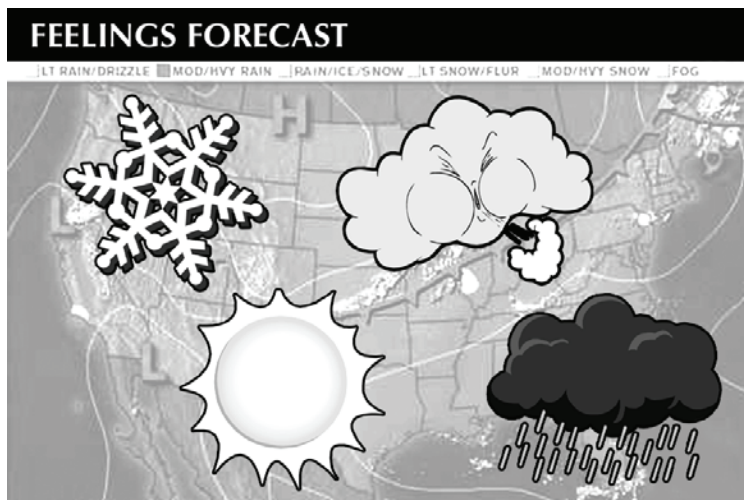
**If You Feel Overwhelmed:** It is ok and it is normal. Often times when people begin to reflect on their true feelings and thoughts regarding something as personal and challenging as a sudden loss, it can be overwhelming. There are a number of ways you can work with your feelings of being overwhelmed. I would encourage you to work with the feelings of being overwhelmed as opposed to just ignoring them and putting them aside. When you place feelings to the side, they have a way of making their way back into your life and causing you more challenges in more ways than you want to know.

You are in control and can stop reading or doing any of the exercises throughout our journey. One way to work with your feelings of being overwhelmed is to take some time for yourself and practice the breathing exercises on page 159. This will help you help yourself lower your level of stress and increase your sense of balance and control. Also, on page 42 there are a number of activities and resources that you can use to practice self-care.

Although, anything you feel following an unexpected or sudden loss is ok and normal, there may be times that it feels like it is too much to handle. There is no timetable for the feelings associated with grief, trauma, and loss, and at the same time there is no reason anyone needs to suffer. There are people that can help you help yourself. If you feel that over time you are feeling very overwhelmed, anxious, or deeply saddened, it may be helpful to contact a professional who may be able to help. On page 164 there is a list of professionals in the field. Also, on page 28, there is a list of questions that can help you, or someone you want to help, identify if they may be experiencing symptoms of depression that may be hindering your ability to function optimally.

**We Will Provide the Map, You Choose the Direction:** Unlike many resources that are designed for you to read in sequence from beginning to end, we have created this resource in a way that you can feel free to choose your path. If you feel you want to learn more about feelings or managing anxiety, or how writing a story about your experience can be helpful, you can skip to that Doorway (chapter). You are in control of what you want to learn about and when. We have set up a suggested sequence that may be helpful, but you are free to explore as you wish. Some sections you may want to read more than once and share with others. I will serve as your navigation guide and you are deciding where you want the journey to begin, move toward, and end.

**Feelings Forecast:** Throughout the workbook I will ask you to do your Feelings Forecast. Whenever you see the Feeling Forecast graphic, please answer the questions below. The more aware you come of your feelings and what triggers them, the easier it will be for you to manage them. I will explain in more detail on page 59 why feelings are so important and how to manage them.



**What am I feeling right now?**

**Why am I feeling this way?**

**What am I likely to feel tomorrow?**

**Why may I feel this way?**

**What is coming up that may trigger my emotions?**

**What can I do to prepare for challenging feelings to come?**

**Focus Frames:** What you focus on is what you will remember and make part of your lives. There will be a lot of information our team will be providing you with throughout our journey. We will highlight some key points that we believe are essential. These key points will be in what we call a *Focus Frame* (see example below).

#### FOCUS FRAME

Because you will not be able to keep 100% focus throughout your readings, we will provide you with some things to make sure that you challenge yourself to pay attention. So, when you see a focus frame, take a deep breath and do what you need to do to focus. The more you focus, the more you will learn.

**Doorways:** There's no time better than the present to explain to you why we choose to use the metaphor of doorways. Yes, it is a way for me to stay connected to my father and his decision to hold the door for people so they could return home to their loved ones. However, I also believe a doorway is a very powerful symbol.

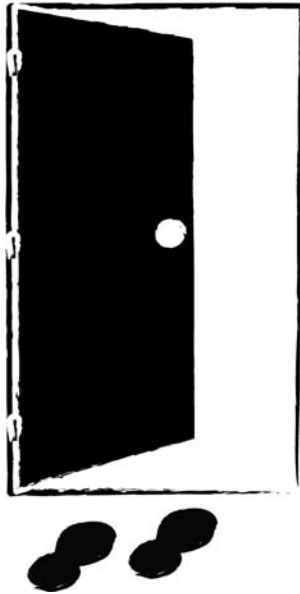
A door can be opened, but it is you that decides if you are going to trust me and find the energy and courage to walk through the doorway. You can continue to read and stay on the side of the doorway that you began on, or as you read you can make the decision to take a chance and walk through the doorway and engage in our journey. Only you will know the difference. I can share with you that in my experience the more willing you are to be open minded and believe that you can help yourself ease the pain of your loss and remain connected to your loved one as you heal, the stronger the chance you will have of healing in a healthy way and eventually growing through your loss.

At the end of each Doorway I will ask you where you are in relation to the doorway. The graphic on the next page will help you illustrate where you stand. You may be outside the doorway (you may feel like you are not ready to move forward and you are sure of that for now). There may be some times that you feel as if you are standing in the doorway (maybe ready to move forward). And, at times, you may feel that you are ready to take the next step and be on the other side of the doorway. If you are in the doorway (maybe) or outside the doorway (not ready) you can take a break or practice your deep breathing (p. 159), or revisit a previous or different lesson in the workbook. Wherever you are is ok and I will invite you to continue to challenge yourself to commit to walking through the door. You already know what is on your side of the door, but you are not yet sure of what it's like where I am asking you to go. I can promise you one thing; I will be there with you no matter where you stand. In the following section, write how you are feeling in the box that represents where you currently are in relation to the doorway.

## Where are you related to the Doorway?

(How ready are you to take a step forward?)

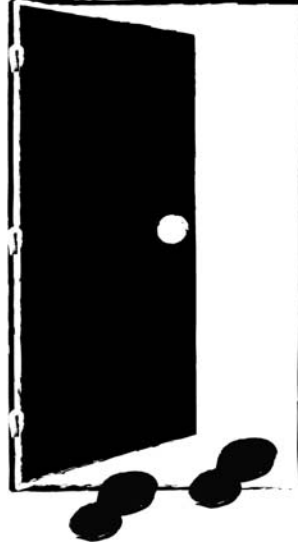
Outside (Not Ready)



Feelings:

Thoughts:

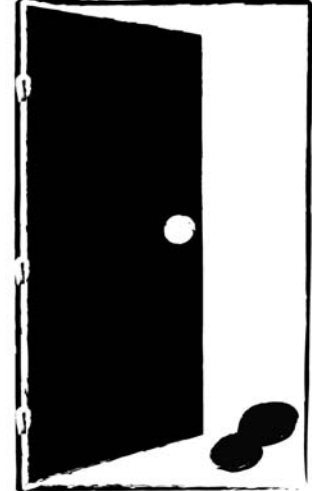
In (Maybe Ready)



Feelings:

Thoughts:

Through (Ready)



Feelings:

Thoughts:

As you enter each Doorway you will be invited to walk with me and learn all about loss and how it may affect you.

As you may have already learned for yourself loss can be painful. Most psychologists would agree that sudden or unexpected loss could complicate the journey. When things happen in everyday life that are not expected (i.e. getting fired, getting into an accident, having a fight with a friend) it can be challenging to manage. When you experience a loss suddenly the feelings and thoughts of challenge and being overwhelmed are often intensified. One of the reasons for this is that we are not prepared and it typically is not present in our mindset. Often times the deeper the emotional connection you have to the person you lost the more challenging it is manage.

Before we get too deep into learning about loss there are some foundational philosophies that the Hold The Door team believes. These philosophies are based on our experience working with people experiencing trauma, crisis, and loss over the past 4 years.

# Hold the Door Philosophies

**Emotion can cause commotion:** As you already know feelings are very powerful. They come and go and sometimes come and go without warning. It is important that you learn how emotions or feelings can cause you to think and react. The first step is to understand that feelings are a part of life and a big part of the healing process. Allow yourself to feel and at the same time encourage yourself to know that feelings are feelings and not necessarily reality. At times when you have extreme feelings they may cause you to make poor decisions or fail to think things through. It is completely natural to have feelings overwhelm you, especially during challenging times. Just by understanding that emotions are powerful and can cause a complex series of actions and reactions you will put yourself in a better place to work with and own reactions. This will result in empowering yourself to allow feelings to be your teacher as opposed to your rival.

**Allow yourself to Move “In” rather than Move “On”:** How often do you hear the words “It’s time to Move On?” Whether you hear those exact words or not, American culture often places direct or indirect pressure on people to move on. The reason for this is simple. It is uncomfortable for most people to share your loss with you. Often times people feel very vulnerable or do not know how to help. And, if they can’t help they just want the feelings associated with your loss to stop. It is not to say that people who aren’t able to walk with you as you live with loss are in any way bad people. Some of them just don’t understand and others aren’t aware of the messages that they send and how they affect you. I would encourage you to communicate with people when it seems like they are suggesting that you “move on.”

So what does “*Move In*” mean? To Move In, is to have the courage to understand yourself and your relationship with your experience of loss. Most, if not all, of our interactive lessons and philosophies will be grounded in the theory that moving toward your loss rather than away will allow you to heal in healthy manner and prepare you to grow through the process. One of my friends and experienced psychologists spoke to the importance of dealing with loss in our first workbook. Dr. Abrams wrote “You can pay now, or you can pay later with interest.” While these words may seem harsh, they are accurate. By moving into your loss and experiencing all the unpleasant emotions and thoughts and working through your pain you will put yourself in a place where you are not afraid and you are not avoiding anything. Take the other path for example. If you do not acknowledge the challenging journey into loss you create a number of blind spots and leave a lot of unfinished business. Almost always for almost anyone, these blind spots or unfinished business will come back to challenge you in ways that may be hard to imagine.

I worked knew someone who lost his mother suddenly at an early age. Because this person made the decision that it was less painful to talk about and move into this loss, later in life his marriage failed because he was not able to be truly intimate and connect with people because of the fear of losing them suddenly. This is not unusual and is a way of protecting oneself. However, this person has not only lost his mother, but also his ability to truly be with others. It ended up affecting his work, home life, and friendships and eventually lead to depression. Living with loss does not always follow the same path, but the path that allows you to *move in* rather than *move on* is one in which will lead you toward more positive feelings and healthier relationships.

**Get comfortable with discomfort:** Life is not about what happens to you. It is about how you choose to respond. When you accept the fact that discomfort is part of life and learn to be comfortable with discomfort, you will put yourself in a place to be able to grow. It is not a natural thing to talk about feelings and challenge yourself to reflect on why you may feel a certain way. Much of what we do together throughout this workbook may seem uncomfortable at times. That’s completely natural and let it happen. As you become comfortable with discomfort you will be able to focus on honoring your loved one or managing the adversity you face.

**Healing Through Helping Others:** Healing and taking care of oneself is essential. A powerful way to heal is to help others (as long as you are also focusing on your emotional healing and growth first). Opening doors for people has a tremendous positive on our bodies and minds.





## DOORWAY 1

# Lessons on Sudden Loss

Welcome to Doorway 1. In this Doorway you will learn some of the many ways that sudden or unexpected loss affects people and how to take steps toward living with loss. It's important to know that regardless of how similar a loss

experience may be, your response to the loss is very personal and unique. Everyone experiences loss differently and heals in their own way. We will provide you with some very practical suggestions on what to do immediately following experiencing a loss.

As you may already know, loss can be a very painful process. I'm here to help you experience less pain and at the same time still honor your loss. It is not about forgetting about your loss or moving on, it is about remembering your loss and moving in. By moving in, I mean it is about understanding yourself and connecting with who you are and what this loss means to you. Once you understand how this loss affects you, you will be able to begin to heal and grow.

It is well known in the field of psychology that the lessons we learn as we grow up can partially predict how we act, react, and interact. An example of this is a child who grows up with a fear of dogs. This child also learns to be fearful of dogs. The process by which fear is transmitted from parent to child is similar to what happens in the grief process. The way we grieve largely depends on what we have witnessed as we have developed throughout life. The good news is that if we have learned unhealthy ways of dealing with loss we can unlearn them and become better and healthier grievers.

Although we may have experienced grief and loss in our lives, in most cases, no one has formally taught us how to effectively deal with grief. One way of learning to grieve effectively is to go through this exercise. Let's take some time to become more aware of the losses we have experienced as well as the lessons we have learned.

## Interactive Exercise: My Loss Line

1. In the space below, write down all of the losses that you have experienced. Place them in chronological order according to your age. *Remember our definition of a loss: any experience that alters your current situation. This can include everything from not making a team that you really wanted to be on to losing a friendship, a job, or a loved one. Please challenge yourself to identify a variety of experiences.*
  
2. The intensity of our emotional reaction to a loss determines how difficult the loss was. Use the key below to label the losses you wrote in question one accordingly.
  - a. Extremely difficult challenge loss (EDCL)
  - b. Challenging loss (CL)
  - c. Manageable challenge loss (MCL)
  
3. At the far right end of the loss line below, write your current age on the small line indicated.
  
4. In the middle of the loss line, write  $\frac{1}{2}$  your age on the small line indicated.
  
5. Take a look at your Loss Line and answer the following questions:

My Loss Line		
Age	Half my current age (current age divided by 2)	My Current
0	_____	_____

1. Which loss was most challenging for you and why?
2. What feelings are you experiencing right now when you look back at this loss?
3. Who has been the most helpful as you live with this challenging loss?
4. What has been most helpful as you deal with this loss?
5. List some ways in which you have witnessed your parents or people close to you deal effectively with loss.
6. In light of the losses in your life, what 3 things can you realistically do to allow yourself to grieve and let that grief move through you? (Sometimes we create the biggest problems by not grieving our losses fully.)



# Sudden Loss Timetable

There is no one timetable for grief. Learning how to live with grief is difficult, but it can be done. Look carefully at the losses in your life and consider the ways in which you somehow managed to live through the loss. Be patient with your rhythm of grieving. By giving time and room to our grief, we can allow it to move through us and discover hidden strengths within ourselves.

REFLECTIONS:

In your lifetime there is a strong possibility that you will face some type of trauma and most certainly will need to work through adversity at some point in your life. Your personal response to a sudden loss or extreme adversity may take a number of forms, all of which are normal.

Whether you are personally involved in the event, have loved ones who were injured or killed, are someone who assisted, or are a health care provider, you will experience some type of emotional response whether you are aware of it or not. Everyone has a different connection to the experience, which creates a unique meaning and a personal response. You will notice that some people around you will react very differently than you. Your responses, which will change from time to time, are a normal part of the healing process.

Below is a list of some of the reactions that you may experience. There is not right or wrong way to feel and you may have additional responses.

Sad	Shock	Change in appetite
Angry	Denial	Nightmares
Worry	Self-blame	Recurring memories of the event
Anxiety	Nervousness	Aches and pains
Stress	Inability to focus	Fatigue
Guilty	Social withdrawal	Change in sleep pattern
Numbness	Hopelessness	
Mood swings	Lack of motivation	

Additional responses you have experienced:

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It's important to remain aware of what you are experiencing. One way to do this is to write about your experiences every day. There may be times that what you experience may become overwhelming. If this is the case please be sure to talk with someone you trust and read more about what you can do to help yourself throughout this workbook. In Doorway 2 there is information on what you can do if you feel you are overwhelmed.

# Healthy Hints on Responding to Loss and Adversity

I have found that the more simple people keep things immediately following an unexpected loss the better they feel and the more they are able to handle. Often our thoughts race, our emotions become overwhelming, and we spiral into a difficult time. By keeping things simple, we slow our minds and bodies down, which allows us to have more of a sense of normalcy and see more clearly how we can help ourselves.

The word *PAR* can serve as a word to help remind you to keep yourself on course and practice self-care. There are suggestions below that provide you with positive suggestions on what to do in each of the three main areas that are important to pay attention to immediately losing a loved one or dealing with a sudden loss.

## *P: Practical - A: Affective (Emotional/Feelings) - R: Relational*

**Practical:** Immediately following a loss we all face an overwhelming experience. It is essential to take care of our basic needs first so we can then manage the rest of our lives. The Practical aspect of our lives includes things as basic as sleep and diet.

Also, don't be afraid to ask for help or give friends tasks that you have to deal with immediately after your loss: letting loved ones know of your loss, organizing a funeral, calling your office to find out about bereavement leave, organizing flights for family members to come into town, etc. Ideally, find good friends that can help you with these details.

**Affective (Emotional):** Whether we want to admit it or not, when you care about someone or something, loss hurts and it hurts a lot more when it is unexpected and sudden. Paying attention to our feelings allows us to heal in a healthy way and manage our emotions. Feelings are going to happen whether we want them to or not. We might as well go with it and learn to work with them rather than against them. The swarm of emotions we face during loss can cause a lot of complications including physical ailments and strains on relationships (i.e. poor communication, friendships changing, discomfort). The more we are aware of our feelings and "move into" them rather than "move on" from them the better change we have of healing and eventually growing.

**Relational:** Your friends and family will be the most essential component as you continue living with loss. I asked 244 people that lost loved ones on September 11<sup>th</sup> what was the most important aspect of their healing and over 80% of them mentioned relationships and social support. Relationships are so important and they can be tricky especially in times of sudden loss. Helping people help you and understand what you need will be very rewarding. There will also be people that will not be able to live with your loss as well as you and you may need to take an emotional vacation from those friendships.

<b>Practical</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Continue activities that are part of your normal routine to maintain as much structure in your daily life as possible.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Hold off on making major decisions (i.e. selling a home, leaving a job, moving) for at least 6 months to a year following your loss.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Keep your routine as normal as you can. Even in times when it is challenging to participate in regular every day activities.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide yourself with additional structure into your daily routine. This will help you regain some normalcy and control.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Drink extra amounts of water.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Pay attention to your sleep habits and get plenty of rest (see page 16 in our Growth Guide) to help you be more resilient to the daily physical and emotional challenges you will face.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Keep lists, write lists, and take notes in one spiral binder or notebook at a time- this will be help you remain organized when you may be overwhelmed.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Exercise on a consistent basis – exercise will help you buffer stress, create positive physical and psychological reactions and give you a sense of accomplishment.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Maintain a balanced diet. Steer clear from sugars, junk food, or binge eating.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> If you drink alcohol do it in moderation. Alcohol is a depressant and it may also mask the natural emotions you need to feel in order to heal.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Stay up to date on your medical doctor appointments.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Focus on one hour and eventually one day at a time. Keep yourself from becoming overwhelmed with thoughts such as “how will I be able to....”</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Keep a running list of your practical needs and questions that you have. For example, write down questions that focus on things that you now need to take care of that you have not before (i.e. paying the bills, taking the kids to places, finding directions to places, holiday gift shopping).</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Keep up to date on your finances and bills or ask one of your friends or family members to help you with this. Often times businesses are not empathetic to these challenging times.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Avoid addictive substances such as excessive alcohol, caffeine, and nicotine, which may have negative long-term side effects.</li> </ul> <p><i>Suggestions from yourself, friends, and your experiences:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> _____</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> _____</li> </ul>
<b>Affective (Emotional)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Know whatever you are feeling, whenever you are feeling it.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Recall times when you have felt comfortable and confident even in difficult times.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Practice deep breathing exercises for 20 minutes daily. (p. 159)</li> </ul>

<b>Affective (Emotional) cont.</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Understand that feelings are like the weather – feelings will come and go and come and go again. You can learn how to predict them and prepare for them, but you may not always be right and need to manage whatever you are experiencing. You are not able to control them, but depending on how you react your experience will be pleasant or stressful.</li> <li>❑ Be mindful that you will experience mood swings and at times it will seem as though you are on an emotional roller coaster. During these times rely on your trusted loved ones to listen to you and help you manage through your tough times.</li> <li>❑ No matter what you feel, always, always maintain your belief in yourself and your ability to eventually feel like yourself again.</li> <li>❑ Honor your loved one by writing about them or starting your story of growth. (p.145)</li> <li>❑ Write how you are feeling each evening before you go to bed and become more aware of your emotions. Accept your feelings and do not judge them.</li> </ul> <p><i>Suggestions from yourself, friends, and your experiences:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ _____</li> <li>❑ _____</li> <li>❑ _____</li> </ul>
<b>Relational</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❑ Talk to people who you trust and who you feel understand you.</li> <li>❑ Know that people will say dumb things and at times the things they say will unintentionally hurt your feelings.</li> <li>❑ Ask a variety of people to support you as you learn to live with your loss.</li> <li>❑ Explain to your friends and family that there may be times that you will not want to talk about your loss and when a that time does occur be upfront that you don't want to discuss your loss.</li> <li>❑ Let people who you trust know who you feel uncomfortable around and why.</li> <li>❑ In social settings have a plan in case you become overwhelmed and want to leave.</li> <li>❑ Let people know when you are feeling down and let them know what your Grief Grabbers are (p. 50).</li> <li>❑ Manage expectations with your friends.</li> <li>❑ Allow yourself to be patient with yourself and others who are trying to help you. It is normal for you and others to make mistakes and be mindful of your limitations as well as the limitations of others.</li> <li>❑ Recognize that many people feel awkward and are not able to communicate their support, but do want to help.</li> </ul>

**Relational  
cont.**

- ☐ Take the time to think of others and how your experience can one day help others live with loss.
- ☐ Seek out advice and support from others who have experienced sudden loss.
- ☐ Make every effort to enjoy the happiness that others may be experiencing around you.
- ☐ Create a list of what you need from people and have it handy so when people ask, “How can I help?” You will have an answer. Your friends won’t always know how to support you and this will come in handy.
- ☐ Engage in pleasurable and comforting activities with your others, such as watching a movie, reading a book, listening to music, or getting a massage.
- ☐ Share your thoughts and feelings with friends and family members whom you trust.
- ☐ Get support and advice from family, friends, counselors, professionals, and others who have lived with loss.

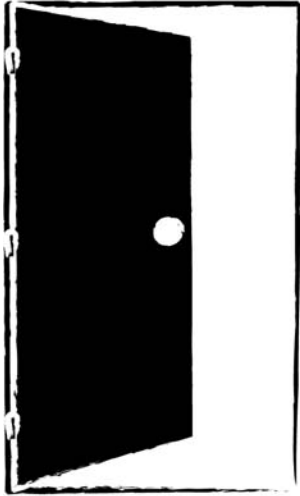
Suggestions from yourself, friends, and your experiences:

- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ \_\_\_\_\_

## Where are you related to the Doorway?

(How ready are you to take a step forward?)

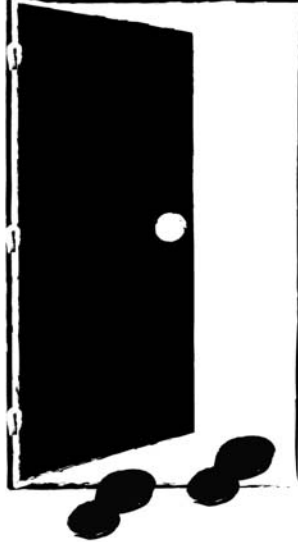
Outside (Not Ready)



Feelings:

Thoughts:

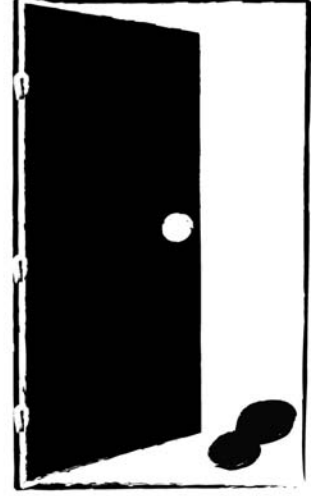
In (Maybe Ready)



Feelings:

Thoughts:

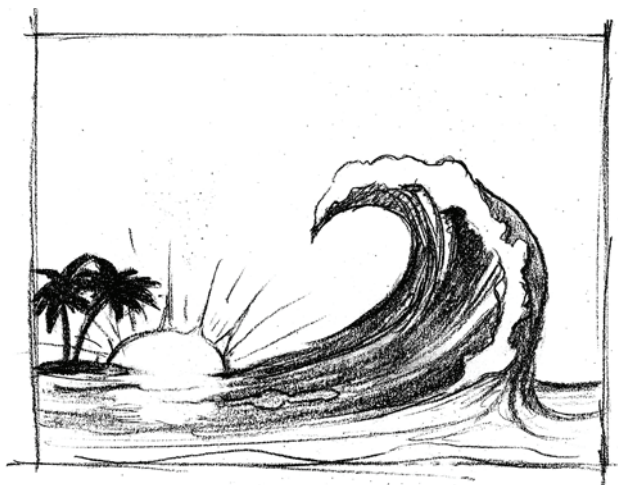
Through (Ready)



Feelings:

Thoughts:





## DOORWAY 2

# Understanding & Managing Responses to Sudden Loss or Trauma

*Mitch Abrams, Psy.D., James Burke, PhD,  
Jason Briggs, M.A., and Jason Ong, PhD*

This Doorway emphasizes the importance of understanding how your experience can naturally create strong reactions and that at times your reactions can move beyond typical grief. Jason Briggs has enhanced this Doorway from our first workbook *Living With Loss: The Journey Through September 11th*. I felt that the information that Drs. Abrams, Burke, and Ong presented would also be very useful.

Our personal losses and challenges with adversity many times leave a marked imprint on our lives. While these experiences in our lives will always be a part of us in some way, how exactly will they be remembered? The effects that memories of our loss have on our lives will be different for each of us. Some of us can talk about specific events that we experienced, while others can't bear to revisit the details. Some of us visualize the events that led up to our loss over and over again. Some of us joke about it. Some of us shut off all emotion as if we were untouched by our hardships.

People may make judgments regarding *how* you respond. Let us start at the beginning. There is no *right* way to respond - or perhaps more accurately, there is no *wrong* way to respond. Traumatic events can occur so far outside of normal life expectations that rational reactions cannot be expected. *Abnormal reactions to abnormal situations are normal behavior.*

Trauma, which has been defined as an experience that produces psychological injury or pain, has been studied for decades. Experts know that the symptoms that accompany traumatic events can include changes in the way we feel, our emotions, loss of interest in everyday pleasures, physical symptoms such as headaches and back problems, and insomnia. What the experts don't know for sure is who will develop some or all of these symptoms and who will not. Two people can witness or be part of the same traumatic event and respond very differently. One important part of the equation in explaining how we cope with trauma may be the way our brains process information.

Usually, when we witness something, we sense it first (see it, hear it, taste it, etc.) and then information about the event gets transformed into a thought in our minds - a memory. When we are under extreme stress, such as when a traumatic event occurs, the part of our brain that transforms sensory experiences into memories does not function normally. Under ordinary conditions, the brain organizes sensory experiences into coherent, integrated thoughts and then the thoughts are turned into memories. When this system malfunctions, people do not form coherent narratives or thoughts. Rather, their traumatic memories are stored directly as intense sensory experiences. As a result, people do not have a clear logical story to tell about what they witnessed. Instead, they tend to have powerful memories of smaller details, the way things looked, sounded, smelled, or felt around them during the traumatic event. It seems to be precisely this phenomenon that leads to trauma symptomology.



**Symptomology:** What exactly are "trauma symptoms"? Most commonly, the primary symptoms include some form of reliving the event - either through nightmares, flashbacks (occurrence of "being back in the moment" visualizing/experiencing the trauma again while awake), or intrusive thoughts that lead the person to think and think and think (ruminate) about the event. In addition, there is a strong emotional component. Some people become extra sensitive and extra reactive to real or perceived threats. Simply stated, they seem to act and feel as if "the world is a dangerous place, it could fall apart any time". People may become afraid of and avoid things associated with the trauma, and as a result have an increased startle response. Disturbances with sleep, appetite, and sex drive are not uncommon. People may have difficulty concentrating and may worry a lot of the time. Finally, there is anger that at times can feel overwhelming. It can be hard to manage anger when our loved ones are taken from us and we find ourselves without them navigating through an expansive and many times dangerous world.

Trauma affects people's emotions and their behavior. When we experience trauma we often feel powerless. One way the mind tries to regain its power is to revisit the scene over and over until it can gain mastery over it. It is the very reason that we are drawn to viewing trauma on TV and then find ourselves wanting to run away from the pain.

**When do trauma symptoms appear?** Some people never experience symptoms. When the trauma is significant, there are few people who avoid the effects of trauma completely. Some people experience trauma symptoms almost immediately. These are people who are most likely to get help right away. They may have significant difficulty in the short run, but if they seek out assistance and address their symptoms, then they tend to do well in the long run. Some people don't experience symptoms until several months after a traumatic event. The anniversary of an event may trigger symptoms. Psychologists think that many people who experience "delayed reactions" are those who keep themselves distracted so that they do not have time to think about their trauma. They may be busy taking care of others or the people who jump right back into their jobs or volunteer work. On the plus side, these people get a lot of wonderful things accomplished. On the minus side, if they have in fact been traumatized, the more time that passes between the event and the time that they start working on the issues, the harder it is. This work is painful, but necessary. The analogy is that in order to get through it, you are going to have to pay (with emotion, pain, fear, etc). Pay now or pay later, but if you pay later, you pay with interest.

The symptoms that I have described are ones that have been reported by people who have experienced all sorts of horrible traumatic events including war, child abuse, natural disasters, etc. Collectively these symptoms are known as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). PTSD is an anxiety disorder that was first identified as "shell-shock" in soldiers of World War I when soldiers became fearful and experienced flashbacks after seeing horrific events. While PTSD can be quite debilitating, it also has a high rate of successful treatment.

Many people around the world have experienced the challenges of PTSD and thus no one suffering is truly "alone" in their experiences. That is not to say that anyone else has had the same feelings or experiences that you have, but because these symptoms regularly occur following traumatic events, mental health professionals have learned ways to treat the symptoms.

**So what do I do now?** There are a lot of ways to move forward with life following a traumatic experience. Each individual must find what works and realize that as they change over time, they may also need to adapt their ways of coping.

**Assess yourself:** There are some people and some situations that make you particularly stressed out. You may be extra irritable, or start overeating, or sit on the couch and not get up. If you can figure out what situations make you feel worse, then you can find ways to avoid those situations. This is one important step on the way to feeling better.

**Celebrate your successes:** We often tend to focus on our shortcomings and failures. You may not be feeling the same or doing all that you were before your loss or hardship, but notice when you make progress. It can be helpful to write down your successes or keep track of signs that indicate that you are doing better.

**Spend time with friends:** Spending lots of time alone can be depressing. Sure, social situations can be hard, but getting out in the world and connecting with others can have a long lasting effect on your mood and even your long-term health.

**Take care of yourself:** Eating right, exercising, and getting sleep are the basics. Some people have found that the luxuries like getting massages can really make a difference in how they feel.

**Spiritual needs:** Many people have found that turning to their religious heritage has strengthened their resolve in coping with the challenges of living following major trauma. Even if you are not a member of a formal religious group, you might gain from an enhanced attention to spiritual issues. Some people have found that considering the basic tenets of Buddhism including patience (set a steady pace, think before acting), letting go (know when to rest, or allow yourself to stop), acceptance (recognize that some people and things will be as they are), trust (trust others and only distrust when you have a valid reason), and a beginner's mind (open your mind, listen to and learn from others) can be helpful in becoming the person that you would like to be.

**Get therapy if you need or want it:** There are many different types of therapists. The best one for you is one that you feel comfortable with and one with whom you feel you are making progress.

In therapy, successful treatment of trauma often uses the safe environment of the therapist's office as the setting in which people can address the horrors of their traumatic experiences. The first step is learning how to relax. The body's response to fear (and anger for that matter) is the predictable and intense "fight or flight" response. What happens is the sympathetic nervous system is alerted when danger appears and prepares your body to either fight an enemy or to flee. The danger does not have to be a real danger to alert your sympathetic nervous system. If you believe you are or may be in danger the system is turned on and your heart starts racing, breathing is faster, muscles tense, you start to sweat, and you may have the urge to urinate.

People who have experienced traumatic events may find that when they think about the event, consciously or unconsciously, an anxiety response can occur. The first skill that is often taught to counteract anxiety is deep, slow breathing. Another way that people learn to relax is by deliberately tensing and relaxing their muscles while focusing on the feeling of relaxation. Once armed with the skill of relaxation, and under the guidance of a trained professional, people are better able to address their traumatic memories and to integrate them into a rational narrative in a meaningful way. This process seems to be at the heart of empowering people to get control over their traumas.

Please remember that therapy is a very delicate process and that someone who is not professionally trained should not conduct these types of treatments. The information I have presented here is a brief summary designed to remind you that help is available and to give you a brief overview of what therapy may be like.

By taking on our grief, one day at a time, by getting the help we need, by letting others know that they are not alone, by understanding what it is to be human and to suffer loss, we will begin to have the futures that we can imagine and lead the lives that we hope for ourselves and our families.

Many times, our experiences with loss and adversity can push us to a point that goes beyond grief. Knowing when this occurs is a key element in ensuring our physical and emotional health, as well as our general progression through our hardships. Below, Dr.'s Ong and Burke will shed some light on how stress and anxiety relate to the grieving process, as well as how we can respond when our grief progresses to a disabling, unhealthy level.

# Introduction to Stress and Anxiety

Stress is a natural part of our lives and is a basic part of living. Stress itself can be either good (motivating us to work hard when necessary) or bad (causing us to worry endlessly and experience disruptive physical symptoms). Often the effects of stress, good or bad, depend on the way we appraise a situation. If we appraise the stressful situation as being something that we can handle, then we use our anxiety to motivate ourselves, act, and solve the problem that is causing the stress. If we appraise the situation as being something that we cannot control, we may experience continued anxiety while our bodies are flooded with stress hormones. This circumstance can be very wearing on us physically, emotionally, and mentally.

Needless to say, the traumatic events cause stress for those who lost a loved one as well as for those who survived the trauma. For many, these events are ever-present and the ripples of stress reverberate throughout daily activities and daily lives. To better understand and manage your own stress and anxiety, please answer the following questions:

1. Thinking back over the past year, what are the key stresses that you have experienced?
2. Circle the stresses on that occupy your mind a great deal of the time.
3. What physical symptoms of stress have you experienced secondary to the stress and anxiety of the past year?

## *Anxiety and Grieving*

When we lose someone close to us, we often go into a period of grieving. Usually, we associate the grieving process with depression, but we may also experience anxiety while grieving. For example, we may have uncertainties about the future and worry about our own mortality. If the loss was sudden, we may become fearful of what might happen next and when it might happen to us. If the event was associated with a particular object, such as an airplane, we may develop a specific fear of airplanes. This fearful airplane reaction may then generalize into fear of all things related to flying or even to travel of any kind.

In some cases, the event may be so traumatic that we continue to re-experience memories or have flashbacks. Flashbacks can reoccur so often that we are unable to focus, eat properly, or sleep well. For some people, symptoms ease with time, but for other people, this anxiety and fear develops into an

anxiety disorder that interferes with the ability to lead a normal life. The following is a list of symptoms of anxiety disorders:

- Chronic worry
- Significant trouble falling asleep or staying asleep
- Panic attacks
- Severe anxiety about going to public places
- Fear of specific objects or situations
- Recurring nightmares or flashbacks
- Constant restlessness

If you are experiencing one or more of these symptoms, you may be experiencing an anxiety disorder. Psychology and psychiatry have been successful at treating anxiety disorders. Anxiety disorders are often managed by behavioral treatments that help people to learn how to decrease stress. Some people may also decide to use non-addictive medications to manage their anxiety. Please note that alcohol and other drugs are not effective long-term treatments for anxiety. If you decide to try behavioral treatments and/or medications to manage your anxiety, you may finally find some relief from your anxiety symptoms. Given the effective treatments that now exist, there is no reason to suffer with excessive anxiety and fear. Life can be hard enough as it is, so it is valuable to seek out the assistance you need to make this difficult journey a little easier.

1. Based upon the information presented thus far, are there any symptoms that you are experiencing that may indicate the presence of some difficulty with anxiety? Which symptoms?
2. If you have some symptoms that may suggest anxiety, have you sought help? If not, what are the barriers that have kept you from seeking help thus far? How might you overcome them to gain relief from the vicious cycle of anxiety?

### *Managing Anxiety*

There are several effective techniques for coping with anxiety that you may want to try yourself at home. These techniques often require some practice but can be very helpful.

1. Emotion-focused coping relies on ways to think and act that help to keep your mood up. A very basic emotion-focused coping strategy is an exercise called deep breathing. As the name suggests, this exercise involves you taking several slow, deep breaths that come from your diaphragm or abdominal region. Some people call this diaphragmatic breathing and it is very similar to some of the Lamaze techniques that are taught to woman to use in childbirth. Take a slow, deep breath and exhale slowly. Repeat these slow breaths for several minutes, relaxing and slowing your breathing as much as possible. This type of deep breathing is a great way to take a step back from

life both physically and emotionally and take your mind off of whatever is causing stress at that moment. Try it!

2. Sometimes, people find themselves thinking about something over and over, like an endless cycle. For example, you may worry about your job or health or relive traumatic events over and over. You may find it difficult to stop negative thoughts from entering your head. A technique that some people have found helpful to stop these thoughts is something called the “rubber-band technique.” To try this, all you have to do is to get a rubber band and put it around your wrist. Every time you find yourself coming back to the thought that you want to stop, flick the rubber band so that it physically gets your attention. Make sure that you flick it hard enough to get your attention, but not too hard so that it causes injury! Once you flick it, take a deep breath, and tell yourself to think about something else. Although it sounds simple, many people have found this technique to work well.
3. If you just can’t seem to get a handle on your worries, you may want to try writing down what you are worried about. Take a careful look at your list and evaluate the probability that the situations that are causing the worry will occur. Seeing that the situation is unlikely to occur may help you feel better about it and less anxious.
4. Finally, setting goals is an important way to move forward. Many people find that setting goals helps them to think about the future and plan ahead rather than worrying about painful situations that happened in the past. After setting your goals, make a contract or agreement with yourself to achieve these goals.

There are many other things that you can try on your own. If the anxiety is leading to bodily tension, try engaging in meditation or relaxation exercises. Some people find that listening to relaxing music while sitting with their eyes closed is a great way to reduce bodily tension. Other people use imagery techniques, such as imagining that they are in a very peaceful and relaxing place. Moderate exercise coupled with good eating and sleeping habits can greatly decrease the amount of anxiety that you are feeling. Keeping coffee and alcohol consumption to a minimum can also be helpful. It may be the best time to put yourself on a training course toward health. Remember, all these are good things that you can try on your own. However, if you continue to have problems with stress and anxiety, please seek the help of a professional. A psychologist or other mental health professional can provide support and assist you in many other ways to help you deal with anxiety and grief.

# When Things Move Beyond Grief

Sometimes feelings of stress, anxiety, and grief move into the realm of depression. Depression and even suicidal thoughts are not surprising responses to tragedy, to a hurt that does not seem to go away, or to a prolonged sense of deadness. If your sense of sadness becomes overwhelming, or if you find yourself seriously thinking about suicide, then it is time to seek help. Life is NOT better without loved ones. People need you here and now. Suicide will only make a bad situation worse. Those of us who have been down the road of suicidal depression have come to truly understand suicide is a problem, not an answer.

When should you seek help for depression? As soon as you feel ready. When should you seek help for suicidal depression? NOW. How do you know that it is time? Take the following test and have someone very close to you take it as well based on his or her observations of you. Together, you may be able to begin taking some important steps toward healing.

## *A Simple Assessment for Depression and Suicidal Thoughts/Behaviors*

Please take some time and consider each question on this assessment for you or your friend or family member. The questionnaire is derived from one posted on the web site: “*Stop A Suicide, Today!*” (<http://www.stopasuicide.org/signs.html>). Remember, it is perfectly normal, given what has occurred to check off some of the items below. This may still mean that professional help might be useful or necessary, and our team encourages you to seek out any help that you need. Please do not hesitate to contact any of the organizations or professionals we have listed on page 164. Many people have obtained tremendous help through mental health professionals. There is great strength in asking for help and taking care of yourself.

### **Part I.**

a) Have you said (or heard your friend say)...?

- ☐ Life isn't worth living
- ☐ My family would be better off without me
- ☐ Next time I'll take enough pills to do the job right
- ☐ Take my prized collection, valuables. I don't need this stuff anymore
- ☐ I won't be around to deal with that
- ☐ You'll be sorry when I'm gone
- ☐ I won't be in your way much longer
- ☐ I just can't deal with everything, life's too hard
- ☐ Nobody understands me, nobody feels the way I do
- ☐ There's nothing I can do to make it better

☐ I'd be better off dead

☐ I feel like there is no way out

b) Have you observed in yourself (or your friend)...?

☐ Getting affairs in order, such as paying off debts or changing will

☐ Giving away articles of either personal or monetary value

☐ Signs of planning a suicide, such as obtaining a weapon or writing a suicide note

## **Part II. Depression Risk Questionnaire**

a) Have you noticed the following signs of depression?

☐ Depressed mood

☐ Change in sleeping patterns (too much, too little, or disturbances)

☐ Change in weight or appetite

☐ Speaking and/or moving with unusual speed or slowness

☐ Loss of interest or pleasure in usual activities

☐ Withdrawal from family and friends

☐ Fatigue or loss of energy

☐ Feelings of worthlessness, self-reproach or guilt

☐ Diminished ability to think or concentrate, slowed thinking or indecisiveness

☐ Thoughts of death, suicide or wishes to be dead

b) If depression is possible have you also noticed...?

☐ Extreme anxiety, agitation, or enraged behavior

☐ Excessive drug and/or alcohol abuse

☐ Neglect of physical health

☐ Feelings of hopelessness or desperation

## *How to Interpret the Questionnaire*

### **If you checked boxes under:**

- *Part I only*, then you (your friend) may be at risk for *suicide* and should seek professional help. If you have checked several boxes seek professional help immediately
- *Part II only*, then you (your friend) may be suffering from *depression* and should seek further evaluation with a mental health professional or primary care physician
- *Parts I and II*, the *suicide* risk is even higher and you (your friend) could save a life by seeking professional help immediately

### **What to do?**

Suicide is a real concern for anyone who has experienced a major loss. Do not underestimate the degree to which a bout of depression can turn quite serious. It is always better to reach out for help or have a friend reach out for you than for others to suffer yet another loss.

If you are unsure what to do after completing the quiz or if you have some concern for yourself or others just make a phone call. It is better that you speak with a professional who can help you assess your situation and guide you in the right direction. On page 164 we present some contact information of professionals who may be helpful.

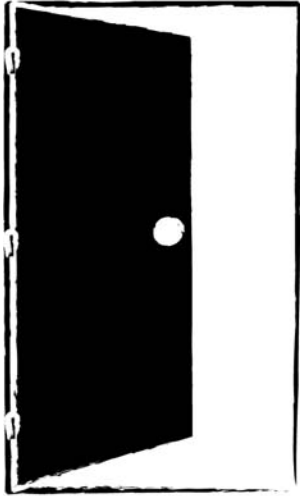
In addition, you can call your local community mental health center, Catholic Family Service, Jewish Family Services, or a professional or clergy person you are close to and let them know your concern right away. In the end, you and those who love you will be glad you cared enough to make that move toward life.



## Where are you related to the Doorway?

(How ready are you to take a step forward?)

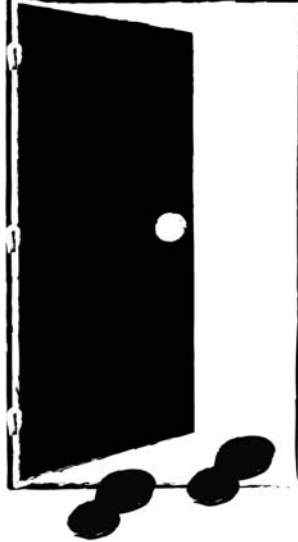
Outside (Not Ready)



Feelings:

Thoughts:

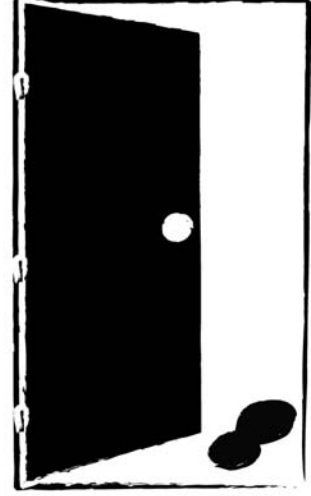
In (Maybe Ready)



Feelings:

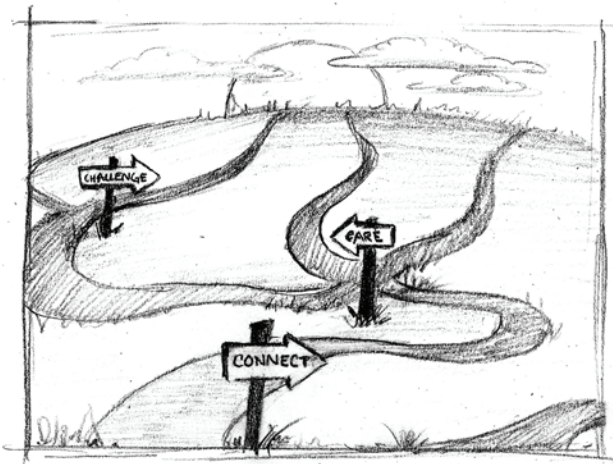
Thoughts:

Through (Ready)



Feelings:

Thoughts:



## DOORWAY 3

# The Process of Living with Loss & Adversity

As you already can tell, your experience of helping yourself live with your loss or dealing with an unfortunate experience will not be easy.

But there are ways that you can learn more about

yourself and navigate through the difficult journey. I have created a process based on experiences with helping people and research. The first step in the process involves gaining a deeper understanding of who you are and how your experiences have affected you. The next step is learning the importance of taking care of yourself and how you can do that. The third step is building up the courage to challenge yourself to take actions toward healing and growth. Although I refer to the process having steps, at times your steps will be out of sequence and it will often feel as if you are stepping backwards. Taking a step backward is perfectly fine; just make sure you take a step and a half forward when you are able.

Below is a description of the steps that will help you learn about yourself and move toward healthy living.

**Self-Connect (Self-Understand):** Understand what you are feeling and what you are thinking and why. You may experience a host of emotions that seem to come all at once. What's important is that you take time to understand yourself so you can address your needs and take steps toward decreasing any painful emotions and increasing positive thoughts and feelings. Again, know that whatever you are feeling is ok. It is important to be ok with your feelings and seek way to manage them rather than avoid them. Below you will find some examples of how you can gain a deeper understanding of yourself and how certain experiences may affect you.

**Self-Care:** Once you gain an understanding of what you are feeling and why, you can begin to take care of yourself. There are several pathways to care for yourself. Make attempts to learn strategies to recharge your emotional battery. Some people reach out and talk with loved ones they trust. Other people practice deep breathing, yoga, writing stories about their experience, imagery, or journal writing. Below you will find some examples of how to care for yourself.

**Self-Challenge:** Based on your new platform of self-connection (understanding yourself) and self-care you can begin to challenge yourself to grow through the experience. You may not be ready to challenge yourself and that is ok as well. Once you feel ready we encourage you to take steps toward growing. This can include reaching out and helping others due to your experience or it can be as simple as writing down the things that you have learned from your experience. Growth and challenging yourself can happen at any time, even when you have experiences that are painful. The important aspect is that you try and try again. Below you will find some examples of how to care for yourself.

Within this Doorway we will present to you more information and exercises related to these steps. Jennifer Page, PhD, is a counselor who works at Harvard University. Below she provides you with a deeper understanding of how to Self-Connect. Dr. Page has a lot of personal and professional experience in the field of loss and adversity. I know you will learn a lot if you allow yourself. You can also read Dr. Page's Story of Growth on page 97.

# Self-Connect

*Jennifer Page, PhD*

My name is Jen and we are connected through our shared experience of loss. I am a psychologist with a specialty in the area of grief and loss, but it is my personal experience with loss that is at the core of my professional work in this area. I lost my father suddenly and tragically when I was a senior in high school. The pain of this loss was such that I avoided dealing with it until years later, when I was forced to ask for professional help to address the negative impact my delayed grieving was having on my college academic performance. Through this experience, however, I was able to gain an understanding of myself that provided the foundation for my healing and growth. With this understanding came a sense of purpose so strong that it decided my career path and my professional goals. I wanted to learn how to help others who, like me, needed psychological healing in order to move forward with life. I have since completed my graduate studies and earned a doctoral degree in Counseling Psychology, and am focusing on specializing in mental health service delivery on a college campus.

Because of the healing power that self-understanding gave me, I believe in the importance of *connection* – with oneself and others – as a foundation for healing and growth. In fact, it was a chance moment of *connection* with Rob around the loss of our fathers that introduced me to the Hold the Door for Others organization. I have been a member of the Hold the Door Team and dedicated to helping others find their way through loss ever since. It is my hope that, with the help of this workbook, we will one day also be connected through our shared experience of *growth* through loss.

Self-Connect is a foundational resource, which is about raising your self-awareness so you can understand yourself and understand the people around you. The process of self-connecting facilitates trust between you and others, and encourages you to bond with people on a deeper level. This in turn enables you to develop your resources to grow through loss.

Self-Connect is a key ingredient to living with and growing through loss. As you proceed through this workbook it will be an important foundation as you build your knowledge of the social and emotional coping skills outlined in the OTHERS(S) model, which is described in Doorway 7 on page 79. It is my goal in this chapter to help you begin to *connect* by guiding you through some exercises designed to help you develop greater self-understanding and build relationships with others. In other words, we're going to work together to help you increase your self-understanding and your understanding of others in order to connect.

***“Knowing others is wisdom, knowing yourself is enlightenment.” - Tao Tzu***

## *Why Self-Connect?*

Connection with yourself and others is a critical part of the healing process. This process involves finding support from someone who is caring, concerned, and can understand your need to talk about your loss. This may be a family member or friend, but it may also be someone outside the family who is either a counselor, a spiritual leader, or someone who has also experienced a loss. In this process, sharing your thoughts and feelings is important because it can help to maintain relationships that can counteract some of the feelings of loneliness that a loss evokes. Self-understanding allows us to identify our thoughts and feelings, such as our anger, our self-blame and guilt, and our sadness, so that we can allow ourselves to talk about them.

Before we continue, I want to bring to your attention the fact that the process of connecting with oneself takes time and self reflection, so you should allow yourself to take whatever time you need to work through this chapter. You may also find that there are times when you begin to feel overwhelmed – this is a completely normal reaction and I encourage you to pay attention to that feeling. You may need to take a break, to talk with someone about what you are experiencing, or to engage in one of the self-care strategies discussed earlier in this book. Whether you work through this chapter in one sitting or many, it will be here for you when you feel ready to learn more about yourself. The more you know yourself the better you will be able to take care of yourself, deal with your grief, and grow through loss.

*“He who finds himself, loses his misery.” - Matthew Arnold*

## *Self-Understanding*

Self-understanding is the process of connecting with ourselves. We do this by focusing on understanding ourselves better. This is important because it helps us understand why we feel what we feel and why we do what we do. With this understanding, we can accept those parts about ourselves that we consider strengths and we can change those things that we’d like to change about ourselves in order to take better care of both ourselves and others.

The following questions are designed to help you – the expert on yourself – discover more about who you are. Again, it will take time for you to go through the questions, so go at your own pace and allow yourself to take breaks as often as needed.

*“We make our world significant by the courage of our questions, and the depth of our answers.” - Carl Sagan*

## *Self-Understanding Questions*

Before we get started, I’d like to share some tips on answering the questions that I found helpful when completing this exercise.

**Tip 1: Be as specific as you can.** The more specific your answers, the clearer the picture of who you are becomes.

**Tip 2: Remember these are questions, not judgments.** Don’t ask yourself these questions with a judgmental tone. They are here to help you discover who you are in an honest, gentle, and nonjudgmental way. Your answers are for you and no one else.

**Tip 3: Let it flow.** If while answering the questions you come up with your own line of questioning, I encourage you to follow it. (Remember, you’re the expert here). Also, if you answer, “I don’t know” to a question, give yourself the freedom to take a wild guess. You know more than you think you do about yourself!

**Tip 4: Be honest.** Honesty leads to true awareness, but it requires courage. It’s the courage to face something you fear or find difficult to accept about yourself. When you summon the courage to take ownership of your actions, thoughts, and feelings, you will be able to face your fears and find the inaccurate beliefs that create them. To do this, check with yourself and make sure that you are answering, “How do I really feel?” and *not* “How *should* I feel?” Monitor if

you are answering the questions intellectually rather than getting in touch with what you are thinking and feeling.

**Tip 5: Trust yourself.** Know that whatever you discover about yourself, you will handle with ease and acceptance. Trust that the information you uncover will in some way lead you to a greater sense of understanding of who you are, where you are, and where you want to go.

**Tip 6: Have fun with the questions!** They are designed to help you get a clearer picture of who you are, but this is isn't intended to be a struggle.

You can use the reflection sections throughout the workbook or a separate piece of paper to write out your answers to the following questions.

### **Your Emotional Self:**

At this time in my life, what emotions am I feeling most of the time? What emotions do I want to feel most of the time?

If I had to list three situations and/or times when I was the most happy in my life, what would I list? What elements were present when I felt that way? How was I feeling about myself during those times?

What do I fear most in my life right now? Why? What would it mean if that happened?

When do I feel the most angry or frustrated? What is it about those situations that make me feel that way?

What is my definition of love? What are my primary beliefs about love (it's easy, scary, short-lived, feels good, is possible, difficult, etc.)? Where/when did I acquire those beliefs? Do I still believe them? Why or why not?

Do I have much control over my emotions? Why or why not?

How do I typically cope with my emotions (e.g., cry, talk with others, write in a journal, go for a walk, breathe, etc.)? In what ways are the coping strategies I use helpful to me? In what ways, if any, are they harmful to me and/or others?

### **Your Spiritual Self:**

Do I believe in God? If not, how do I believe the universe operates? Why do I believe that?

How has my childhood effected my beliefs about God/or lack there of?

What characteristics do I believe God possesses? Why do I believe that?

What is my relationship with this God/Universe? Is it the relationship I want? Why or why not?

In what ways do my spiritual beliefs affect my day-to-day life?

Do I have a code of conduct that I follow? If no, do I want one? Why or why not? If yes, what is it and why those codes?

What do I believe about death? What does it mean to me?

### **Your Social Self:**

What type of people do I enjoy spending time with (intelligent, open-minded, out-going, self-righteous, reflective, quiet, funny, optimists, readers, pessimists, thinkers, sports-minded, active, perceptive, shy, etc.)?

Why do I enjoy those specific qualities in people?

Do I seek out people similar to or different from me? Why is that?

Do I have many friends with the qualities I just described? Why or why not?

How many close friends do I want based on the amount of time I have?

What would those close relationships look like? What would be the biggest aspect shared (talking, shared activities, working on projects together, laughter, storytelling, playing games, etc.)?

What are two of the most favorite things I enjoy doing with others?

Where have I met most of the friends I currently have (family, work, community, childhood, online, etc.)?

What does where I met these friends tell me about myself?

Why am I still friends with these people?

What is the single biggest attitudinal change I'd like to make when with people (be myself, be more out going, be more honest, initiate more conversations, be more comfortable, be more open, be funnier, interrupt less, initiate more activities, etc.)?

### **Your Relational Self:**

What specific characteristics do I want my ideal life partner to possess (generosity, open-mindedness, funny, gently, strong personality, quiet, organized, fun, honest, attractive, playful, similar goals, similar beliefs about politics, finances, parenting, etc.)? Why do I want them to have those characteristics?

If not in a significant relationship, how would I feel if I never had a life partner? Why would I feel that way?

If currently in a significant relationship, am I happy in my current relationship? Why or why not? In what way would I like my partner to change? Why is that important to me? Could I be happy if that person did not change? Why or why not?

What did I appreciate about this person when I first met/knew them? What do I appreciate about them now?

If dealing with the loss of a significant relationship, what did I appreciate about my loved one? What memory stands out most? What do I miss most about that person now? What would I say to that person if I could connect with that person one last time?

## **Your Personal Self:**

What skills have I acquired that I'm proud of?

What accomplishments am I proud of?

Beginning when I was a child, what are the 10 most significant events in my life? How did I make them significant?

What period of my life do I like most? Why? What period of my life do I like least? Why?

What are five of my greatest strengths?

If I were to receive an award, what would I want that award to be for? Why that?  
What do I desire most right now? Why do I desire that?

What motivates me? Why?

If I were to pick out a general theme that showed up often while answering these questions, what would that theme be? What does it mean? How do I feel about that theme?

## **Personal Definitions:**

In addition to asking yourself questions, you may also want to investigate your personal definitions of common words. I know when I went through this process of self-understanding, I found I only had a very general sense of the meaning of these words. It wasn't until I came up with my own precise and specific definitions, that their meaning became clear.

### **What is *your* definition of the following words?**

- |               |                |                  |
|---------------|----------------|------------------|
| - love        | - trust        | - anger          |
| - success     | - appreciation | - mistake        |
| - honesty     | - knowing      | - sex            |
| - happiness   | - believe      | - friend         |
| - soul        | - reality      | - guilt          |
| - true        | - fear         | - intention      |
| - acceptance  | - joy          | - responsibility |
| - inner peace | - judgment     | - myself         |

### *Putting Self-Understanding to Use*

Now that you've taken the time to connect with yourself, you will be able to better understand your thoughts, feelings, and actions in relation to your loss. In the following space, describe a time when you were really hit by grief. You may use the following questions to guide you in more fully describing your experience. What were you experiencing? (What did you see, hear, smell, and feel?) What were you thinking? (What did you assume, expect, believe or conclude about what you were experiencing?) What were you feeling? (What emotions were you feeling in reaction to your thoughts?) What would you have

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue 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.

## Understanding Others & Building Relationships

Once we understand ourselves, we can begin to focus on understanding others. This allows us to build and/or enhance our relationships. The key to understanding others is taking the time to listen to their story of loss, and to listen for ways in which you can connect with their story. For me, I have found that my own experience with the sudden loss of my father has given me an increased sensitivity to and understanding of the feelings and reactions of others who have experienced a traumatic loss. But there are numerous ways in which you might connect with another's story of loss. For instance, you could



connect with someone who lost the same type of relative, holds similar feelings about their loss, makes similar meaning out of their loss, or has learned similar skills through living with loss.

In what ways can you connect with others who have experienced a loss?

Name one person who you want to connect with around your losses this week.

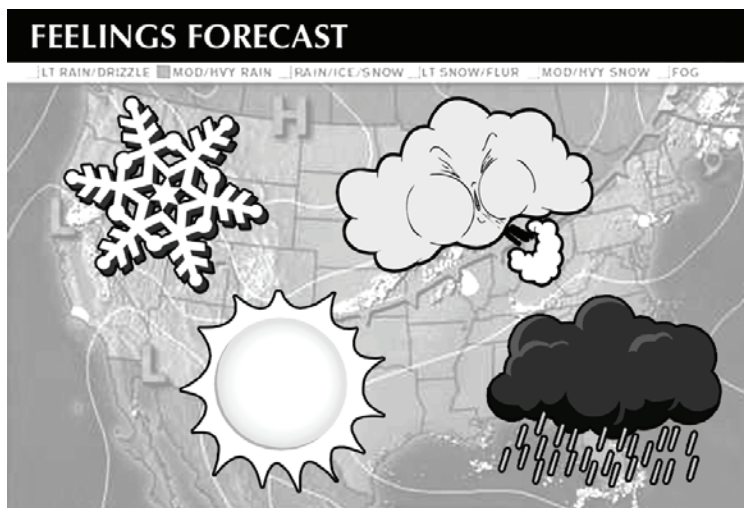
Building relationships with others is a significant part of the healing and growth process. Essentially, we must understand how we originally *connected* with those that we lost and how we can regenerate those connections by both honoring those lost and developing new connections with others. The following questions will help you begin to think about your connections with those loved ones lost and about building connections with others.

1. How did you originally *connect* with the one that was lost? What kind of relationship did you have? How did it begin? How did it evolve? What specific ways/behaviors were reciprocated to maintain the relationship?
2. What aspect of the *connection* was the most difficult to let go? What aspect of the connection have you attempted to regenerate through your relationship(s) with others? What role did the lost person play in your life? What important connections were lost and/or damaged? Have you been able to rely on others to fill that role?
3. In what ways have you attempted to stay *connected* with the loved one? (Rituals, anniversary celebrations/memorials, conversations/letters)
4. What *connections* have you renewed or developed since your loss? Has the loss encouraged you to renew or deepen connections with others? Have you identified specific people, things, organizations, etc. that you would like to build connections with? Identify the strengths/skills you have used and continue to use to build and maintain connections.

5. What *connections* do you hope to renew or develop in the future? What connections have you hoped to deepen but have avoided to this point?

Now that you have taken the time to Self-Connect you have the foundation you need to develop the resources described by the OTHERS(S) model later in this workbook. In order to solidify this foundation, I encourage you to deepen the self-understanding you gained through the exercises above by making sure you take the time to write your own story of growth when you get to page 145 in Doorway 9.

Dr. Page's insights and suggestions will serve a great platform for the next two steps or foundational resources, Self-Care and Self-Challenge.



What am I feeling right now?

Why am I feeling this way?

What am I likely to feel tomorrow?

Why may I feel this way?

What is coming up that may trigger my emotions?

What can I do to prepare for challenging feelings to come?

# Self-Care

Now that you have taken some time to gain a greater understanding of yourself it is time to practice some self-care. It is great if you have people around you that can remind you of the importance of taking care of yourself, but it is also your job. The better care you take of yourself the better you will be able to manage the challenges that may come.

Self-Care is about tending to your physical, psychological and emotional needs. There are several pathways to care for yourself. Make attempts to learn strategies to recharge your emotional battery. Some people reach out and talk with loved ones they trust. Other people practice deep breathing, yoga, writing stories about their experience, imagery, or journal writing.

If there is ever a time to pay attention to our needs and care for ourselves it is during times of extreme stress, sudden loss and adversity. Our minds and bodies are affected a great deal. Some of the consequences of the stress is very easy to identify, for example when you feel extreme sadness and cry. There are a host of other reactions that our minds and bodies can have. We all have targets of stress (i.e. eye twitches or stomach aches). It is our job to first identify what these target stress organs are (self-connect) and then take the time to do something to take care of the potential negative effects.

## **Example targets of stress:**

Headaches  
Back aches  
Tightening of throat  
Stomach aches  
Eye twitch  
Muscle tightness  
Stiff neck  
Shortness of breath

1. What are your targets of stress?

2. What can you do to help relax some of your stress related responses?

## *Reflection*

By taking time to listen to and accommodate your physical and emotional needs, you can better equip yourself to not only maintain ground through difficult times, but also thrive despite challenging obstacles.

I have done a lot of work with athletes on managing their stress and helping them relax. Below is an example of a relaxation and deep breathing program that is a great way to practice self-care and give yourself a break from the intense feelings related to sudden loss and adversity.

## *Relaxation*

Relaxation is important because it allows you to take a break and recharge your emotional battery and spirit. It acts as a way to “hit the reset button.” The better at deep breathing and relaxation you become the more centered and relaxed you will be, which in turn will allow you to be in a better place to manage your feelings. Adding breathing to your daily life will allow you to relax your mind and your body. Over time you will become more flexible in mind and body and eventually develop greater mental toughness. Relaxation and deep breathing is the foundation to relaxation.

Additional benefits of deep breathing and relaxation:

- Great ability to manage the pressure of daily grind
- Enhanced ability to focus and concentrate
- Cools down your physiology before, during and after a stressful event
- Lowers your level of stress and increases your ability to manage stress

### **Awareness Breathing:**

In a place where you feel comfortable and relaxed.

1. Inhale deeply through your nose very slowly to a count of 4. Be sure to breath deeply from your diaphragm and that you can feel your stomach expanding first and then your chest. While you breath it should be effortless and without strain. When you complete your four count your stomach and abdomen should be pushed out.
2. Briefly hold
3. Begin to exhale through your mouth in a slow, controlled and relaxed manner. As you exhale count to 10. Focus on completely exhaling in a comfortable and effortless way. Feel your body relax as you exhale and your stomach and diaphragm become at ease.
4. Inhale once again through your nose. Notice how full and deep your breathing is. Notice how good it feels and pay attention to how refreshed you begin to feel.
5. As you inhale say to yourself, I am totally focused - I am totally relaxed and at ease.
6. If you exhale properly your body will take over and ensure that you take full, comfortable and relaxed deep breathes.
7. Repeat these steps for 5 minutes until you begin to feel relaxed and confident.
8. Practice deep breathing for 20 minutes a day and focus on relaxing each part of your body

In our Personal Growth Guide, which can be downloaded for free on our website, a number of activities are suggested to help you care for yourself. Below are a couple suggestions.

- When facing loss of any kind, one can easily un-attend to his/her physical/emotional well-being. Many times, when we respond to loss or adversity, we can become consumed by strong emotions and lose sight of how we can help ourselves pull away from those limiting feelings we may become burdened with. Think about your current lifestyle after your loss, and ask yourself: Realistically, what activities can I interject in my life-style that will encourage good physical health and emotional well-being? Write down your ideas, and inject them into a daily physical fitness plan. Be sure to make your goals attainable (realistic to you) and time-specific. Research suggests that by partaking in a physical fitness regimen and healthy lifestyle, you not only improve your physical health in many ways, but a byproduct is also increased self-esteem, a positive mood, and overall higher level of happiness.

- Pay attention to your diet, especially in times of duress. What we feed our bodies can have a significant impact on the way we feel in general. Just the same with physical exercise, it can be very easy to neglect a healthy eating regimen when we are going through emotionally laden times. In conjunction with your physical fitness plan, think about some ways that you can improve your diet. Consult various healthy lifestyle books/magazines, and come up with a doable eating regimen for your new lifestyle. Choose nutritional foods that you enjoy, not ones you dislike, or know you won't be able to keep in your diet. Embarking on a new eating regimen that is enduring can be a challenge. Look for support from your friends who seem to be successful with their lifestyle. If you still have trouble, you may want to consult with a dietician for some healthful advice.
- Develop a personal health and wellness plan that will outline both fitness activities and a healthy eating regimen. Connect this plan to a specific, measurable fitness goal. Include exercises and activities that you genuinely enjoy, and can see yourself practicing on a regular basis. Also, think of some healthy food substitutions for those times when you want to grab the ice cream container or bag of chips. Post your health and wellness plan somewhere that is highly visible to you. Make your plan a living document, where you add new activities and healthy food items as you acquire them.
- Develop a personal health and wellness plan that will outline both fitness activities and a healthy eating regimen. Connect this plan to a specific, measurable fitness goal. Include exercises and activities that you genuinely enjoy, and can see yourself practicing on a regular basis. Also, think of some healthy food substitutions for those times when you want to grab the ice cream container or bag of chips. Post your health and wellness plan somewhere that is highly visible to you. Make your plan a living document, where you add new activities and healthy food items as you acquire them.
- After experiencing a loss, your thoughts and emotions may interfere with your regular sleeping patterns. It is especially important to get sufficient sleep (8 hrs) when your mind and body endures the physical and emotional stresses of responding to loss. The following are some healthy sleeping habits as recommended by William Dement, M.D.
  - *Sleep only when you are tired:* This will reduce the time you are awake in bed
  - *Try not to take naps during the day:* This will ensure you are tired at bed-time
  - *Develop your own sleep rituals:* Listen to relaxing music or read for 15 min. before bed
  - *Stay away from caffeine, nicotine and alcohol at least 4-6 hrs. before bed:* These items may interfere with your ability to fall asleep or stay asleep
  - *Take a hot bath 90 minutes before bedtime:* A hot bath will raise your body temperature, which may leave you feeling sleepy

# Self-Challenge

Self-Challenge is a foundational resource needed to build the OTHERS(S) resources. Challenge places emphasis on finding your inner strength, even in the most painful times of your life, to be brave enough to take steps toward healing and growing through your loss.

One thing that I believe sets Hold The Door For Others apart from many organizations and many approaches to healing is our focus on honoring your feelings and taking action. It is perfectly normal and fine to take your time and experience what you are experiencing. However, there comes a time when it is helpful for you to take steps toward your personal growth. It is not easy and it is *not* about “letting go” or “moving forward.” It is about caring enough about yourself to challenge yourself to create new meanings and purpose, while honoring your loved one or understanding the adversity you may have faced.

Challenging yourself is how you grow and how you can take some of your pain away. Our bodies and minds do not let us focus on two things at once. Therefore, if you decide that you want to focus on how you can grow at that moment you cannot be thinking about your pain. There will be times that you take one step forward followed by a step backwards. That’s ok as well, just remember that you have the ability to take steps and use your friends, family, and resources to continue the journey.

One way to challenge yourself is to dream. When you create dreams you become emotionally connected to your future. Below are some exercises that will help you create a strategy around your dreams. Try to make the dream about you and what you want. I am not asking you to forget about your loved one or the difficult experience you are going through, but I am asking you to take a vacation from it for the next couple of pages. Challenge yourself to take a break from your grief and create some positive emotions and thoughts about your life. Trust me, we will be revisiting the challenging emotions and thoughts later on in the workbook.

## *Dreams*

Dreams are emotional and tremendous. Dreams have no parameters and no limitations. Having dreams keep us engaged in the future and allow us to keep moving forward despite emotional or physical pain.

When we dream, no one, not even yourself, can tell you it is not possible. Dreams are all about your heart and not much about your head. So stop reading and start dreaming.

Don’t think or feel; just write one of your dreams.

**The title of my dream is:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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## *Vision*

Visions are big, but not grandiose. They are our roadmap and guide toward growth. They provide us with images, pathways, and connections toward our growth.

**Create a vivid picture of your desired future:** The more clearly you can see your vision the more clear your path to your vision will be.

**Describe your vision using powerful words and emotions:** Associate with your vision how it would feel to reach your vision. By using powerful emotions and words you will be driven toward your vision.

**Use as many senses as you can. Act as if your vision is a reality:** Our minds do not know when we actually achieve something or do not. Therefore, by acting as if we reached our vision using all of our senses we are more likely to develop the confidence to reach our visions.

**Associate your vision with personal as well as organizational values:** It is essential to align your vision with the organization's belief system. In addition, the more your vision reflects who you are, the more passion and drive you will have when focusing on it.

**Commit to your vision publicly:** Tell a number of your colleagues and friends about your vision. By declaring your vision publicly there is a sense of obligation for fulfilling this vision.

**Include other opinions when creating your vision:** Communicate with a number of people about your vision and welcome their feedback. Often, a person can help with shaping a vision that is more appropriate for you.

**My Vision for my Growth:**

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# Growth Steps

## “The Only Distance Between Your Dreams and Your Reality is You!”

Every journey, no matter the distance, begins with one step. Growth STEPS are action steps toward our desired destinations. Growth STEPS are essential because they provide us with concrete ways we can take control of ourselves and begin to grow. Taking Growth STEPS does not mean we do not experience any challenging emotions, or thoughts we are experiencing. Quite the opposite, we acknowledge potential speed bumps and roadblocks so we can plan by ourselves and with others how to navigate through them.

In order to walk toward your dreams and growth you need to create Growth STEPS that are practical, engaging, easy to follow, and effective. Growth STEPS need to be Specific, Time oriented, Emotional, Positive, and Self-controlled. Below you will be presented with a description of each characteristic and examples.

**S-Specific and measurable** (has to be clear and able to be measured)

**T-Time oriented** (need to have an element of when)

**E-Emotional** (connected to what you want and are invested in)

**P-Positive** (needs to have an element of moving forward)

**S-Self-controlled** (under your control)

**Specific:** Growth steps need to be specific and measurable. Someone who does not know you should be able to know whether or not you have completed your growth step.

Example (not specific): I will write down how I am feeling and why *more often*.

Example (specific): I will call my friend Sally *once a week on Tuesdays* and tell her how I am feeling.

**Time oriented:** An effective Growth Step is one that has an element of time. You know when it is completed.

Example: I will talk with three people *this week* and let them know that I can use support.

**Emotional:** Growth Steps need to include an emotional connection to you. Growth steps need to be something that YOU want to accomplish and something that you are invested in.

Example: *I want to* increase *my* self-awareness by keeping a journal three times a week.

**Positive:** Growth STEPS need to be stated positively so you know they are helping you grow and move forward.

Example (negative): I am *not* going to be negative and doubt my confidence.

Example (positive): I *am* going to remain positive by saying positive statements to myself every night.

**Self-Controlled:** Growth STEPS need to be under your control. They need to be actions that you have control over and you are the deciding factor of whether they are completed or not.

Example: I am going to practice my Feelings Forecast once a day in the morning.

## *Growth STEPS Road Map*

**Desired Destination (outcome):**

**Growth STEPS**

1. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## *Grief Grabbers*

For some, seeing images related to how our loved one passed is very difficult. For others, smelling that persons favorite cologne, or seeing their favorite show, or walking by their favorite restaurant becomes very challenging. When something triggers our emotion and grabs our grief it often is an overwhelming experience. There is NOTHING wrong with that. However, the more aware we are, the easier it is for us to honor those feelings and also focus on our growth. One of the easiest ways to manage overwhelming emotion is to figure out when it is most likely to occur and to come up with a plan to handle the feelings. Therefore, it would make sense for us to identify our grief grabbers. These grabbers can be anything from an image or certain person to a specific place. Anything that you find triggers your strong feelings of grief.

Below please make a list of your *grief grabbers* that may hinder your Growth STEPS. By creating this list we are learning to become more aware of what triggers our grief so we can become more strategic in dealing with it.

- a)
- b)
- c)
- d)
- e)

These grief grabbers often lead to a number of feelings that are challenging to manage. I know from speaking with a number of psychologists as well as my research and practice in the area of social and emotional learning and emotional intelligence that our feelings are extremely powerful.

I would even go so far to say that our feelings are the most powerful aspect of our being. The way we feel dictates how we act in any given situation. For example if we are feeling sad or depressed we may be less motivated to interact with people or accomplish a task. On the other hand if we are feeling passionate and confident we will be more likely to deal with challenges and pursue our dreams. Therefore, it is important for us to identify our feelings and deal with them in order to choose the direction we want to go.

## *Confidence*

**Write down 5 reasons why you know you can achieve your Growth STEPS.**

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)

4)

5)

**My Growth Buddy is:**\_\_\_\_\_.

**Phone:**\_\_\_\_\_ **Email:**\_\_\_\_\_.

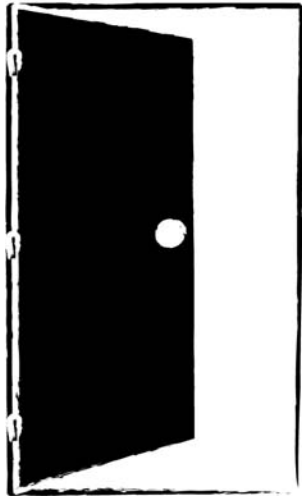
**The next time we plan to talk is:**\_\_\_\_\_.  
**Who will contact who?**

**The time after that we are going to talk is**\_\_\_\_\_.  
**Who will contact who?**

## Where are you related to the Doorway?

(How ready are you to take a step forward?)

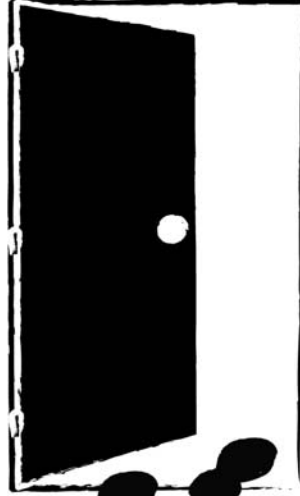
Outside (Not Ready)



Feelings:

Thoughts:

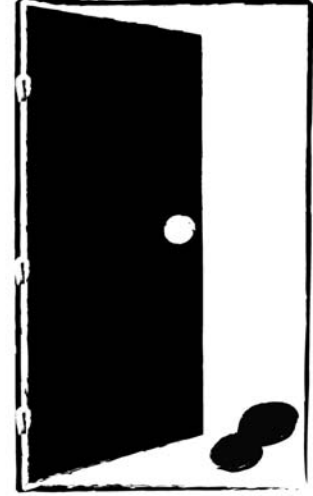
In (Maybe Ready)



Feelings:

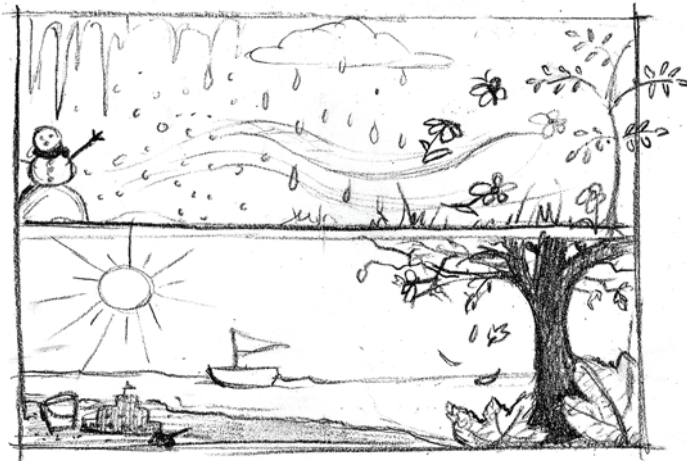
Thoughts:

Through (Ready)



Feelings:

Thoughts:

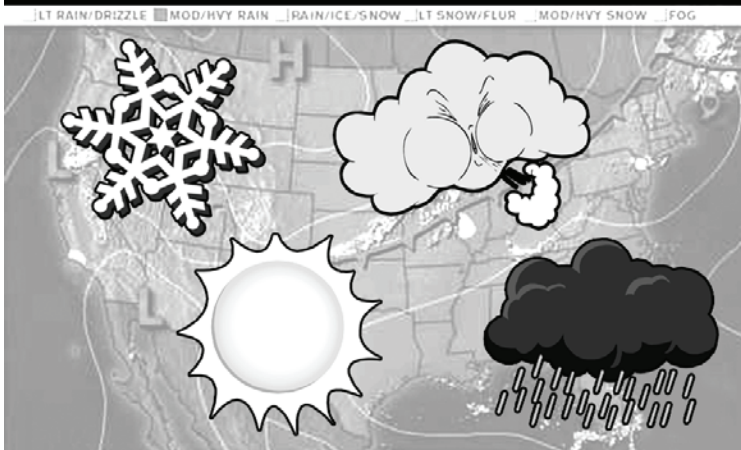


## DOORWAY 4

# Healing & Feeling

Everything in life involves feeling. Whether we want to feel it or not, whether we are aware of it or not, feelings are in every aspect of our life. From every decision we make in life to every decision we decide to not make in life, our feelings are part of us. Feelings are the most wonderful aspect of the world and when you allow yourself to care, feelings can be the most challenging part of your life. Because you have been through a difficult experience, you may want to not feel or even not care for people once again. You must actually do the complete opposite. Now is the time to honor your feelings in honor of your loss or adversity. I know it will not be easy to feel, and feel again, but I also know that feelings are healthy and the more you let yourself feel, the more you will be allowing yourself to heal.

### FEELINGS FORECAST



**What am I feeling right now?**

**Why am I feeling this way?**

**What am I likely to feel tomorrow?**

**Why may I feel this way?**

**What is coming up that may trigger my emotions?**

**What can I do to prepare for challenging feelings to come?**

Feelings are the most powerful aspect of our being. They are what drive our behavior and what we actively strive to either avoid or experience. Take a minute to reflect on this: Everything we do in life is to either avoid or embrace a certain feeling. We help people we care about because they need us, but what is really behind those actions? Do we want to feel good because we are helping? Do we want our friend to feel supported? Do we want to avoid feeling guilty or the dealing with conflict that may feel awkward?

The bottom line is that feelings are powerful and they cannot be avoided. Even when we feel that we don't want to feel, we are still feeling.

Feelings are very similar to the weather. They will always come and always pass. Even when we think we can predict what feelings we are going to have, much like when Al Roker says it's going to rain and it's sunny, we can think we are going to be sad and actually feel happy. It is important to get better at predicting and preparing for your feelings. For example, you can learn what situations trigger you to feel depressed or anxious. Just like you can bring along an umbrella when you think it is going to rain, you can prepare for potential feelings. You can let a friend know that you may be calling them because you are going to a social situation that reminds you of how you lost a loved one. Just like you may decide to wear a windbreaker when you know it is going to be windy, you can rent a funny movie if you know you are going to be upset.

You are likely to have a range of feelings over time. Many times it will feel as if you are shifting from feeling to feeling. Below are some feelings that many people feel as a response to sudden loss or a very difficult experience.

**Fear:** Fear is a common emotion that many of us will experience as we continue with our lives. This powerful emotion can result from our uncertainty. We are uncertain what the future holds for us now more than ever. Fear can be debilitating and prevent us from truly living life. Especially after what you may have experienced, you may have a tendency to bring a sense of fear with you everywhere we go. It is important for you to be aware of what is causing your fears so you can deal with this powerful emotion.

Think about the following questions and write your answers below:

1. Since your experience what fears do you have?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. How have these fears prevented you from living the life you want to live?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. What has helped you cope with these fears? (*Note* - if you have not been able to cope with your fear, you may want to consider seeking counseling)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. Who is someone you can talk with when you are feeling a great sense of fear?

Having people to talk to and knowing some ways to manage fear will not eliminate fear. Indeed, being afraid and cautious in some situations is very wise. Knowing how to understand and manage fear and

relying on the support of friends and family *will* allow us to move forward with our lives, and can prevent our fear from becoming overpowering.

**Worry and Anxiety:** Feelings of worry and anxiety are now commonplace. With all of the media coverage of war, terrorism, violent crime, natural disasters and September 11<sup>th</sup> we are likely to have increased worry and anxiety. Situations that may have never concerned us before may be very anxiety provoking for us. What will we do about Thanksgiving? Who will make the important financial decisions? Who is the leader of our family? What now without Dad or Mom? These are all common and normal concerns to have. For many, there are fears of future losses and adversity. After loss and adversity, it is only natural for people to fear what else could go wrong. Fear and anxiety often feed upon each other. Be aware of cycles of fear and anxiety that may be interfering with your effectiveness and try to be accepting of some of your limitations at this time.

Related to anxiety and worry is having consuming thoughts about our loved ones. Nothing can replace the person you lost. This is one of the reasons why we tend to think of that person repeatedly. Some of us may even review their death on a daily basis. It is fine to think about our loved ones, but when these thoughts consume us and begin to take over our lives it is time to act.

**Anger:** Anger, even rage, seems to be one of the emotions most strongly identified with your experience. Anger can be expressed as outright hostility, irritation, irritability, frustration, intolerance, or annoyance, and can also result in the loss of faith in religion. It can be uncomfortable or embarrassing to be this angry or to feel this out of control. But being angry in our case is reasonable. Our loved ones were horribly taken from us. There are grounds for anger.

*The important aspect is how we deal with our anger.* It is important to express our emotions in a healthy manner. We do not want to take out our anger on the nice lady from the Red Cross who is trying to help us. However, we do need to deal with this powerful emotion. For me, I took my anger and the energy, sadness, and frustration I felt and channeled it into our foundation's mission: to empower people to growth through loss and adversity and achieve their dreams.

One strategy I apply when I become angry is to take a step toward further accomplishing our mission. For example, if I become angry because my father can not be here to see the success of our foundation, I will write down one thing I can do to make the foundation better and then do it. It may be something such as writing a letter to Mayor Bloomberg asking for his support, or it may be having a conversation with my mom about how she would like to be involved. The point is to channel the powerful emotion of anger toward something positive.

Think about the following questions and write your answers below:

1. What specifically about your experience makes you angry?
2. When do you feel this anger the most?



3. What do you do when you become angry?
4. How can you deal with you anger in a more healthy way? (*Note* - if you are angry all the time or cannot find ways to effectively and appropriately deal with your anger then counseling may be appropriate)

**Guilt:** Guilty feelings can result from the fact that you are still alive while your loved one has died. This “survivor guilt” is a very powerful emotion. In some countries, people serving in the military are not allowed to trade rounds of duty. That’s because if something happens during a shift, the country may lose two soldiers - one to war and the other to survivor guilt. Survivors of tragedy can become so overwhelmed with the guilt of having survived when others died that they are simply not able to go on with their lives.

Then there is the every day garden variety no win situation guilt. It goes something like this. “Well, it is Gregg’s 50<sup>th</sup> birthday party. If I don’t go, Gregg and his family will be upset with me. But, if I do go I may have fun and laugh and that is just not right without (insert name of loved one lost). I mean people may think I don’t care that she or he is no longer there. Then again, it would be nice to see Gregg’s family. But, what if I get tired and overwhelmed with people looking at me and saying sorry?” As you can see, we can go on for days playing these scenarios out.

If we looked at it rationally, we know that our loved ones do not want us sitting around and grieving constantly. Although we may feel sad, it is important that we understand that the amount of time we spend alone grieving or turning down social engagements does not reflect how much we loved our special person. One of my close friends once told me that guilt is like being in a rocking chair, it gives you something to do, but gets you nowhere. No, this is not the most kind and sensitive comment that I’ve heard, but it makes sense. It is normal for us to feel guilt at times. On the other hand it is not healthy for us to allow guilt to overwhelm us and to determine what we do and when we do it.

1. What are the occasions that lead you to feelings of guilt since your experience?
2. How might these feelings of guilt interfere with your being able to heal somewhat and help others to heal as well?
3. What is keeping you from letting go of your feelings of guilt?

#### 4. When is enough simply enough in terms of having to feel guilty?

**Separation Pain:** It is only normal for us to experience pain and yearning for our loved ones. These strong feelings come and go over time. They keep memories of our loved ones alive and connect us closely to them. These feelings play an additional role. They often prevent us, whether we are aware of it or not, from establishing new loving relationships or deepening the ones we have. Since the tragedy of your experience was so sudden and sharp it is difficult for us to trust that the ones we love will be by our side forever. The coping strategy of shutting down and pushing friends and family away can and will only make matters worse in the future.

**Depression and Despair:** It is estimated that 30% of people who lose a spouse become depressed. Clearly, the death of a husband or wife is a terrible event dramatically affecting everyone who experiences it. The general public is also well aware of the turmoil and emotional distress that is caused through losing a child. In some cases it is even possible for physical illness to surface after such a loss. Sadness and depression are normal responses to loss. If depression continues without relief, however, it can be life threatening. If you are so depressed that you cannot live your life or if you decide to commit suicide, then the loss of life due to your experienced tragedy has doubled.

It is common for people to turn to alcohol and/or drugs (including over-the-counter sleeping pills) or even excessive shopping or gambling to try to control the anxiety and depression present when dealing with intense feelings of loss. Be careful here as it is easy to lose one's life this way – both in terms of being able to function effectively and in terms of placing oneself, and possibly others, in great peril. Seeking sources of help in your community in church, synagogue, or through AA/NA (even if you are just a bit concerned about these problem behaviors) can be the most life-affirming decision you can make. Facing the raw hurt of loss is brutal and should not be done alone.

**Please turn to page 29 to learn more about depression and potential suicidal thoughts.**

**Confusion and Lack of Concentration:** I know for me it has been difficult to focus on daily tasks. Grief plays tricks on me and can creep up unexpectedly. I remember being completely prepared to run a workshop on focus and concentration for a business. The ironic aspect of this is that minutes before the workshop was to begin I became overwhelmed with grief. It was just “one of those grief stricken days.” I had a decision to make. I could cancel the presentation and leave everyone stuck for the day or I could try to hide my grief and “fake it” or I could try to work within the limits of my feelings. I decided to give the presentation but to share my feelings. I explained how I was feeling to the audience and described how my feelings might have hindered my focus during the workshop. This served many purposes. The main ones are: a) I was able to deal with my feelings and b) I gained my focus and concentration back by facing my emotions and then continuing on. Confusion and lack of focus can also stem from lack of sleep, depression,, and anxiety. Addressing the underlying causes of lack of focus may help reduce the confusion and distractibility that we feel.

**Please turn to page 65 to learn more about thought blending, focus, and concentration from Dr. Jack Lesyck.**

**Diminished Self-Concern:** I know from speaking with people who lost a loved one on September 11<sup>th</sup> that many people feel a loss of purpose when faced with adversity and loss. Things that used to matter just don't seem important or even worth bothering about anymore. Things that we used to look forward to we don't care about and may even dread doing. If you feel like nothing much is worth doing or really important, you should know that you are not alone. Others of us have shared your feelings but want to encourage you to step forward. You are now being softly challenged to begin to find your new life and new self. Trust me when I say we would all love to have our old selves back, but that is not possible.

**Stress:** Stress wears us down both physically and emotionally. Indeed, it is estimated that 60-80% of all sickness and disease is caused by stress. The specific events that cause stress are different for each of us. Some of us find social situations to be incredibly stressful, but others find the support of friends and family to be extremely helpful. Clearly, our individual perceptions and feelings affect how much stress we feel. Understanding, managing, and reducing some of our stress can be an important step in the healing process.

**Please turn to page 26 to learn more about stress and anxiety.**

We are now well on our way to learning how loss can affect us. Let's keep in mind that ultimately we are in control of our lives. We can get through this. We have the strength and skills to find a way to survive and even gain from loss. This is not easy. You may be reading this right now and not be able to see how you can eventually learn from all that you have been through. Please read on and challenge yourself to say maybe, just maybe there is relief from my grief and I can live a life where my emotions are less intense at times. A helpful way of looking at this for me and the clients I work with is that we are in the process of making ourselves emotion coaches. We can literally learn how to coach ourselves, carry ourselves, guide and help ourselves through our grief. That is exactly what we are already learning how to do.

Together we have learned and become aware of what some of the powerful feelings related to grief are. We know this journey is a long one and can take many turns. Let's move forward together and open our next door.

# Healing With Feeling

The following is a list of some ways you can manage challenging feelings that you experience. Remember, we are not trying to avoid feelings (when we avoid, we leave ‘a void’). We are honoring our feelings and finding healthy ways to live with them and lessen the negative feelings and enhance the positive ones.

## 1) Feelings Force Field:

There are times that it is important to take a break from your feelings. One way to do this is take action to manage your feelings. At times, feelings will become overwhelming.

One exercise you can try is to break up how long you will allow yourself to feel a certain way. For example, if you are feeling down for an extended period of time you may want to try and challenge your thoughts so you can feel differently. The way this works is that you give yourself a certain amount of time to feel the way you are feeling. Let’s say 8 minutes. Within those 8 minutes you are allowed to feel whatever you are feeling. It might be sadness, depression, anger, etc. After this initial period, change your thoughts, which will in turn change your feelings. Do not allow yourself to engage any feelings that are not either positive or neutral. Then a third 8-minute period is for just positive thoughts and feelings. This is your time to reflect on what is positive in your life or what you are happy about.

This exercise is not easy and takes practice. The key is to believe in the process and commit to changing your mindset and focus. I often use this exercise with people who need to perform in spite of extreme adversity. Below is some guidance to help you apply this new skill. Remember, skills only work if you practice them. Just as you would practice any new skill you are learning such as skiing or teaching, you need to practice this skill time and time again until it becomes a part of your life style.

You can think of the 3 sets of 8-minute periods as the phases of a traffic light. For instance, the red light would be your first 8-minute period to think through what your current feelings are. The second 8-minute period would be a yellow light, which represents neutral feelings where you may have some contemplation. Finally, the third 8-minute period would be your GREEN light, which would represent only positive feelings. The Force Field comes into play because once you commit to the GREEN light you are absolutely in control. Only positive thoughts and feelings can be present. If you begin to have doubts or negative feelings you need to return to the yellow light and can only return when you are absolutely ready. The GREEN light is when you make your transition from contemplation to concentration. While in the GREEN you can think about your favorite place to be, your dreams, how you have grown, etc. The most important aspect of the GREEN light is it is a positive experience. You can always return to the yellow or red lights, but when you are in the GREEN, you are in control and you are having a positive experience.

Let’s practice.

### Red Light: 8 Minutes

What are you feeling?

What are you thinking?

Why are you feeling this way?

How are these feelings influencing your thoughts and behaviors?

**Yellow Light: 8 Minutes**

Why is it important for you to have a break from your challenging feelings?

On a scale of 1 (lowest) to 10 (highest) how motivated are you to have a brief period of positive feelings?  
What do you need to do to allow yourself to have a brief positive experience?

Are you aware that you can always return to your challenging feelings?

Take a deep breath.

**GREEN LIGHT: 8 Minutes of positive thoughts and emotions**

The light is now GREEN. Only positive, thoughts, images, and feelings for the next 8 minutes. Some people like to play inspirational music at this time.

Some guiding questions:

What positive thoughts are you having?

Why do you have hope for the future?

What have you learned about yourself recently?

What are your greatest strengths?

Who have you developed meaningful relationships with lately?

## **Personal reflections:**

Now it is up to you to keep the positive momentum and energy flowing. Keep focusing on positive feelings, images, and thoughts. Challenge yourself to extend this 8 minute period to 10 minutes and then 12 and then 20 and so on.

## **2) HEAL**

**H** - Honor your feeling

**E** - Evaluate your feeling

**A** - Ask yourself how to manage your feeling in a healthy way

**L** - Learn from your feelings

This particular exercise is meant to challenge you to become aware of your feelings, to face them, and then to gain some relief from your grief. Keep in mind that one of my missions is to help you help yourself to have more good hours and days than bad. I know it will be tough, but I know you can work toward it as we travel through this journey. Time to face our feelings, and HEAL as we feel.

### **H – Honor your feeling**

Describe the feeling that you are having. Really challenge yourself to identify what you are feeling and sit in it. Is it anger, is it guilt, is it sadness, is it hopelessness? Don't be afraid of the feeling. Welcome it. Once you do this, be sure to take a *DEEP BREATH* and a couple minutes to relax yourself.

Be sure to honor your feelings. They are yours and you are having these feelings for a reason. This does not give you license to act out or act in on your feelings. That is, you are NOT permitted to hurt others or yourself physically or emotionally because of this feeling. Right now we are simply identifying it so we can deal with it in a healthy manner.

### **E – Evaluate**

Evaluate what caused you to feel this way. Once you have described what you are feeling, you then need to gain an awareness of why you feel this way. By evaluating and gaining a greater self-awareness in regard to your feelings you will be more able to manage your emotions and coach yourself. So with that in mind, ask yourself why am I feeling this way?

### **A – Ask**

Ask yourself what is the healthiest way to deal with this feeling? Our minds work like computers. When have good input, we get good output. So by asking for healthy ways to deal with your

feelings, you will get healthy suggestions. Here are some guiding questions. Do you want to talk with a close friend? Do you need to recharge your emotional batteries? Do you need to go for a walk?

### **L – Learn**

Learn from your feelings and your reactions to your feelings. This journey is one of growth and reframing the experience of loss as our teacher. Loss is very difficult and it can provide us with a number of lessons on how we deal with our feelings. For each feeling you have that needs paying attention to, be sure to learn from it. As your feelings change over time, revisit this exercise and help yourself to move through your most difficult emotions.

Here is an example of how to apply the *HEAL* acronym to your every day life. Let's take the example of becoming frustrated with a family member that does not seem to understand your point of view and how to apply the HEAL exercise. Let's say that someone in your family is forcefully requesting that you attend a social event with the family, but it is one of those days that you are not feeling well and grief has been getting the best of you. This will happen from time to time. So let's say that the person keeps pushing you to attend the social event and you finally blow up and yell at the person to just leave you alone. My guess is that something similar has happened in your household, I know it has in mine. Here is how you can HEAL.

### **H – Honor your feeling**

Right now I am feeling angry and frustrated because Denise will not leave me alone. I need to just take a few deep breaths.

### **E – Evaluate**

When I think about it after taking a deep breath I am angry because I am so angry that she will not understand that I don't want to go to the social event. It really is so hard to keep attending social events. Today I just feel too emotional. I don't want to make a scene and get upset at the gathering. I wish she could understand that.

### **A – Ask**

For me it seems like I really need to take some time to myself. Then I need to try and explain why I feel this way, I am not sure I made it clear. She just may think I don't want to be with the family. I will talk to her about it clearly and calmly.

### **L – Learn**

I learned that if I don't speak my mind when I feel something toward Denise it can build up and come out in a yelling match. For me the anger I felt really was because I was tired, frustrated, and scared of being at another large social event. If I talk to her about it calmly we will be able to work this out.

The areas of your life you can apply this are many. The trick is that you need to apply it and make an attempt to deal with your feelings on a consistent basis. Believe me this is a great exercise to increase your emotional intelligence and try to cut down on the yelling matches.

## FOCUS FRAME

Dealing with our feelings is essential. If we do not actively identify and live with our feelings, they are likely to affect us later in life. Therefore, meet your feelings and don't run away from them. They are telling us something so let's listen and then respond. Throughout the book we will refer to the terms Emotional Intelligence and Emotional Quotient (EQ). Dealing with feelings is one component of what makes up our EQ. The higher our EQ the better you will be at living with losses and adversity and achieving dreams.

### 3) Recharge your emotional battery

Humans are not energizer bunnies. Contrary to popular belief, we all need to recharge our batteries. Just as a battery only has a certain amount of energy, as humans we have a limited amount of emotional capacity. For this reason we need to plan how we can recharge our battery. This can include having conversations with people who care for us or taking the time to do some deep breathing.

#### Some battery chargers:

- 1) Relaxation and deep breathing (see p. 159)
- 2) Visualization or imagery (p. 159)
- 3) Going for a peaceful walk
- 4) Honoring your loved one (p. 163)
- 5) Crying (see below)
- 6) Going shopping (*careful with this one*)
- 7) Exercising
- 8) Connecting with someone who cares and you trust

What else? Please list some of your strategies for recharging your emotional battery.

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)

### 4) Learn that a TV can be turned off

Ready for this one? If at any point you are watching TV or listening to the radio and what you are experiencing is upsetting you, TURN IT OFF. This is the most simple, yet effective intervention we have. It is human nature to be intrigued by the media. Some of us hope to see our loved ones. However, often the result is greater grief and sadness. Therefore, please take control of these situations and make the decision to turn off the TV if the broadcast upsets you.



## 5) Check in with your social support

Social support is key to the grief process and our future. It is important to realize that our support system is comprised of humans. Therefore, we need to check in with them from time to time. It is always appreciated when we thank them for their support. When I am facing a situation that will be stressful and emotional for me, such as the closing ceremony of Ground Hero, I give my social support people a heads up. That is, I call a few friends and let them know what is going on for me and that I may want to call or spend some time with them. This approach is consistent with our proactive philosophy. *As we come better at predicting our grief, we become better at providing ourselves with relief.*

## 6) Cry

Our society seems to have an association with crying that would suggest crying is for the “weak.” Just the opposite is true. Crying actually is a sign of strength. Those of us that do cry, both male and female, are being true to our feelings. It is often more difficult to sit with our pain and express it, then change our focus and ignore it. There is actually research that suggests crying is a biological response that is our body’s way of relieving our body chemically from grief. We can think of our tears as symbols of our love for the ones we have lost. These symbols of love include in them some of the pain that we are letting leave our body as we remember the love and memories of our special ones.

Can you remember times during your grief that you denied yourself the right to cry? I can. I remember when I saw a friend of mine in a health club. I was too concerned about appearing weak so I denied my feelings and bottled up my tears in an attempt to appear strong. For that moment my purpose may have been served, I did not cry. However, when I got home later that night, I was overwhelmed with grief. I was unable to be emotionally available to my mom and ended up upsetting her even more than she was already. In this case I did not allow myself to feel my grief in the moment and it caused intensified grief, stress, and conflict at home. The message here is simple. When you feel like crying because you are sad from your loss, then cry!

List times when you remember not letting yourself cry:

List the reasons that you did not let yourself cry in the situations identified above:

Did any of these decisions not to cry have an affect on you later?  
Which ones and how did they affect you?

## 7) Journal

This simple and effective way of dealing with feelings is often overlooked because of its simplicity. However, keeping a journal can be a tremendous way to a) identify your feelings and thoughts, b) release some of the emotions associated with your feelings and thoughts, and c) become aware of how you

feelings and thoughts interact and cause you to act. An additional benefit of journaling is an increased sense of self-awareness. By expressing your feelings without judgment from others, you will become more aware of certain patterns. This may be a great way for you to gain an understanding of what triggers some of your challenging emotions. Journaling is also beneficial to your physical health. By taking the time to honor your feelings they are less likely to pile up and manifest in other ways. Finally, journaling is fun. Your journal is something that you can save for yourself or pass on and share with others. Journals can become storehouses of important information. It is always interesting to look back at your journal and on your thoughts and feelings over time.

## **8) Talk to someone**

Talk to someone, but not just anyone. By speaking with someone who cares and will listen, you will be able to relieve yourself with some of the pressures that your feelings cause you. Grief is a heavy load to carry by yourself. I find that the more I speak to my close friends about my dad and how I miss him the lighter the load becomes.

## **9) Focus on the Tasks of Daily Living: Resisting Intrusive Thoughts**

*Jack J. Lesyk, PhD*

You have the capacity to choose what you think about. If you choose to think about past hurts, you will continue to feel bad. While it's true you can't change the effect past influences had on you once, you can change the effect they have on you now.

-Gary McKay, PhD

I (Rob) asked Dr. Lesyk to join our team because he is a psychologist who has a great deal of experience working with athletes on mental toughness and focus. You may be asking yourself, how does that apply to me? Well, here's how. One normal reaction to loss may be losing the focus we once had. Actually, I should say misplacing the focus we once had. Focus and concentration are skills just like writing and typing. You need to not only learn how to do them, but to practice them in order to get better. Now you may never forget how to write or type, but if you don't use those skills for a while we know that they will not improve and chances are that they will diminish over time. This is similar to our mental skills. Therefore, we have Dr. Lesyk to help coach us through a lesson on focus and concentration.

I know from my own experiences that in times of grief it is often difficult to concentrate on daily activities. Sometimes it is so hard to focus that it seems better to just let things happen. However, I also know that it is important to gain control of focus and concentration. The information that Dr. Lesyk prepared for us is really important and it really helps. So, please take an active read. Dr. Lesyk, please lead us to the journey through focus and concentration.

Intrusive thoughts are thoughts that seem to take over our minds and make it difficult for us to pay attention to the tasks of daily life. It is common for people who have experienced traumatic events to experience intrusive thoughts associated with the event. Initially these thoughts seem to be almost constant. As time passes they may slip into the background of awareness, but are easily evoked by anything associated with the trauma: birthdays and anniversaries, a current news event, music, photos, etc.

Part of healing is allowing yourself to experience these thoughts and not sweep them aside. However, there are times when you may feel "enough is enough already." You may wish to put these thoughts aside and simply focus on the tasks of the day. If this is difficult to do, you may feel frustrated and the

victim of your own thoughts. The ability to resist intrusive thoughts can be improved with practice. Here are some techniques that you can try to stop or manage intrusive thoughts.

**Thought Stopping:** This is simply saying, “No, I’m not going to allow myself to think about this.” Sometimes this works, but often trying not to think about something makes you think about it even more.

**Thought Switching:** Instead of simply trying to stop a thought, you guide your awareness to an alternate thought. You view your awareness as a choice. You think to yourself, “At this moment I could choose to think about my terrible loss, or I could choose to think about the present task of completing my monthly report. At this moment I choose to concentrate on the report. Later I may choose to think about my loss.” Once your choice is made, you immerse yourself in the present task. If this is difficult and the intrusive thoughts persist, you may wish to try extra hard to focus on the task at hand for a very brief period of time, for example, five minutes. When you succeed, extend the time to longer and longer intervals.

**Thought Blending:** Blending the intrusive thoughts with the present task in a way that is productive. For example, if you are being distracted from working on your monthly report by thinking about your brother who recently passed away, you may redirect your thoughts into working on the report in a special way that he would have appreciated. Or you might think about how he hated doing these reports even more than you. Or, you may think about how he sometimes set a good example for you in how to complete a task that you don’t enjoy doing.

### Exercise:

This exercise is designed to help you improve your ability to choose your thoughts. To begin, I’d like you to select two alternative thoughts.

1. Think about a wonderful relaxing moment that you’ve experienced within the past few months, a real and specific moment in time. Imagine that moment in great detail, for example, exactly where you were, the time of day, what you were wearing, who you were with, etc.
2. Think about a specific work-type problem that you’ve experienced sometime in the past few months, one that you have dealt with and that has been resolved. It may be connected with your job, school, or home responsibilities. Imagine where you were when you experienced the problem, the time of day, etc.
3. Now close your eyes and deliberately switch back and forth between the relaxing moment and the problem experience. Give each one about a minute to a minute-and-a-half before changing. You might wish to use a timer or have a friend tell you to switch at random intervals.

Once you become skilled at this exercise, you can apply the same technique to any thoughts that you may have. These thoughts may include thoughts about a personal loss or adversity. The benefit of this skill is that you can use it in all areas of your life. However, just like in anything, if you don’t apply what you have learned, you don’t reap the benefits. So best of luck on the rest of your journey and remember to challenge yourself to make the decision to focus.

## **10) Take a mental vacation**

Most likely you have been through a great deal. Life did not get put on hold since your loss or challenging experience. You still have to get dressed in the morning and tend to a number of responsibilities. It is also important to make sure that you find ways to have some relief from the grief. One way to do this is to give yourself a break. This can be by watching a funny movie, jogging, going out for ice cream, or simply taking a nap. Be sure to take a mental vacation from time to time from your grief.

Good work. I know there is a lot to learn here. So I would suggest that you go back and pick a favorite tool to deal with your feelings. That doesn't mean that you can't learn all of them very well, but I want you to master one at a time. So which one is it?

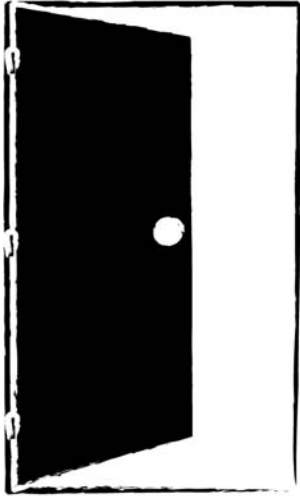
My favorite social and emotional tool is:

I hope you have something written above. If not, please think about or look back over this doorway and then choose the tool that will be most helpful for you. Now you have come to another fork in the road in our journey. Take a minute to decide if you want to keep walking and read away or take a break for now. Whatever you decide, I know you will be reading and learning as you and I continue to learn about loss and adversity and how to help ourselves.

## Where are you related to the Doorway?

(How ready are you to take a step forward?)

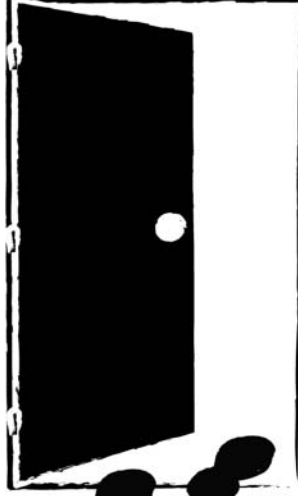
Outside (Not Ready)



Feelings:

Thoughts:

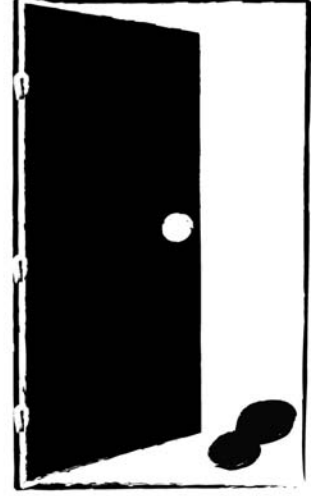
In (Maybe Ready)



Feelings:

Thoughts:

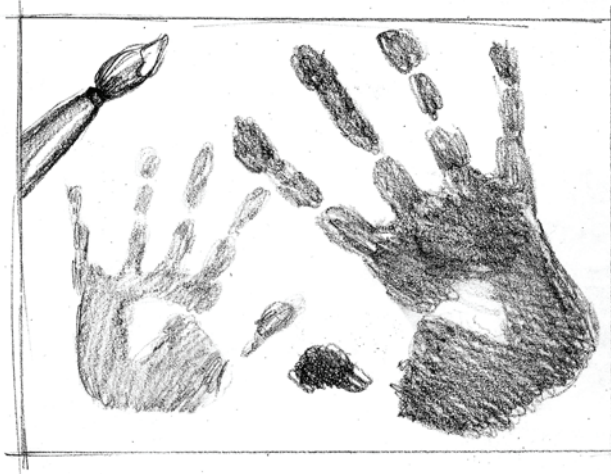
Through (Ready)



Feelings:

Thoughts:

*In recent years I have made a number of great relationships with people who have a common passion for helping others help themselves. Many people whom I have gotten to know personally and professionally continue to add a great deal to the field of psychology. One of these very special people is Diana Salvador, PhD. Diana has extensive experience in working with families who have faced very challenging times. Her insights and suggestions are based on the latest research and a tremendous amount of experience. She was very willing to spend the time to share her insights and suggestion with us.*



## DOORWAY 5

# Families, Children, and Living With Sudden & Traumatic Loss

*Diana Salvador, PhD*

My name is Diana and I am a counselor who works with children and families that have lost someone they love. Over the course of my work, I have had the privilege of getting to know incredible families who have survived and thrived after experiencing sudden and traumatic loss. These families have given me the opportunity to learn and grow with them. If you are reading this chapter, it is likely that you are a parent or someone in a parent role searching for ways to help your family. Later I've included a summary of lessons that I have learned from families who have demonstrated "the ability to allow joy to coexist with sorrow, to celebrate life's blessing and to triumph over grief even while acknowledging its presence" ([www.familiesofseptember11.org](http://www.familiesofseptember11.org)).

When reading self help books focused on grief and loss, I'm often left wondering why the term "family" is left out of the readings. Typically, grief and growth following loss is associated with the grief of one identified person as opposed to the entire family. However, as I have discovered and you know, loss doesn't occur in a vacuum. A child who has died after battling a long illness has a classroom full of peers, a sister, a special aunt, grandparents, and parents. A father who died in a work accident has children, a mother, a partner, and a circle of friends. Similar to loss, growth following loss doesn't occur in a vacuum and family has been found to be a key ingredient to thriving following loss.

Below I've included suggestions that can be used to tap into the strengths of your family. As you are reading through each section, please remember, these are only general guidelines that should be modified to fit the personalities and needs of your "family".

**Consider who is a part of your family or "strength network":** It is common for people to rely on individuals and groups outside of their biological family for love and support - particularly during difficult times or times of crisis. When considering family makeup, it is suggested that you think of both your biological family or blood relatives and your family of choice. Family doesn't have to be restricted to your biological relatives or the opinion of any one person. For some, family includes a good friend, spouse, church counselor, parent, and a teacher. Your definition of family may be completely different.

To help each family member recognize members of their strength network, ask each to identify, quietly or aloud, the top "go to" people they turn to during a crisis. What are the characteristics of these people?

What makes them unique and special? Ask each family member to participate at their own comfort level even if it means that they don't want to participate at all. An adolescent may identify their best friend as their top go to person because he/she doesn't feel pressured to talk about the situation in their presence. A mother may identify her mother as her top go to person because she helps her keep things organized and keep things running. A father may only turn to his spouse in his greatest time of need because she will understand his feelings the best. Ultimately, this conversation can be useful in shedding light on the needs of each family member. In addition, it will serve in creating a specific strength network for each member of your family.

**Encourage communication amongst your family members that conveys caring and support:** Ironically, many of us forget to take care of ourselves during times of crisis particularly as it relates to communicating with others. Family members may lash out with anger or avoid one another. If you begin to notice a breakdown in communication with a family member, try to encourage them to tap into their "strength network". In addition, it may be helpful to use metaphors to highlight the benefits of communication. For example, a heavy backpack or packed U-Haul that is constantly being towed or carried around can be compared to distressing thoughts and feelings that are being kept inside. For many younger children, parents have found spending extra time talking with their children at bedtime was beneficial. This seems to be a time when most children experience the highest level of discomfort, fear, and anxiety related to a loss. For many, shifting to an earlier bedtime to accommodate special talks with Mom or Dad can have a positive impact on children.

**Encourage a commitment to grieve and grow together as a family:** If you are able to identify the members of your family and communicate in a caring and supportive manner, you have clearly made a commitment to get through this situation together. However, this should be continually conveyed through words and actions. For example, a mother might say to a child who lost his father, "I know you miss your father and you are feeling sad. We are all here for you and we will get through this together."

**Allow family members to grieve - especially children:** Often parents are naturally driven to "make things better" and will try to "cheer up" or distract their children when upset. Although it is difficult to see your children in distress, it is critical to allow each child to grieve in their own way within the context of a safe and supportive environment-hopefully which will include the presence of a caring adult within their identified family. Conversely, try not to stifle your own grief reaction in front of your family. Openly grieving helps affirm others thoughts and feelings and send the message that it is normal. Below I've included age appropriate reactions to loss (National Institute of Mental Health, 2001):

- *For children 5 years of age and younger*, typical reactions can include a fear of being separated from the parent, crying, whimpering, screaming, immobility and/or aimless motion, trembling, frightened facial expressions, and excessive clinging. Parents may also notice children returning to behaviors exhibited at earlier ages (these are called regressive behaviors), such as thumb-sucking, bedwetting, and fear of darkness. Children in this age bracket tend to be strongly affected by the parents' reactions to the traumatic event.
- *Children 6 to 11-years-old* may show extreme withdrawal, disruptive behavior, and/or inability to pay attention. Regressive behaviors, nightmares, sleep problems, irrational fears, irritability, refusal to attend school, outbursts of anger, and fighting are also common in traumatized children of this age. Also the child may complain of stomachaches or other bodily symptoms that have no medical basis. Schoolwork often suffers. Depression, anxiety, feelings of guilt, and emotional numbing or "flatness" is often present as well.
- *Adolescents 12 to 17-years-old* may exhibit responses similar to those of adults, including flashbacks, nightmares, emotional numbing, avoidance of any reminders of the traumatic event, depression, substance abuse, problems with peers, and anti-social behavior. Also common are withdrawal and

isolation, physical complaints, suicidal thoughts, school avoidance, academic decline, sleep disturbances, and confusion. The adolescent may feel extreme guilt over his or her failure to prevent injury or loss of life, and may harbor revenge fantasies that interfere with recovery from the trauma.

**Remind yourself that each member of your family may experience and express their reaction to loss differently:** Everyone grieves the loss of a loved one differently. For young children, initially life seems to go on as usual with little or no discussion signs of distress. Some adults prefer to isolate themselves and withdraw from families, friends, and their daily activities. This can be terribly frustrating for someone who prefers to talk and is searching for an active listener. Despite differences in coping styles, it is important to respect every person's grieving process. Encourage members of your family not to judge others.

**Maintain and nurture structure and routine within your family:** Structure provides children with a sense of safety and security. Sustain daily rituals, such as chores and eating dinner at the same time every night or every Sunday with Grandma. This includes school. A child is usually relieved to go back to school and the safety of friends, teachers, and the school day. However, make sure that the school and teacher are aware of the situation and determine if they have planned any school specific responses to the crisis.

**Shift family responsibilities when necessary:** In the event that the person who died was in charge of a particular family routine, assign new roles and responsibilities in the family to ensure their continuity. For example, a teenager who lost his father may willingly assume the responsibility for mowing the lawn. Often children take pride in assuming the role that was once the responsibility of the lost loved one.

**Utilize support within your extended family and community:** In many cases, it will be important for you to mobilize additional support beyond your family such as the services of a counselor. Tap into your "strength network" for guidance, suggestions and referrals.

**Be honest with family members, particularly children, regarding the circumstances surrounding a loss:** While you don't need to share details about the loss, it will be important to answer as many questions as you can and to avoid misleading phrases. For example, you should discourage a family member from telling a child who lost a loved his father that "he went to sleep forever". This will create new fears and anxiety (i.e. fear of going to sleep at night), particularly in children.

**Take care of yourself:** Allow yourself to grieve. Know your limits and when you need back up, whether it is helping with daily activities or with a family member in particular need.

**Convey hope:** Although, life will never be the same again, your family will discover a new normal together. Remind yourself and your family that you will be ok. For many, it may be difficult to consider any kind of growth coming from such a terrible event. Fortunately, growth is the brother of despair and a natural part of grieving and healing.

For some parents, many of these tips may seem simple or include family practices that you are already using. If so, use this information as a reminder that you are fostering a resilient family in the face of a terrible loss. For others, the list might feel overwhelming. Again, use your strength network or make new connections to assist you in creating a more resilient family one day at a time. Whatever you do, remember there are no rules or guidelines for living with loss. The only thing that you can count on is the process of grief and growth will happen.



## Tear Soup Activity

*Tear Soup - A Recipe for Healing After Loss* by Pat Schwiebert & Chuck Deklyen

The purpose of this activity is to promote conversation about a loss and the healing process. It can be conducted with just one child or the entire family and is geared for children ages 5 -14.

First read the book aloud. Then create a pot of tear soup. You may want to buy a real pot to conduct this activity. Have each member of the family come up with ingredients or memories and feelings related to the loss. These can include good and bad memories and feelings. Then have each person draw, write, or identify some visual representation of that memory and/or feeling. For example, a child might draw a picture of his father riding a bike with him. An older child might write a poem about a family member who died. Finally, each memory or feeling should be put into the soup. The tear soup should be stored in a place accessible to all family members so that they can add new ingredients or look at ingredients already in the pot.

### References for Doorway 5

DeKlyen, C. & Schwiebert, P. (2005). *Tear Soup: A Recipe for Healing After Loss*. Grief Watch: Portland, Oregon.

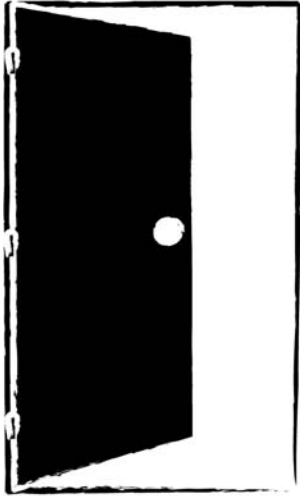
Families of September 11<sup>th</sup>. (2006). Retrieved from <http://www.familiesofseptember11.org>

National Institute of Mental Health. (2001). *Helping Children and Adolescents Cope with Violence and Disasters*. Retrieved from <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/violence.cfm#viol2>

## Where are you related to the Doorway?

(How ready are you to take a step forward?)

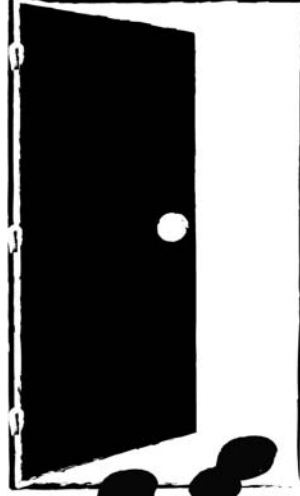
Outside (Not Ready)



Feelings:

Thoughts:

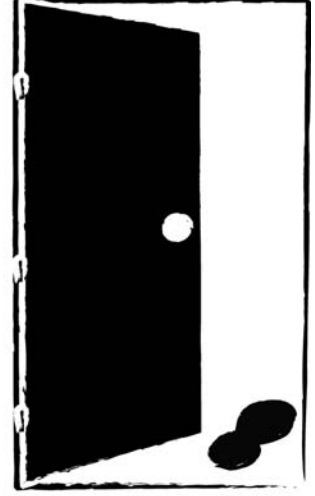
In (Maybe Ready)



Feelings:

Thoughts:

Through (Ready)



Feelings:

Thoughts:





## DOORWAY 6

# Growth Through Loss & Adversity

The idea that you can “grow” through loss and adversity is not always an easy one to accept. Often, when I suggest that someone has the capacity to grow because of their loss or adversity they are experiencing, the reaction is

one of disbelief. People can choose to learn from their experiences and actually find a way to grow. I am not suggesting that this is at all easy, but it is somewhat of a natural process. For example, there are countless stories of people who have experienced adversity, such as a battle with cancer. Many people learn to have a new perspective in life and also develop a greater sense of inner strength. This does not suggest that there is not a lot of pain along the way, but these people do grow and experience a new sense of opportunity and perspective.

An interesting finding came from the work of Drs. Tedeschi and Calhoun at the University of North Carolina. They learned that people can grow while they are experiencing some of the more difficult aspects of living with loss or adversity. For example, a father that has lost his child may experience feelings of depression and during the same time period he may learn how to start a scholarship to honor his son’s legacy. It is ok to experience the emotions and reactions that you naturally have and at the same time you can challenge yourself to grow. Everyone has a different time line for their growth and a different path.

Be aware of self-made barriers to growing through loss. One example of a barrier is *The Guilt Trap*. This is when you begin to feel a sense of normalcy or even start to feel happy, but you feel guilty because you feel “normal” or happy. Many people struggle with feeling guilty if they are not suffering after the loss of a loved one or because others are experiencing adversity.

## What has Lead Some of the Families of September 11<sup>th</sup> to Grow?

Approximately 2 years following the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, Hold The Door For Others surveyed over 240 people who lost loved ones on September 11<sup>th</sup>. We asked people to respond to the following questions:

- 1) What helps you the most as you live with your loss?
- 2) What is the most challenging aspect of your loss to date?
- 3) Did anything good come from your loss? If yes, then what?
- 4) How have you grown personally since September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001?
- 5) What can you offer others that may be helpful if they experience a traumatic loss like the families of September 11<sup>th</sup>?

Our findings further verify the fact that loss and adversity can actually serve as a spark for positive changes. Specifically the following common themes emerged:

Question	Percentage of Responses and Theme
1) What helps you the most as you live with your loss?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 55 % of the responses included a reference to social support (e.g. support from friends and family) was what helped them the most as they began to live with their loss. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Of this 55%, 11% of the responses included a reference to having a support network of people who have experienced loss was the most helpful.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• 26% of the responses included a mention of spirituality (e.g. faith, connection with loved one, belief of person being in heaven).</li> <li>• 11% of the responses referred to other types of support such as therapy or support from strangers as being the most helpful</li> <li>• 9% of the responses included doing a journaling exercise.</li> </ul>
2) What is the most challenging aspect of your loss to date?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 66% of the responses included a reference to the fact that the suddenness of the loss was the most challenging aspect.</li> <li>• 30% of the responses included a reference to the difficulty of resuming life (e.g. creating a ‘new’ life, facing each day without loved one).</li> <li>• 20% of the responses included a reference to managing the feelings associated with the loss (e.g. pain, grief, loneliness, anxiety).</li> </ul>
3) Did anything good come from your loss? If yes, then what?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 52% of the responses included a reference to <i>personal growth</i> (e.g. greater self-reliance, increased independence, increased resiliency). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Of these responses 40% of them were focused on a heightened appreciation of others (e.g. family, friends, enhanced relationships).</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
4) How have you grown personally since September 11 <sup>th</sup> ?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 41% of the responses included a reference to an enhanced sense of appreciation for life such as compassion, and tolerance of</li> </ul>

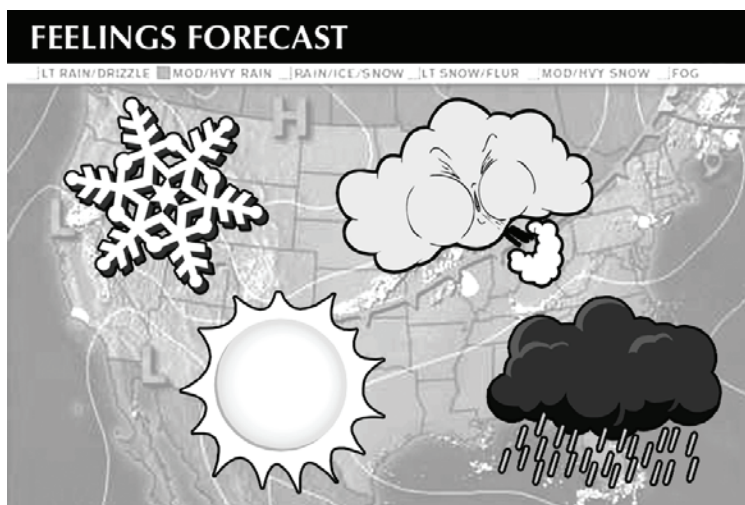
	<p>others.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “I have a better sense of perspective. I can better see the big picture. I try not to get hung up on the little things.”</li> <li>● 29% of the responses included a reference to <i>personal growth</i> (i.e. stronger will or determination, resiliency). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “I’m doing things I never thought I’d be capable of/doing things I never saw myself doing.”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
5) What can you offer others that may be helpful if they experience a traumatic loss like the families of September 11th?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 49% of the responses included a reference to <i>reaching out to others and getting support</i>.</li> <li>● 24% of the responses included a reference to getting help such as group or individual therapy or support groups. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ “Tell people how they can help you/don’t be afraid to ask for help.”</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

*What can we learn from these people who have been through a sudden loss?*

**People, People, and People.** The majority of the responses included an aspect of reaching out to people and gaining support. In addition, people were able to easily identify that they experienced some type of personal growth as a direct result of an extremely sudden and traumatic loss.

No one wants loss to happen, but loss happens and it hurts. By understanding yourself and reaching out to others you can actually grow through the experience when you are ready.

Now that we have learned that people can and do grow a great deal from loss, how does it happen? The answer lies within you, and I am willing to help you learn how to access that answer. In our next Doorway, we will learn about the process of growth through loss and adversity and what resources can help you in your journey.



**What am I feeling right now?**

**Why am I feeling this way?**

**What am I likely to feel tomorrow?**

**Why may I feel this way?**

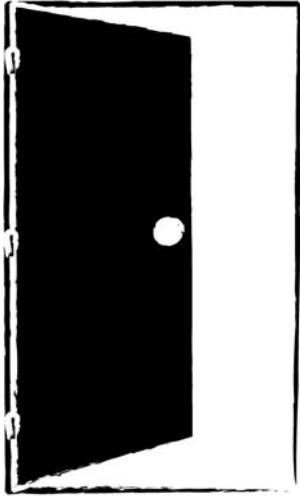
**What is coming up that may trigger my emotions?**

**What can I do to prepare for challenging feelings to come?**

## Where are you related to the Doorway?

(How ready are you to take a step forward?)

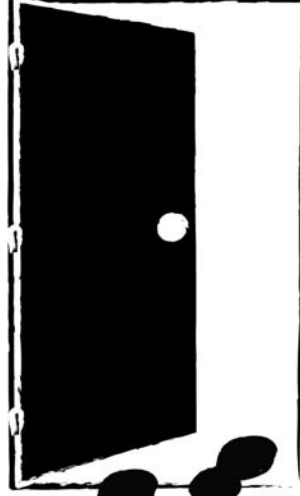
Outside (Not Ready)



Feelings:

Thoughts:

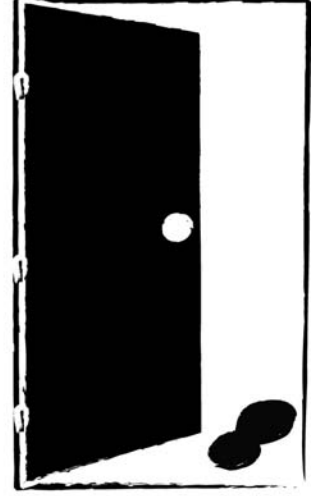
In (Maybe Ready)



Feelings:

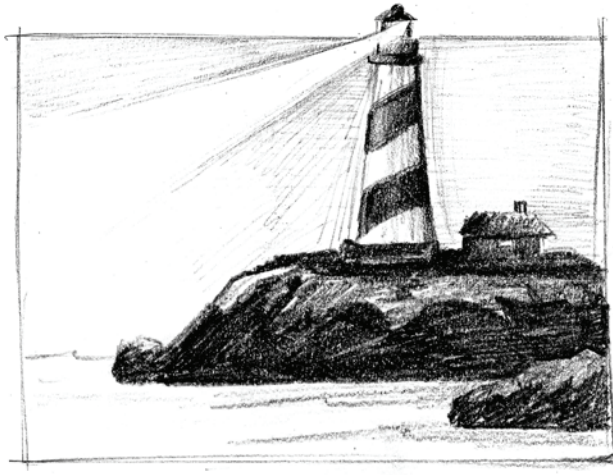
Thoughts:

Through (Ready)



Feelings:

Thoughts:



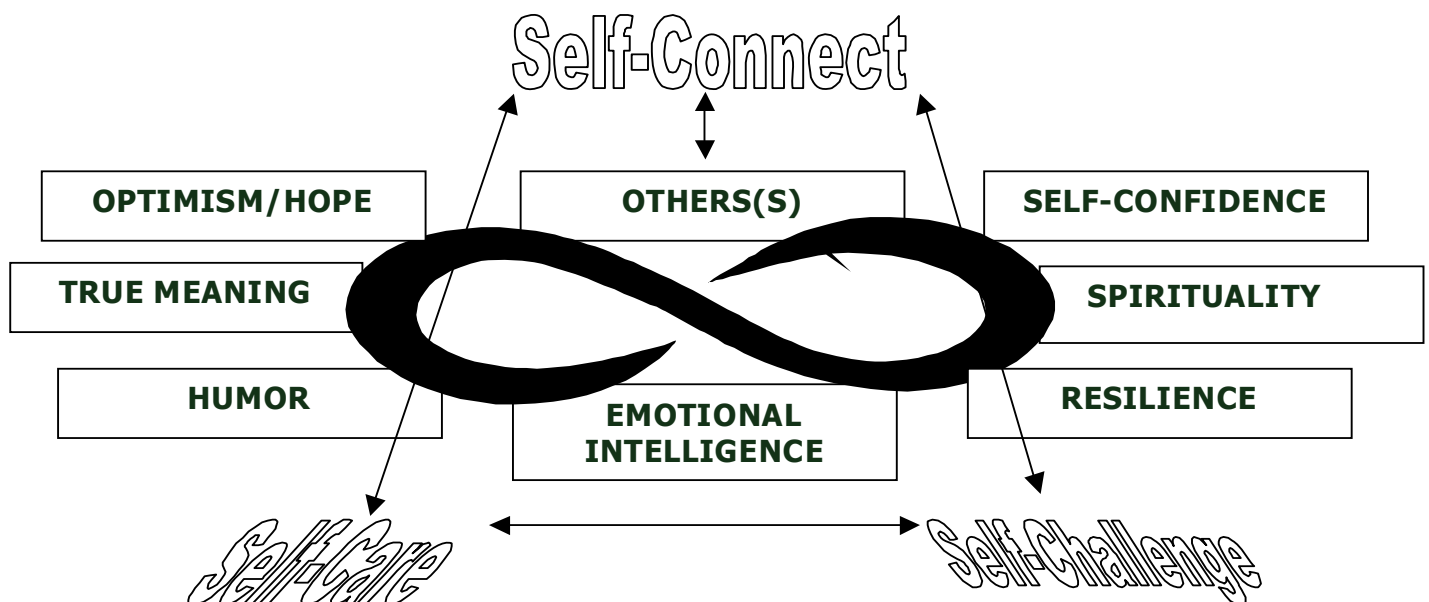
## DOORWAY 7

# What Do You Need to Grow Through Loss & Adversity

Throughout this workbook you have read about growth through loss and adversity. We know that not only is it possible, but often times adversity can serve as a catalyst to grow. Over the past

several years through our research and experiences we have identified eight core resources that allow people to manage loss and adversity in a healthy manner and lead people to grow. The foundation for the eight core resources are three foundational resources that allow you to enhance the necessary life skills associated with the OTHERS(S) model.

## The OTHERS(S) Model



Each of the OTHERS(S) resources as well as the foundational resources have a definition, a key message, and a key skill.

The foundational resources are:

- Self-Connect (self-understanding)
- Self-Care
- Self-Challenge



These resources help us achieve greater self-awareness, increased emotional and physical well-being, and empower us to leverage our strengths and fuel our efforts to push through our hardships so we can continue on our journey of growth.

The core resources are:

- Optimism/Hope
- True-Meaning
- Humor
- Emotional Intelligence
- Resilience
- Spirituality
- Self-Confidence
- OTHERS(S)

These resources concentrate more on our relationships with others, and how we interact and respond to loss and adversity. In essence, these resources are very visible in our everyday interactions with others. A description of the model is below.

## Foundational Resources

### Self-Connect:

- **Definition:** Self-Connect is a foundational resource that is about raising your self-awareness so you can understand yourself and understand the people around you. The process of self-connecting facilitates trust between you and others, and encourages you to bond with people on a deeper level. This in turn enables you to develop your resources to grow through loss and adversity.
- **Key Message:** Build your self-understanding and understanding of others.
- **Key Skill:** Journal writing. By becoming more aware of your personal thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, you can gain a clearer understanding of yourself and those around you. This facilitates resourcefulness and personal growth.

### Self-Care:

- **Definition:** Self-Care is foundational to building the OTHERS(S) resources. Care emphasizes having empathy for yourself and helping others help you. It is a process that includes practicing self-care and healthy ways to heal and grow through loss and adversity.
- **Key Message:** Practice self-care.
- **Key Skill:** Reflection. By taking time to listen to and accommodate your physical and emotional needs, you can better equip yourself to not only maintain ground through difficult times, but also thrive despite challenging obstacles.

### Self-Challenge:

- **Definition:** Self-Challenge is the last foundational resource needed to build the OTHERS(S) resources. Challenge places emphasis on finding your inner strength, even in the most painful times of your life, to be brave enough to take steps toward healing and growing through your loss and adversity.
- **Key Message:** Challenge yourself
- **Key Skill:** Challenge affirmations. By thinking about how you can achieve your personal goals, and providing specific reasons for your success, you can increase your self-confidence, as well as your ability to take on challenging events in your life. An example of this would involve making a list of positive statements about your self.

## Core Resources

### Optimism/Hope:

- **Definition:** Optimism is your ability to develop and maintain a positive attitude and hope even during challenging times.
- **Key Message:** You control how positive you are in any given situation. The more often you have a positive outlook, the more often you will have positive feelings.
- **Key Skill:** Finding the positive and refocusing.

### True-meaning:

- **Definition:** True meaning is your ability to make meaning of your losses/adversity and find purpose for the future.
- **Key Message:** Finding meaning related to the loss of a loved one can provide you with peace of mind. By creating purpose in your life, you will be more motivated on a daily basis.
- **Key Skill:** Self-Questioning. You can develop meaning and purpose by asking yourself positive and purposeful questions.

### Humor:

- **Definition:** Humor is your ability to laugh and use humor to lighten the load of loss and adversity.
- **Key Message:** For years researchers have reported that laughing is good for your psychological and physical health. Laughing breaks down barriers and facilitates connections among people.
- **Key Skill:** Find the humor.

### Emotional Intelligence:

- **Definition:** Emotional intelligence is your ability to be aware of your emotions, connect with people, read emotions in others, and communicate your emotions to others.
- **Key Message:** The more aware you are of how you feel and how others feel, the better you will be able to respond in healthy ways. Your feelings are the most powerful part of you. Get to know them and how they affect you, because they can be a tremendous resource.
- **Key Skill:** Resilience and emotion coaching. Become aware of your emotions, understand them, and then channel them into positive actions.

### Resilience:

- **Definition:** Resilience is your ability to adapt, bounce back, and respond with strength to adversity, loss, and challenge.
- **Key Message:** You have the ability to bounce back, just like a basketball. The journey through life in general has a lot of hills and valleys and twists and turns, but you don't have to get stuck or be lost.
- **Key Skill:** Self-Coaching. Your way of communicating with yourself and teaching yourself to bounce back.

### Spirituality:

- **Definition:** This resource can only be defined by you, as it is the most personal of all resources. An example of a personal definition is: the level of

connectedness to people and the surrounding world. Spirituality may also be defined as the inner spirit and passion for relationships with others.

- **Key Message:** Spirituality is what gives you the strength to live with loss and move forward. Everyone has his or her own sense of spirituality.
- **Key Skill:** Leveraging your spirit. Personally define the passion within you that encourages you to thrive, and use it when ever possible. An example of this could be: Personal Definition: connectedness I share with others – Application: Try to strengthen bonds and deepen the roots of my relationships I share with others.

#### **Self-Confidence:**

- **Definition:** Self-confidence is your belief in yourself and your personal resources.
- **Key Message:** Self-Confidence is the key that unlocks most doors. If you believe in yourself and your abilities, you increase your chances of succeeding tremendously.
- **Key Skill:** Canning the T. Think about how you “can” accomplish something. Instead of saying “I can’t”, think about a smaller step toward your goal and figure out what you “can” do in the present and grow from there. “Can’t is can with the T. Therefore, you have to can the T.”

#### **OTHERS(S):**

- **Definition:** OTHERS(S) ties all of your personal resources together and emphasizes relationships. This resource is the most important by far. It is your ability to build relationships in your social-network, and heal through helping others.
- **Key Message:** The world revolves around relationships. The more positive relationships you create, the more happiness for yourself you will create.
- **Key Skill:** Hold the Door for Others. By reaching out and connecting with others, people can often heal and grow through loss. Put this skill into action by volunteering to help someone in any way you can.

A big part of healing and growing through loss and adversity is knowing yourself. Because self-awareness is so important we have created a way for you to understand how well you have developed each of these resources. Take a few minutes to fill out the self-awareness exercise below.

## OTHERS(S) Resources Competency Indicator (ORCI)

Robert J. Fazio, PhD and Jason M. Briggs, M.A.

[www.holdthedoors.com](http://www.holdthedoors.com)

**Directions:** The ORCI is a tool that will assist you in heightening your self-awareness, so you can realize which OTHERS(S) resources are areas of strength and areas of future development. Please read the statements below, and think about how closely these descriptions relate to your thoughts and behaviors. It's important to answer these questions based on how you have reacted in the past or present, not how you would like to act in the future. For each statement, rate your self on a 0-6 scale where a score of 6 suggests that the statement is entirely like you, and 0 suggests the statement is not at all like you. A score of 3 would indicate that the statement is somewhat like you. Please record your answers under "time 1" if you are answering these questions for the first time, or "time 2" if this is your second trial.

Item #	(0-Not at all like me)-----1-----2-----3-somewhat like me-----4-----5-----6 -Entirely like me)	Time 1	Time 2
1	I look forward to new events		
2	I can find meaning in challenging events in my life		
3	I am able to laugh in the face of a challenging situation		
4	Most times, I feel I can only rely on my self to get me through troubling times in my life		
5	My faith shows me ways to handle most difficulties		
6	If I need to learn a new skill, I have confidence in knowing how to achieve it		
7	I am a strong person		
8	I share strong connections with the people I know		
9	I maintain open communication with those that are close to me even in the worst of times		
10	Many times, I worry about what lies ahead for me in the future		
11	I know that remaining positive is a personal choice		
12	I am motivated by my sense of purpose in life		
13	I am aware of my feelings as they occur in the moment		
14	I typically use humor to deal with difficult situations		
15	After experiencing loss, it's hard for me to realize how that loss has impacted my life		
16	In my efforts to maintain a healthy lifestyle, I always try to include others in my activities		
17	I am aware of my inner strengths that will help me through challenging times		
18	I draw off of my previous experiences when dealing with turbulent times		
19	When I am upset or stressed, it can be hard for me to maintain a healthy lifestyle		
20	People view me as someone who values a connectedness with the world around me		
21	I think of others on a consistent basis		
22	I often respond to my hardships in a serious manner		
23	I take care of my body by practicing a healthy lifestyle		
24	I control what I can, and leave the rest to my faith		
25	I depend on myself and others during tough times		
26	I always have a sense of hope		

27	Everyday, I wake up with a sense of purpose		
28	I can easily read emotions in others		
29	I respond to my personal hardships by taking active steps toward personal growth		
30	I believe in my abilities to be successful		
31	I offer support to others on a regular basis		
32	I feel equipped with various resources to help me through challenging times		
33	When I'm markedly emotional, I usually respond to others based on my feelings in the moment		
34	When faced with a significant loss, I think about how I can grow from the experience		
35	I can usually accomplish my personal goals		
36	When I am faced with a challenge, my fear of failure can easily disable me		
37	I have compassion for others		
38	I possess the personal resources needed to deal with crisis		
39	I find that my personal challenges often stunt my ability to achieve my dreams		
40	I know who I can turn to when I am in need		
41	On a regular basis, I take a "time out" from the daily grind to practice a favorite relaxation technique		
42	I feel a connection to others		
43	In times of crisis, people gain confidence from being around me		
44	I am able to bounce back from adversity		
45	When challenged by adversity, I typically maintain a positive attitude		
46	I am a passionate person		
47	It's easy for me to express my intimate feelings		
48	It is hard for me to respond to change in my life		
49	I believe in healing through helping others		
50	I am aware of my personal spirituality		
51	I keep setbacks in perspective		
52	When faced with adversity, I am aware of what I need to be able to thrive		
53	I laugh everyday		
54	During the grieving process, I plan ahead for situations that could set me back		
55	People say I have a good sense of humor		
56	I'm able to connect on a deep level with others		
57	It can be very hard for me to tend to others' needs when I'm faced with adversity		
58	I know how to seek support		
59	Often, I make others laugh		
60	I frequently withdraw from others when my spirits are down		
61	When I plan to accomplish something, I set realistic, positive, and measurable goals		
62	When I think about my life, I see a reason for being here		
63	I'm fully aware of what draws me to those I have relationships with		
64	I know I can deal with whatever life presents		
65	During difficult times, I am usually attentive to my emotional needs		
66	I communicate to others during times of distress		

**Hold The Door For Others™**  
**OTHERS(S) Resources Competency Indicator (ORCI)**  
**– Score Sheet –**

**Directions:** For each box (resource), place your value next to the item number shown. Add up all of your values for each item (you should have a total of 6 values for each resource box) and record your total. Pay close attention to item numbers with a ( ) because those items are negative score items and the value you have for that item needs to be subtracted from the total. Once you have your total score, divide that number by 30 and multiply by 100 to get your percentage score. The following will help you interpret your percentage score:

**Absolute Strength (90-100%) – Relative Strength (70-89%)**  
**– Area of Further Growth (≤69%)**

<b>Self-Connect</b>	
Item	Your Score (0-6)
8	
22	
32	
40	
52	
(60)	<i>Subtract this value</i>
Total Score:	
Percent=Total÷30X100:	

<b>Self-Care</b>	
Item	Your Score (0-6)
9	
16	
(19)	<i>Subtract this value</i>
23	
41	
65	
Total Score:	
Percent=Total÷30X100:	

<b>Self-Challenge</b>	
Item	Your Score (0-6)
17	
29	
34	
(39)	<i>Subtract this value</i>
54	
61	
Total Score:	
Percent=Total÷30X100:	

<b>Optimism and Hope</b>	
Item	Your Score (0-6)
1	
(10)	<i>Subtract this value</i>
11	
26	
35	
45	
Total Score:	
Percent=Total÷30X100:	

True Meaning	
Item	Your Score (0-6)
2	
12	
(15)	<i>Subtract this value</i>
27	
46	
62	
Total Score:	
Percent=Total÷30X100:	

Humor	
Item	Your Score (0-6)
3	
14	
(22)	<i>Subtract this value</i>
53	
55	
59	
Total Score:	
Percent=Total÷30X100:	

Emotional Intelligence	
Item	Your Score (0-6)
13	
28	
(33)	<i>Subtract this value</i>
37	
47	
56	
Total Score:	
Percent=Total÷30X100:	

Resilience	
Item	Your Score (0-6)
7	
18	
25	
44	
(48)	<i>Subtract this value</i>
51	
Total Score:	
Percent=Total÷30X100:	

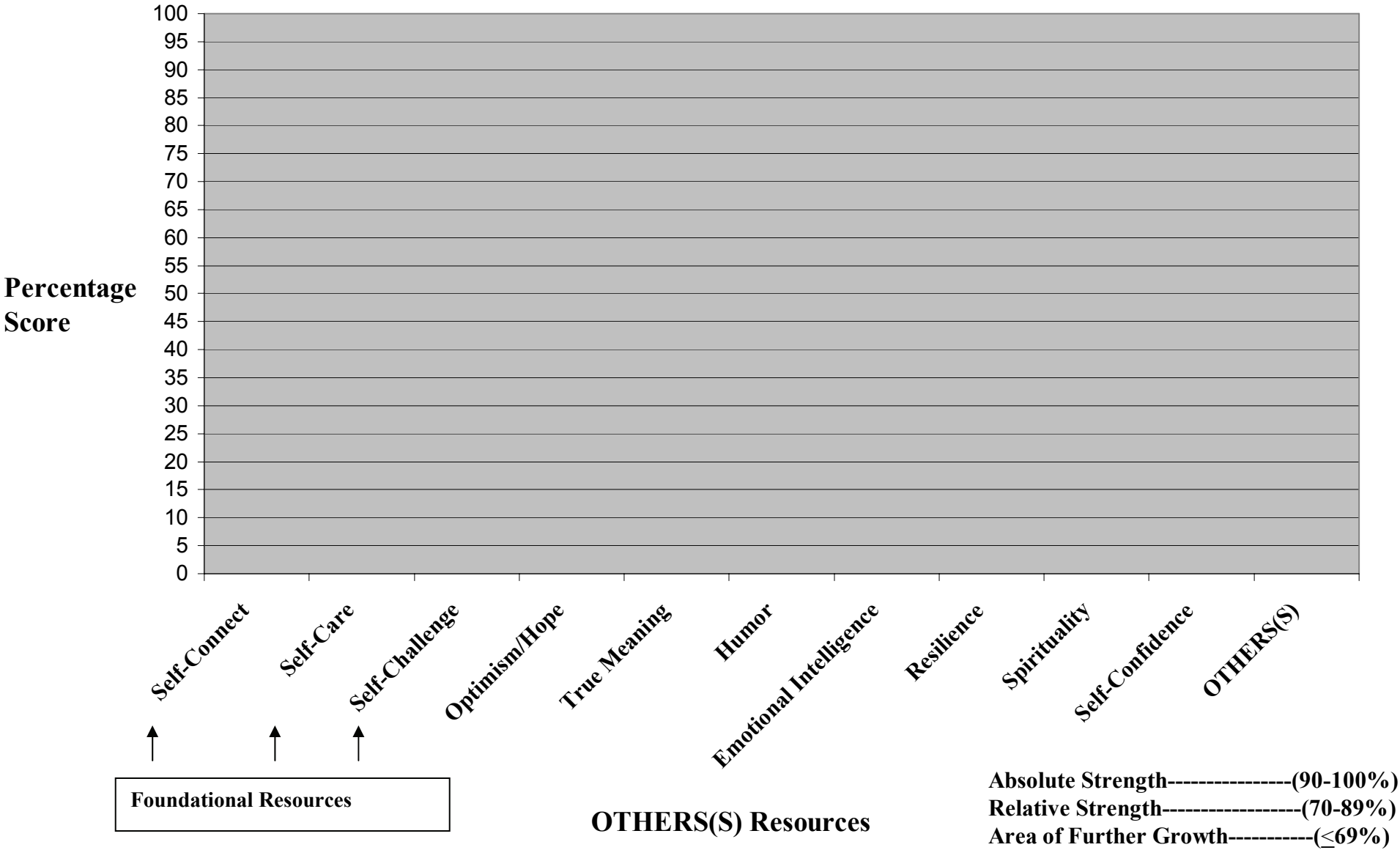
Self-Confidence	
Item	Your Score (0-6)
6	
30	
(36)	<i>Subtract this value</i>
38	
43	
64	
Total Score:	
Percent=Total÷30X100:	

Spirituality	
Item	Your Score (0-6)
(4)	<i>Subtract this value</i>
5	
20	
24	
42	
50	
Total Score:	
Percent=Total÷30X100:	

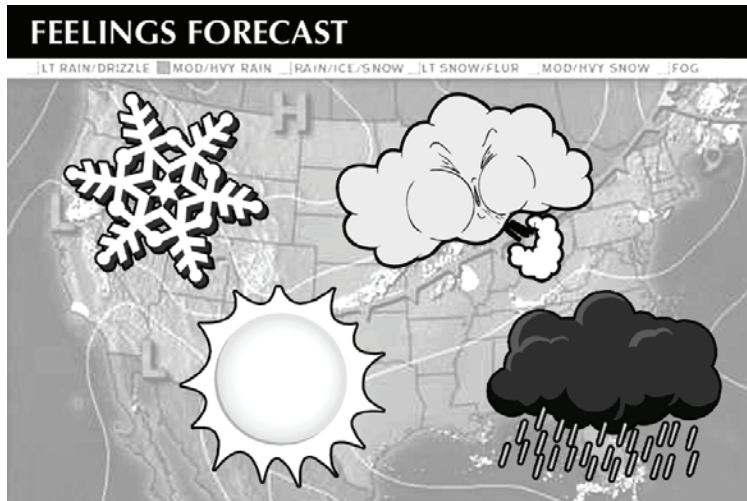
OTHERS(S)	
Item	Your Score (0-6)
21	
31	
49	
(57)	<i>Subtract this value</i>
58	
66	
Total Score:	
Percent=Total÷30X100:	

Below, chart your scores for each resource based on your results above. Place an X on the graph next to the number that represents your percentage score for each resource. You can use an O or any other letter/symbol to mark your progress during additional trials. In the next Doorway we will talk about how to use this chart to develop your resources so you can better prepare for, live with and grow through loss and adversity.

**OTHERS(S) Resources Competency Levels**







What am I feeling right now?

Why am I feeling this way?

What am I likely to feel tomorrow?

Why may I feel this way?

What is coming up that may trigger my emotions?

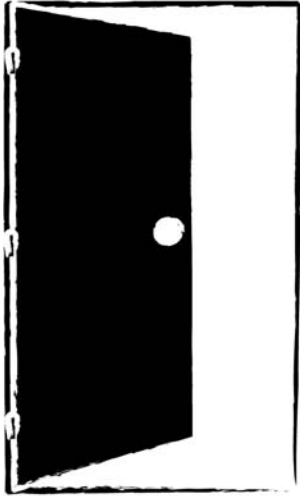
What can I do to prepare for challenging feelings to come?

REFLECTIONS:

## Where are you related to the Doorway?

(How ready are you to take a step forward?)

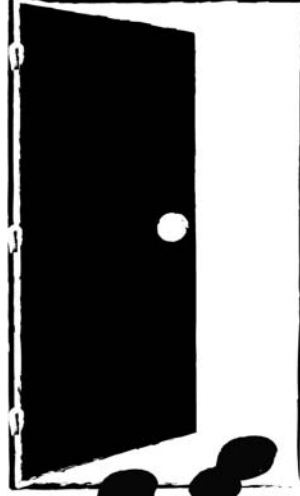
Outside (Not Ready)



Feelings:

Thoughts:

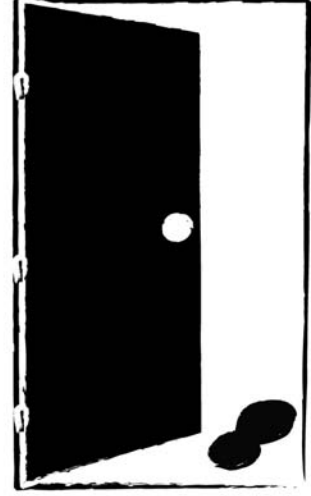
In (Maybe Ready)



Feelings:

Thoughts:

Through (Ready)

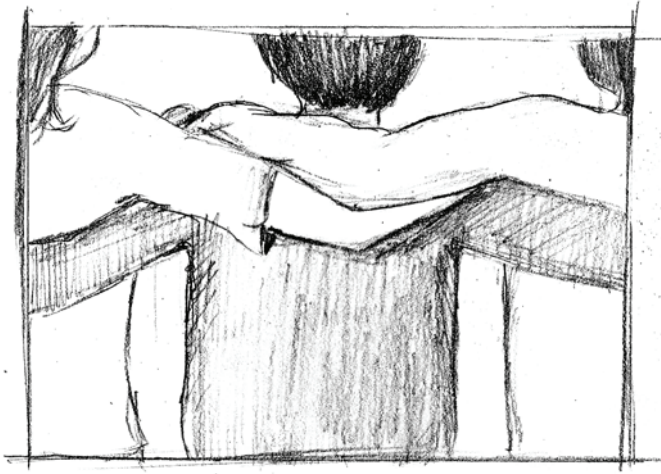


Feelings:

Thoughts:



*There is no better way to illustrate how a person can grow through loss and adversity than to learn the stories of others. Connecting to the stories of others can provide you with inspiration and motivation to keep trying. For people who have attended Hold The Door Day, you have experienced how we walk people through sharing their stories of loss and developing their stories of growth. We have learned that the exercise benefits people who actually write their stories, people who read or listen to the stories, and even people who help others create their stories. Breanna, Jennifer, Lauren, and Lauren have put a tremendous amount of work into identifying and helping people write their stories of growth. I am proud of all the people who have taken the time to reflect, move in to their loss, and write these stories with hopes of connecting with you and inviting you to walk through some new doorways.*



## DOORWAY 8

# Stories of Growth

*Breanna Winder, M.A., Jennifer Page, PhD, Lauren Jenkins, and Lauren Fazio*

Our team believes that understanding and connecting with one's loss are important parts of the healing and growth process. Perhaps one of

the most effective means of doing this, which has been supported through research, is through sharing our stories of loss and growth. In this spirit, we have included a collection of stories of loss and growth as an inspiring resource for you, the reader. Through the following stories we will teach social and emotional skills that we have learned are helpful in working through very challenging times. These stories will illustrate that anyone who has lived with loss cannot only survive loss and adversity, but also thrive despite loss.

We understand that at times you may not want to learn about how someone can actually grow through these tough experiences. You are in control and you can decide whether you read one story, all the stories, or none of the stories. Our hope is that these stories will inspire you to connect with your own experience of loss and to consider the ways in which writing your own story might contribute to your healing process. Writing your own story will provide you with an opportunity to deepen your understanding of your relationship with your loss, create a structure for the thoughts and feelings related to your loss, allow yourself the opportunity to explore the possibility of growth, and to remember and honor your lost loved one.

Everyone will experience these stories differently. To some they may be very emotional and that is ok and very normal. They capture some of the most personal aspects of the writers' losses and adversities. You may experience various different feelings as you read through these stories. If strong feelings do arise for you, perhaps take a break and go back to the section on managing your feelings on p. 53.

Each of these Stories of Growth have a theme woven through based on one of the eight elements of the OTHERS(S) model. The model consists of eight resources, based on the research and experiences of the Hold The Door For Others team, that empower people to grow through loss and adversity: Optimism/Hope, True Meaning, Humor, Emotional Intelligence, Resilience, Spirituality, Self-Confidence, and OTHERS(S). Below you will see the definition of each resource before the stories that the writer felt connected best with their growth. Following the stories, you will find reflective questions designed to encourage you to think about how aspects of these stories relate to your own growth.

When you read through the following stories know that each person shares their experience with you because they believe that over time and with some support you can lessen the pain and enhance your strength.

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# Stories of Growth

## Optimism/Hope

Optimism is your ability to develop and maintain a positive attitude and hope even during challenging times.

*Tayyab Rashid*

Colorful falling leaves of autumn remind me of both the beauty and finality of life. One such fall, back in 1999 and the second year of my graduate studies, was filled with the black color of grief for me. Within a span of 18 days I lost both of my parents in Pakistan some 8,000 miles away, where they raised me with joy until I came to America in 1997 for graduate studies. I had visited them in the early fall of that year because both were not doing very well, but I was sent back to America, optimistically reassured by my elder siblings that my parents were just a bit sick and frail due to aging (folks in their 50s are considered aging in Pakistan where the average life expectancy is 45) and will be fine. I returned to America, 2 weeks into the fall semester, optimistic that my parents would be fine. I came back and tried to engage in studies. My optimism did not let me consider seriously that anything could happen to my parents nor that I had seen them for the last time. Midway through fall, when both passed away (due to under diagnosed problems) within 18 days, I realized that this was my last meeting with my parents. Gripped by shock, grief, and also by anger and guilt (for coming back to the U.S.), I rushed back to Pakistan. I was annoyed at my optimism. I tried to find solace by holding onto emblems of their death (i.e., soil from their grave, their rosaries, praying rugs), but nothing provided any solace in the short run.

Upon my return to the U.S., in the depth of my thoughts and feelings, I told myself, "Never be an optimist again as I may miss important cues of reality." So, I coated my emotions and thoughts with pessimism; isolated myself from my wife and friends. The pain of grief latched onto my pessimism, and I felt as if my existence was meaningless. Laughs, cheers, smiles, and hugs felt foreign. My grieved soul took toll on the body and

I became ill and depressed. Among other things, my doctor suggested I work out. Initially I ignored his advice, but then my wife almost dragged me to a nearby gym. My body found some relief but my grief, guilt, and anger did not release until I accidentally discovered a yoga class at the gym. It turned out to be a spiritual up lifter. The yoga postures, deep breathing, and Shavashana (relaxation) helped me slowly let go of the grief, guilt, and pessimism that I was holding onto tightly. It did not jolt me into instant happiness, but let me recede into deeper contentment, which allowed me to realize that no one is to be blamed for the death of my folks. After all, like autumn leaves, finality is an inevitable reality. More importantly, I realized that this reality doesn't have to be distilled in pessimism.

As Yoga connected my body with soul, the American Psychologist issue of January 2000 (a special on Positive Psychology) bridged my mind to optimistic avenues of thinking. My inner dialogues started reassuring me that finality of life, yes sad and inevitable, nonetheless can be transformed into some meaning. And for me, that meaning was to help myself (and others) to not be pessimistic but to optimistically put engagements of life into perspective. As a graduate student in clinical psychology, my work thus far had mostly been identification and amelioration of emotional pain. With this newfound reassurance, I thought that pain and loss are inevitable, like finality of life, but holding onto them (and their allies of guilt, anger and pessimism) will make finality of life more painful and bitter. Instead, we can grow from it, not out of it. And this is how I did it. For the following spring semester, I had registered for an independent study to explore deeper trenches of psychopathological terrain of our emotions and thoughts. Despite many logistical challenges, I

dropped that project and decided to do a study on optimism. I read extensively on optimism. Not the one portrayed by pop psychologists that takes a superficial rosy view, but optimism that one could exercise when everything in life appears gloomy. This exploration helped me to learn specific ways to look for the silver lining when clouds are dark and deep, how to let go and how to hold onto the thinnest thread of hope, how to find the rope of growth and thriving when in the well of grief, and most importantly how to find meaning in loss.

Not that my grief has dissipated completely, my heart still sheds tears of loss when leaves fall, memories of my parents knock doors of my heart. Almost every middle-aged woman reminded me of my mother, and every frail and aging male remind me of my father. I meet both of them in my dreams. However, yoga and positive psychology has helped me tremendously to carve a meaning out of my loss. In my dreams I ask my parents, what would you like me to do so that the two of you are always close to me? Their answer is always the same and simple: don't mourn our departure from life, just spread joy and goodness.

My journey, I have to acknowledge, of turning this thread of meaning into a rope of growth, has not been smooth and straight. I guess it never is.

“My journey,  
I have to acknowledge,  
of turning this thread of  
meaning into a rope of  
growth, has not been  
smooth and straight.”

Images, memories, and emblems of my parents often prick me with the pain of loss. But I constantly remind myself that I can keep my parents closer to me by doing what they would have wished me to do. I do yoga regularly and then often meditate on beautiful images of my parents, which are vivid in my mind and heart. I also teach yoga and basic relaxation and mindfulness. Currently I am in the process of becoming a certified yoga instructor. Professionally, instead of steeping into psychopathology exclusively, through positive psychology, I learned ways to help my clients to authentically access their pain, grief, and troubles, and learn some ways of letting go rather than shallowly suppressing it. I also try to equip them with therapeutic techniques which cultivate positive emotions of comfort, contentment, serenity and bliss, which help them to savor little but important joys of life, as well as find ways to find their greatest strengths and open themselves to explore the best qualities of others.

Fall still comes with a reminder of finality. The pain of the loss of my parents still seeps deep down in my heart and soul, but now instead of letting it sit there, I lift myself with a reminder from my parents - go spread joy and goodness, there is little time left.

## **Reflective questions**

Tayyab is reminded of his parents in the fall. Is there a certain time of year that reminds you of your loved one? What is significant to you and your loved one about this time of year?

Yoga and relaxation provided Tayyab with the means to accept his grief and find contentment. What relaxes you, and when was the last time that you took the time to do it? Think about how you can make time for relaxation each day or each week.

Tayyab finds comfort in his dreams where his parents tell him to spread joy and goodness. If your loved one could advise you, what do you think he or she would tell you to do?

## **About the Author**

Tayyab Rashid received his doctorate in clinical psychology from the Fairleigh Dickinson University in Teaneck, New Jersey. He is among a few Pakistanis who have earned a doctoral degree in Clinical Psychology. His publication credits include a book and a number of articles in both peer-reviewed journals and in newspapers. He has also received several awards for his teaching and research. In March 2005 he volunteered to train mental health professionals in Thailand in Positive Psychology and in the OTHERS(S) model, in dealing with Tsunami tragedy. Dr. Rashid advocates a holistic, here-and-now based interpersonal approach to assessment and intervention which focuses on positives resources and teacher-client mind-body integration.

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# Stories of Growth

## True Meaning

True meaning is your ability to make meaning of your losses/adversity and find purpose for the future.

*Teresa Ivey*

Not a single cloud rests in the clear blue sky, but dense layers of smoke loom over them creating an ominous tone. There are five men walking toward a staircase that leads into the sublevels of the building. Each one is dressed in the appropriate gear, carrying tools in their hands and tanks of oxygen on their backs. They appear calm, quiet, and focused even though the surrounding sounds echo screams of fear, sirens, and feet pounding the pavement running to find safety. As they continue to stride forward, random papers that have twisted, turned and flitted from stories above temporarily attach themselves to their legs and then fall silently to the ground. Thick layers of brownish-gray dust have settled on the concrete and the surrounding areas. It is a dreary sight that has turned a promising day into an unimaginable dismal scene straight from hell. Unaware of the video that is recording their actions, the men continue on their journey, down the stairs, out of the sunlight and into the building that would engulf their bodies and release their souls from this world.

It is approximately 9:30 a.m. the same day, 30 miles north of the city. I am pulled from my classroom and brought to central office to be with my mother, the superintendent's secretary. She is waiting for my father and my sister to call from the very place I am watching burn on TV. My mother appears calm, quiet, and focused, even though the buzzing in the office echoes sounds of phones ringing, demands being given, and feet treading heavily in and out of the room. A woman who happened to be my 6<sup>th</sup> grade teacher enters the office. I look away from the TV and through teary eyes and a quivering voice, tell her that my dad and sister are there. She puts her arm around me and we continue to watch. I have no reason to believe that anyone else I know is in

danger. After all, I spoke to Mike, one of the five men noted above, only moments ago.

Finally, my sister calls. She has left her office. Knowing she and her unborn child are safe is a huge relief. It is unspoken, but I know my mother and I are thinking the same thing, "Daddy is not going to make it home this time. He made it out in '93...no way he gets lucky twice." I return to the TV and continue to stare through it numbly, motionlessly, and empty.

Moments later, the unthinkable happens. A blanket of smoke coats the entire screen as the floors of Tower 2 collapse into each other and vaporize to the ground. The newscasters speak as if they are no longer on the air; traces of confusion, sorrow and disbelief are heard in their voices. I run to my mother and tell her what has happened. "The World Trade Center. It just fell." Then I add, "They said over 300 firemen were in that building." She heads into the office along with others who gaze blankly into the TV. Again, we are waiting to hear from my sister who had called just minutes earlier. But now I have a new fear. Where is *my* Mike?

The shock is unbelievable and indescribable. My mind repeats the same thought over and over: "Everyone is fine. Things like this don't happen to you." But my gut was telling me something else. I could not make sense of the emotional turmoil and instinctual feelings that I had just lost someone. Yet I was certain that my sister was safe, and I was suddenly not as worried about my father, either. I kept hearing the news reporter in my mind saying, "There were over 300 firemen in that building..." I did the best I could to quiet the voice of doubt that warned me. Again and again I kept comforting myself with a conversation Mike and I had had less than an hour ago. His firehouse



was across from Lincoln Center...no way they made it there before the collapse.

Somewhere in the chaos of the first tower collapsing, a man and his camera roam. On that film holds one of the final moments of five men's lives, one of them being Mike's. And although it is not on film, it was a final moment in my life, too, though I had no idea at the time.

As the 5-year anniversary of 9/11 creeps slowly upon me, I take comfort in the fact that I have learned how to manage the grief and continue to live my life in spite of losing Mike. People have told me from the very beginning how strong I am, how well I handled the situation, how if they were me, they don't know how they'd do it. These words don't hold much meaning; I never quite understood why people said them to me. There is no secret to living after loss. There is no easy solution, no medicine to take away the heartache, no friend or family member who can solve the problem. The recovery comes from within the individual. For me, it was teaching.

I returned to work the Monday following the 9/11 attacks. It was not easy; I cried in front of my colleagues, my students, and in my empty classroom during my breaks. But it was okay—they needed me to be there, and I needed to be there with them. Teaching was the one constant

in my life at the time. I was doing what I love the most and it made me feel like I had a purpose for waking up in the morning. Working with the children kept my mind busy. They reminded me to breathe, because as anyone who has lost a loved one knows, sometimes you forget to breathe.

This school year was the first year that I taught a September 11<sup>th</sup> unit. In addition to teaching them about that fateful Tuesday, the goal of the unit was to teach the students how to find the good in the world that came from the events and to celebrate the lives of all of the victims. The students' responses to the unit overwhelmed me with joy. My 7<sup>th</sup> graders asked me and their parent's questions about that day, they were intrinsically motivated to research and read articles and stories to fill in the blanks that their young memories could not, and they wrote poetry and drew pictures that symbolized their respect for those who died and those who lived. When the unit

came to a close, the students asked me to keep the published list of names of all of the victims on the board. Six months later, the students still stare at the list and ask me questions. Teaching my students about September 11<sup>th</sup> is something that I will continue to do throughout my career. I cannot change what happened in 2001, but I can continue to honor the innocent lives that were taken by sharing their stories with students to come.

“...I take **comfort** in  
the fact that I have learned  
how to **manage**  
the grief and continue to  
live my **life** in spite  
of losing Mike.”

## Reflective questions

Teaching is Teresa's passion and helped her to keep functioning in the wake of her grief. What is your passion? Has it helped you to focus on moving forward?

By educating her students about 9/11, Teresa found a way to honor and celebrate the lives lost on 9/11. Have you started to do something specific to celebrate the life of your loved one? If not, would you like to start, and how could you go about doing so?

Also, by teaching her students about the events of 9/11, Teresa is ensuring that her fiancé and all of the others who lost their lives will never be forgotten. How can you keep the memory of your loved one alive?

Teresa is comforted by realizing her own strength to persevere in the years following her loss. Take time to reflect on all that has happened since the initial moments of your loss, and identify your moments of strength. Is there something that you have accomplished since your loss that makes you feel strong?

## About the Author

Teresa Ivey is a resident of Rockland County, NY and a middle school teacher. She holds a B.A. in Communication Arts and a teaching certificate from St. Thomas Aquinas College. Teresa's father and sister thankfully survived the WTC attacks, but her fiancé, Michael Roberts, sadly did not. Writing letters from his point of view has brought her comfort since September 11<sup>th</sup>, and she is pleased to honor Mike by sharing one of those letters in the Hold The Door For Others *Doorways* Anthology. She is honored to have had the chance to know him and says that despite the pain, she'd turn back time and meet him all over again if she could.

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# Stories of Growth

True Meaning

*Jennifer C. Page*

We are connected, you (the reader) and I, through our shared experience of loss. What follows is an account of my journey and how finding “true meaning” helped me grow through loss. Surprisingly, despite the fact that I lost my father over nine years ago, this is the first time I’ve shared a written account of my story. It is my hope that it will be of help to you as you find your own way through loss.

My story starts in the spring of my senior year of high school. The year is 1996 and it’s March. I live in a small harbor town on Boston’s North Shore so the air still holds that crisp nip to remind you that winter has not yet departed. But I am eager to get out of the house to go spring shopping with friends up at the outlets in New Hampshire. I rush downstairs to catch my ride and attempt to brush by my parents. My father attempts to engage me in a discussion about breakfast, which I quickly dismiss. My mother reminds me to be home in time for dinner since we are going out in my honor to celebrate a local journalism award I received for my work with the school and town newspapers. But I am preoccupied with the adolescent concerns that, at the time, seem more important than spending time with my family. I run out the door with barely a good-bye.

I wish I had known that was the last time I would see my dad. While I was gone shopping, he took our dog, Jasmine, for their weekly Saturday walk. But he didn’t come home. We never got to have our celebratory dinner. And I never got to say good-bye.

When I arrived home that Saturday evening my mother had already been worrying for some time. We, along with my 14-year-old sister, went out looking for my father by car and foot, called

friends and neighbors, and eventually called the police. Neighbors and friends helped us search through the night as we called out for Dad and Jasmine, but the chilling wind and dark inhibited our efforts. We all tried to keep up hope, but a nagging feeling in the pit of my stomach wouldn’t let me ignore the increasing gravity of the situation and the increasing sense of fear that my world as I knew it was slipping away. The night seemed endless, as did the tears. But with the morning light also came the reminder that time was moving forward and my dad had still not been found.

That Sunday morning in March our house was buzzing with people. I attempted to uphold a happy disposition for the benefit of my friends who had come to show their support, and it almost seemed possible to imagine that life was as I’d always known it. But the news reporter vans from local television stations camped in front of our house, and the over 100 officials from local, state and county police and fire departments outside searching for my father, reminded me of the terrible reality I was living. The specifics of the day are a blur in my distant memory, with the exception of the moment one of the police officers walked into the house and took my mother into the living room. I saw the exchange and instantly knew that there was bad news. I rushed in after them to find my mother in tears. My sister and I joined her.

One of the helicopters had spotted Jasmine lying next to one of the snow-covered ponds in the conservation land near our house. She had stayed at the scene of the tragic accident all day and night. Her leash and some dog biscuits were found near the break in the ice where divers from the local fire and police departments’ dive team located my father. He had fallen through the ice

on the pond and drowned, but not without a fight as my dad had reportedly kicked off his boots and attempted to get out. That image would haunt me for a long time.

I'm a sophomore in college now and am in the car headed home for winter break. I think back to the day in the fall of my senior year that I received my early acceptance letter to my father's alma mater. My dad came home from work, picked me up and spun me around the house as we laughed and cheered. But I quickly push this image out of my head as the pain of loss begins to build up inside. Put the wall back up, Jen, don't let yourself feel. This has become almost impossible as of late. I find myself preoccupied with thoughts of the tragic accident. I feel sad most of the time and frequently break into tears. My grades have slipped and I no longer have an interest in my work as news editor of the school newspaper. I've been partying to excess. I feel out of control.

My adjustment to college had been relatively smooth. I made some close friends, joined the track team, earned good grades, and worked on the school newspaper. There were times when I would miss home, particularly having my mother and sister around to talk to when I missed my dad. There were times I would think of how the sudden loss of my father brought with it the loss of what had seemed a future of endless possibilities. Things once taken for granted were now uncertain. New and unfamiliar issues arose as I navigated the uncharted territory of living with loss. While my friends went on with their lives, I began to question a world that no longer made sense. It isn't fair, why my dad? Why him? He was so young, he was such a good man, he was not ready to die. Why?! Why now? Why this way? I was angry, angry that my dad was taken from us. And then I would feel overcome with grief. But I quickly learned to cope by turning inward. In a world that seemed unpredictable, I attempted to gain a sense of control by striving for self-control. I set high standards for myself academically and in my extracurricular activities. And I became obsessed with exercise, perhaps the ultimate form of self-

control. Running was not only my emotional outlet, it was my means of survival. I ran from the pain of loss. But I couldn't run fast enough or far enough. An injury during the fall cross-country season of my sophomore year prevented me from running. And I found myself stuck, finally forced to pay attention to my feelings.

With the support and encouragement of my mother, sister, relatives and friends, I sought professional help that winter break to work through my experience of a delayed grief reaction. I allowed myself to feel what I was feeling, to express my sadness, anger, and fear, and to become more emotionally and cognitively self-aware. I also began to connect with others and

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share my experience of loss. By reflecting on my story I was finally able to make sense of my father's death, and ironically to gain the sense of control for which I had been striving unsuccessfully. I had to answer for myself, what is it that really matters in life? Through self-questioning and much guidance

from the memory of my father, I began to make meaning from my loss. I remembered peaceful summer afternoons sailing with my dad, I remembered Dad's cheers of support during soccer games, I remembered reading the letters he would write when I was away at camp... When I think of my dad I don't think of whether he was a successful businessman or of how much money he made, but rather I think of him as a beloved father and husband, a genuine and giving man, and a man who enjoyed the simple pleasures of life. And so my dad helped me discover that what matters most are relationships with others, with ourselves, and with the world around us.

This experience of self-reflection holds great meaning for me not only because it helped me understand and resolve my grief, but also because it created within me an increased sensitivity to and empathy for psychological pain. With this understanding came a sense of purpose so strong that it changed my college major. I wanted to learn how to help others who, like me, needed psychological healing in order to move forward with life. In particular, as a result of the negative

impact my experience of psychological distress had on my academic studies, I wanted to learn how to help students who were experiencing problems that interfered with their educational pursuits.

I returned to college for the spring semester motivated to pursue an additional major in psychology. I would go on to pursue graduate training in clinical psychology and earn my doctorate degree.

The year is 2005 and it has been over nine years since the loss of my father. I work as a professional psychologist in a university mental health setting to help students with the personal, social, career and academic problems that interfere with their educational goals. In both my

professional and personal life, I have found healing and growth through reaching out to and helping others. Every day I am motivated by the

“I have found **healing**  
and growth through  
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fact that what I have chosen to do is directly related to my experience of loss. And every time I help someone I feel that I am keeping my father's legacy alive.

As you move forward through your own journey of loss, it is my hope that my story will motivate you to create meaning by writing your story of loss, reflecting on your story, and eventually creating your own story of how you grew through loss.

## **Reflective Questions**

Jennifer recalls running out the door, barely saying goodbye the last time she saw her father. After loss it is common to feel regret over things that you did not get a chance to say or do. Is there anything you wish you could have said to or done for your loved one? If so, write a letter detailing your thoughts.

Jennifer writes about trying to push thoughts of her father out of her head as a way to evade her pain. Sometimes forgetting seems less painful than remembering, but remembrance is necessary for healing. What are some of your happiest memories of your loved one?

With loss comes uncertainty, and many aspects of trauma fail to make sense. As Jennifer discovered, true healing is derived from an understanding of life's true meaning. Reflect on your loved one and what his/her life can show you about the meaning in your own life.

## **About the Author**

Jennifer C. Page, PhD, is a clinical psychologist with a special expertise in the area of grief, loss, and trauma. Dr. Page also specializes in the provision of mental health and academic support services within a university community. She is a graduate of Williams College and the University at Albany's Doctoral Program in Counseling Psychology. Her clinical work, and her volunteer work as a Growth Consultant for the Hold the Door for Others organization, reflect the ways in which she has found healing and growth through loss.

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# Stories of Growth

True Meaning

*Maria Ragonese*

My journey through loss is a painful one, but not a journey without reward. I hope through sharing my story, you might see that even the darkest possible moments in your life can bare gifts. In my case, the gift was finding “true meaning” in my life by growing through my loss, and ultimately arriving at a place where I could help others.

I am no stranger to grief or loss. I lost both my mother and father to cancer by the time I was 36 years old. I walked a road of illness with each of them, and ultimately helped them make their transitions from life to death. Caring for my parents during this difficult time taught me a lot about myself as a person, and showed me an inner strength I never knew I possessed. Little did I know that this was preparation for a much more traumatic and devastating loss that was still yet to come in my life.

On September 11, 2001, when terrorists attacked our nation, my best and life-long friend, Laura, was killed when the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center collapsed. Laura and I were best friends since I was 11 years old. We were bonded together by threads thicker and stronger than blood. They were the bonds of our youth, years of shared experiences, and many journeys of the heart taken together in good times and bad.

Losing Laura was the most devastating moment of my life for many reasons. As with any friendship that spans a lifetime, Laura was connected to every dream and plan I had for the future. Her death meant that the future as I saw it no longer existed. Then there was the agony of having her death connected to such a horrific event. Not knowing what she faced in her final moments, as I watched the broadcasted horror that surrounded

her, made the pain unbearable. Not having any remains or being able to hold a funeral – no way of saying goodbye – kept every emotion raw for a long time. This pain and grief was like nothing I’d ever experienced before. Yet, it was the very process of this grieving that stripped away my illusions about the world and about myself. It forced me to take a closer look at my own life. Was I happy? Was I living with meaning or did I just exist as part of the daily grind? Tough questions to consider.

I realized I was working a job I didn’t like, and other than my wonderful husband and daughter, there was no purpose that defined my life. I didn’t like that feeling. If nothing else, the most powerful message that September 11<sup>th</sup> drove home for me was that my time here is limited. That meant I didn’t have forever to leave a mark on this world. If I was going to find true meaning in my life, then the time was NOW.

Ultimately, I was lead to my destiny by a series of “coincidences” that were really blessings in disguise. The first came a few months after the 9/11 attacks, in the spring of 2002, when I got laid off from the job I disliked. I decided to collect unemployment for the summer and take my time looking for another job. With a lot of free time on my hands, I had the opportunity to explore volunteer work. I thought about the area agencies and hospitals as possibilities. I checked out organizations such as the United Way and Red Cross, even the Salvation Army who did such wonderful work, especially in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, yet nothing felt right.

The one organization that kept coming to mind was the local area Hospice. Hospice is an organization that provides palliative care for terminally ill patients. They are a collage of

nurses, chaplains, social workers, and volunteers who come into the home and help a family with a loved one who is making the transition from life to death.

There is no way to fully describe the support, comfort and peace these caregivers bring to the patient and family unless you've had the experience of being in their care. They are real life angels. I know this because they were by my side when both my mother and father were in the terminal stages of cancer. I remember how their unwavering support got me through the long and difficult days of illness.

Then, once again, Hospice was there for me in the wake of September 11th, as their grief counselors reached out and offered support to all families in our area that were affected. I can honestly say, without their compassion and their guidance, I could never have survived the horrific loss of my best friend. It suddenly seemed so clear that Hospice was the organization where I should volunteer.

The second of my coincidental blessings fell into place as soon as I finished my training and became an official volunteer. The Chaplin at Hospice who ran a majority of the bereavement support groups just finished developing a new program in grief management. It was a monthly workshop for bereaved children and teens, and they needed volunteers. With my experience in grief and loss on so many levels, the volunteer coordinator thought this might be a good place for me to begin my work.

Feeling scared but willing to try, I embarked on this new experience hesitantly. The activities in the workshop were designed to encourage the children to talk about their losses. Each time I worked with these kids, I faced grief and loss anew; theirs and my own. It was hard. Yet helping them heal one step at a time; helped me heal as well.

“Feeling scared  
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new experience hesitantly.”

My final blessing came the following summer when the Chaplin who was running the program decided to take a new position with another hospice, leaving me and a few other volunteers to decide if we wanted to take charge of the children's bereavement program ourselves. It would mean more responsibility and a bigger commitment, as now we would be planning each stage of the workshop activities, as well as changing our caps from helpers to actual facilitators. It didn't take long for me to realize that this work brought into my life the meaning and purpose I'd been searching for. This is how I officially became a grief counselor.

Bereavement work is a paradox. It is rewarding and fulfilling in the very same breath that it is gut retching and sad. As difficult as it is to see these kids in pain, is as joyous as it is when they break through and find a way to smile once again.

Take eight year old Jerry\* who began every session this year by putting his head down on the table, refusing to share anything about the father he recently lost to violence. All the other kids were making scrapbooks to honor their loved ones, and Jerry told me he couldn't remember anything about his father, so I simply asked, “Do you remember that you loved him and that he loved you?” He nodded. “See”, I said, “you do remember something about your dad”. At the end of the day, Jerry came up to me and showed me a piece of paper. On it he wrote: **I LOVE MY DAD.**

Another example is 10-year-old Katie\* who by some quirk of fate always ends up in my class. She is, for the most part, always cheerful and willing to talk and participate in the activities, despite losing her mom in a motorcycle accident 2 years prior. Recently, Katie participated in a Valentine's Day activity where the kids were asked to make cards to thank someone in their lives that helped them through their loss. At the end of the workshop, as she was getting ready to leave, she handed me a beautifully decorated card adorned with hearts and flowers. It took me a moment to realize the card was for me. She hugs



me and says, “Because you remind me so much of my mom”.

I think of these moments with great pride, and yet it is still a little hard to believe that something I said or did helped a child take a step toward healing. But as with Jerry and Katie, I am shown time and again—through the innocence and honesty that only children possess—that the good you do for others, certainly does come back to you.

I like to think now that it was my parents and Laura who guided me to my work at Hospice. It was ultimately because of them that I was able to understand, first hand, what wonderful work Hospice does. They must have known that somewhere deep inside, I had the capacity to do the same.

As my work with Hospice continues, I’ve been privileged to meet so many courageous and inspiring people; staff and patients alike. I’ve

been invited to become part of many wonderful and healing causes. And, on more than one occasion, I’ve been given the chance to make a difference. Now my blessings are no longer coincidental; they are countless.

As the adage says, “we must grow where we are planted”. Someday, we will all take our turn being planted in grief. It will be your moment and your time to decide if you will push through the dark, heavy soil, reach toward the light; and grow into something new. I am still amazed that I was able to rise above my own tragic and painful loss to cultivate a garden of peace and healing. It is the very best legacy I can imagine leaving behind in honor of my very best friend.

As odd as it sounds, grief is a place where I am now comfortable. It is also a place where I do my best work. May you all find the courage to rise above your losses and “Grow Where You Are Planted!”

\*Names have been changed to protect the privacy of minors

## **Reflective questions**

Maria's loss caused her to evaluate her life. Have you done the same since your loss? If so, what did you discover about yourself? Is there anything that you have decided to change?

Maria received support from grief counselors and then became a counselor. She says that becoming a counselor provided her life with the meaning that she was lacking. Is there a type of meaning that you would like to add to your life? How do you think you could go about doing so?

Maria says she is honoring her best friend by creating a legacy of healing. Has your loved one inspired you to create your own legacy? What could you do to best honor your loved one?

## **About the Author**

Maria Ragonese was born and raised in Brooklyn, New York. She has been married to her childhood sweetheart, Michael, for 23 years and notes that she is the mother of an amazing 10-year-old girl, Briana Lorraine. She lost her sister-in-law and lifelong friend, Laura Marie Ragonese-Snik at the World Trade Center.

On September 11, 2002, Maria spoke about Laura at the "Candles for Freedom" ceremony held in Harrisburg, PA. In 2003, with the help of family and friends, she undertook a yearlong project of creating 3,000 angels for the 9/11 Victims' Tree, which were proudly displayed aboard the USS INTREPID.

Maria is a resident of East Stroudsburg, Pennsylvania and currently works part-time as an administrative assistant for a community college. She loves to write and hopes to be able to use her writing as a vehicle to help others cope with loss and realize that there is life beyond survival.

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# Stories of Growth

## Humor

Humor is your ability to laugh and use humor to lighten the load of loss and adversity.

*Anonymous*

Optimism and humor go hand in hand. Without optimism, nothing in this world would seem humorous and without the good feelings humor brings, what would be the reward of moving forward despite adversity. In my life, the two have been inspirational.

Was it optimism or humor that made me look at my diagnosis of Multiple Sclerosis, in 1993, as a lifesaver? It was both. Was it optimism or humor that made me think I could manage MS and still care for my 1-year-old baby? It was both. Was it optimism or humor that kept me strong as my abusive (ex) husband ranted and threw a \$1,000 worth of medication against the wall, medication I had been chosen from a lottery to receive? It was both. Was it optimism or humor that kept me strong as I left my husband, still blind in my left eye? Specifically, was it optimism or humor that allowed me to drive over an hour, in the darkness of a violent snowstorm with one eye blind, in order to travel with my child to my older brother's home? It was both.

Without these two traits we are lost. Without the ability to see things as they can be, we are lost. Without the ability to laugh at things, as they are, we are lost. Optimism is what made me think of my blindness and say to myself, "God must be trying to tell me something; there must be some good reason for this." It was humor that led me to think, "God is joking with me, like a friend. He's been trying to tell me I've been blind." I could almost hear him, "OK, You ARE blind, do you get it now?"

What is it about me that led me to see things this way, rather than to give up? What was it about me that has kept me going since then, through the nasty divorce, complete with the woman my husband was cheating on me with, complete with

the woman holding my baby in court and yelling to the judge, "Come on Judge, when is this gonna be ova', I wanna get married?" Again, humor. This was too funny. Again, optimism, this woman would not be in the picture for long. It was funny. And she wasn't.

The kind of MS I have is just what I could handle. I have the remissive-remitting type of MS. It is the type that will literally cripple you, blind you, and stop your entire life on a dime. It is the type that will then go away, leaving hardly any damage (in my case) and causing you to wonder if it all really happened at all. It can play tricks on your mind in that way. Thank God for optimism; thank God for humor. If those two things could only be bottled, what a treasure they would be and how they would help so many people to see beyond things that may seem like devastating problems.

We all have the potential to hurt. We all have the potential to let the hurt take us over, devastate us. If we allow that to happen, however, we let the hurt win a good person. I chose not to let my disease, my ex-husband, or any number of other obstacles that came with the situation, win me over. I knew I had to stay strong, if I were to do any good in this world. I am a teacher and I knew that I would never be any good to children I work with, or my own child, if I would let negativity take me over.

So, to date, I've been blinded several times, I've been crippled, and I've lost many other abilities. And I've gained most of them back. I consider my illness God's way of helping me to stay grounded, to understand others. I feel that God knows I'm a person that will help others, with all I have. I believe He knew that the lessons I have gone through would not be wasted on me. I strive to learn from my adversity so that I can help others.

When I chose to move back to NY from NJ, I knew I had to accomplish a lot in order to regain my NY teaching license. One thing I needed to do was to work toward my master's degree. That was in 2000. Things have not been easy. In 2001, it seemed like the world turned upside down, in general, as you know. At the time, personally, I trusted someone and for 4 years we planned to be together, be married one day, etc. He left 1 year ago today. Also, my daughter, who I had basically raised alone, decided she would rather live with my ex-husband back in NJ. Over the years, he has made many changes and has gotten close with her, which I am happy about. However, for the time being, she has forgotten any good I've been to her. He has more money and things, and she is now a teenager, so in many ways I suppose that is what she needs right now. Plus, we had not been getting along. I think she blamed me for not being able to follow through with the relationship I thought would be a marriage and would lead to a better future. She had a lot of anger toward me. By sending her to live with her dad, I felt I put an immediate end to any tension, turmoil, and harshness between us. It has not been easy, but it was my way of "giving the baby whole" rather than "splitting the baby in half." I remember that from Sunday School, as a child. I felt a good mother does that even if it hurts.

I cannot know how my illness or any other part of my life, i.e. my business with schoolwork, etc, has affected my once close relationship with my daughter. I can only know that over time. For now, she does not see me a lot. It has hurt me and others in my family. For now, she is enjoying living with her dad and they get along great, it seems. I can only be thankful that she is still an honor student and a talented, good person. I feel if she had stayed with me any longer she may have developed the kind of anger and resentment that never goes away. I could not live with myself if that were the case.

So, my life has been, and seems to always be, in transition. I seem to be good at "transition". I only wish it would stop for a bit. Still, I look at it all through optimistic and humorous eyes. I may have

lesions on my brain, but they cannot compare to what is inside my heart and my spirit. What I've gone through will make me a better mother in the long run; what I've gone through makes me a better teacher, daily (particularly when I work with little-understood special needs students). What I've gone through will not be in vain. I'm an artist, also, and gave up art early in college to pursue teaching. That in itself is a long story that changed the course of my life.

It is a very personal part of my life, but it left me with certain fears which led me to change my major to education (which I suppose I viewed as more stable than art) and, ultimately, led me to marry my ex-husband on my 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. I suppose I allowed my fears of the real world to set me on a path, which led to a violent marriage and many situations I wish I could change.

"I consider my illness  
God's way of helping me  
to stay grounded,  
to understand others."

Still, life is what makes us all individuals. I believe it's all about what we learn from our lives. If not-so-good things

happen, I feel we only gain strength by looking hard to find any kind of optimistic purpose in what has happened. I feel we can only benefit and gain strength by using humor to explain to others what we've been through. I find that when we let others know that we've been through a lot, and we are still standing and still helping, we show them how they too can overcome whatever life brings to them. We model for others how they too can still have enough of themselves left inside to help others. Being truly happy inside is not about what happens to us, it seems to be about what we strive to gain from what happens to us, and also how we choose to see it.

I have never lost anyone close, in a tragic way, so I cannot relate to that at all. However, I can only imagine that loved ones who were lost in such a way can only benefit from our turning to positive thoughts and light. In general, being optimistic and happy, and turning toward the light in even a difficult situation brings us all closer to those around us and, I would imagine, even to those who we've lost, those who are still around us in spirit.

## **Reflective questions**

The writer searches for positive aspects of negative situations and then uses them as a source of optimism. Try to think of positive aspects of your situation? Think about your loved one and what positive affect he or she has had on you.

Although the writer has experienced a variety of painful events, she has extracted life lessons and learned from her experiences. Have you learned any life lessons from your loss? If you have, how could you utilize these lessons?

Recall a humorous memory that you shared with the loved one you lost. Now try to think of something that has happened since your loss that your loved one would have found funny.

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# Stories of Growth

## Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is your ability to be aware of your emotions, connect with people, read emotions in others, and communicate your emotions to others.

*Margaret Mauro*

September 11, 2001 was my wake up call to live my life everyday to the fullest. In a blink of an eye I lost the most important person in my life; the other half of me. My identical twin sister Dorothy was killed when the first plane struck the North Tower of the World Trade Center. Death was no stranger to me, as I had previously lost both my older sister and my mother years ago to illness. But Dorothy's death affected me much differently; probably because of the horrible way she died and the strong bond between twins.

This time my grief enveloped me like a dense fog for weeks and months. It consumed me day and night. In late October 2001 I knew I needed to see a therapist. I was closing myself off from friends and staying away from all social situations. I had trouble sleeping, eating, concentrating, and was experiencing flash backs of the planes striking the Twin Towers. I called the American Red Cross looking for help and was told they could help me with three visits to a therapist. I told the woman I spoke with I was sure it would take more than three visits. I thanked her and told her I would find a therapist. She asked if she could keep my contact information in the event some one else called looking for a support group for 9/11 families. Living in Nashville I thought that was very unlikely, but I told her that she could have my contact information. Dorothy's company had set up each of the families with a relationship manager. I called my relationship manager and he told me to call the Human Resources Department. I called, and they told me that the company would be helping the families who lost loved ones with therapy sessions by paying for all sessions for a year. They gave me the telephone number for their managed care group. I called the managed care group and they gave me a number for a

therapist here in Nashville. When I called the therapist office the receptionist told me the therapist had been out of town for 2 weeks and he had no openings for at least 1 week. I explained why I needed to see the therapist and left my phone number. But I knew I couldn't let another week go by; so I called the managed care company again and they gave me a list of four other therapists. I called each of the offices and listened to the messages on their answering machines. With each of the first three numbers I called there wasn't a voice I felt comfortable with. I proceeded to call the last number on my list. When I heard the message on this answering machine I heard a soft comforting voice and this is the one I selected. I left a message explaining why I needed to see her and left my telephone number and name. Later in the day, she called me back and said she had a cancellation at 4 p.m., and asked me if I would like to come in today. I said yes, and at 3 p.m. I drove downtown for my first appointment. At my first session I was very guarded and keep my emotions and feelings in check. But soon realized if I really wanted to work through my grief I had to feel safe and comfortable with my therapist and let my guard down. Her office became my safe haven, a place where I was able to bloom and grow as a person.

With the help of my therapist I learned new skills for coping with my grief. My journey through grief was a long, difficult road to travel. Along the way I learned a great deal about myself and how much I had changed and grown as an individual. I needed to look for the good things that came out of September 11<sup>th</sup>. I had to see the joy in my life and not the negative things that day in September did to my world. My relationships with my friends grew stronger and more meaningful because I trusted myself to ask for

help when I needed it. My friends are all very special people; they were my rocks during some of the most dismal days of my life following

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**grown** as an individual.”

September 11<sup>th</sup>. We are not afraid to say, “I love you” to each other. My relationship with my nephew has grown stronger, and we often share

our memories about my sister/his aunt. Instead of mourning Dorothy’s death we now celebrate her life. We came up with new traditions to celebrate Thanksgiving and Christmas. He spends the holidays here in Nashville with me, I cook dinner for us, and we do fun things together. We truly love spending time together, whether it’s going out to lunch at his favorite restaurant, going to the movies or just renting funny videos to watch at home.

Because of the strong bond I had with Dorothy I embrace the fact that some days when I look in the mirror I can see her staring back at me. Sometimes when I laugh, I hear her laugh. Even though her physical body is no longer here with me, her spirit is very much alive in my heart.

## **Reflective questions**

Many people find it difficult to ask for help while coping with loss, from a professional or from friends and family. Margaret facilitated her healing by having the strength to seek out help. Have you taken steps towards getting help to cope with your loss? How do you think you could better reach out to others for help?

Through learning to cope, Margaret found that she needed to focus on the good in her life rather than the bad. Since your loss, have you noticed a shift in your focus towards negative thoughts? If so, how do you think you could start focusing on the positive? Take a few moments to search for good things that have happened in your life recently.

Holidays can be particularly difficult after losing a loved one. Margaret and her nephew developed new traditions as a way of moving forward. Which holidays did you spend with your loved one? How are things different or how will things be different without him or her? What new holiday tradition have you begun or would you like to begin to commemorate your loved one's life?

## **About the Author**

Margaret Mauro grew up in Brooklyn, New York. On September 11, 2001, Margaret lost her twin sister Dorothy who was at work in the North Tower on the 97<sup>th</sup> floor. Clearly, the connection between Margaret and Dorothy was and continues to be strong and loving. Margaret currently resides in Antioch, Tennessee.



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# Stories of Growth

Emotional Intelligence

*Breanna M. Winder, M.A.*

It is hard to believe that it is almost ten years since it happened, especially since the memories are so vivid in my mind today. What started out as a typical 17-year-old summer day filled with shopping at the mall with my friend Gina turned into something that changed my life forever. Gina picked me up from my house and asked which way we should go to the mall since there were two ways that were similar in time and miles. I picked the mountain road; a long, curvy, but relaxing and beautiful drive over a mountain that lasted for about 8 miles. So, we started out on the road and were only about one mile from my house when I looked up to see a vehicle flipping head-on towards us. Gina slammed on the breaks and stopped the car at about the same time the vehicle stopped flipping a few yards ahead of us. Gina yelled to get out and go help and that she would go call for an ambulance at my house. I complied in a way that seemed to include no thought, logic, or panic; just an automatic zombie-like response. It wasn't until I got out of the car and my friend quickly drove away that I realized that someone had been in a terrible car accident and I was alone on this desolate mountain road and needed to figure out what to do.

So, I ran up to the car and found a classmate of mine, Andy, screaming, "Where is Mike?" I was confused because I thought he was talking about my neighbor, who was my classmate as well, however that Mike drove a truck and this vehicle was so smashed that I was sure it was a car. But, I quickly learned that it definitely was the Mike who, although we weren't close as teenagers, had shared my bus stop and played with me in the snow as a kid. And, it was his truck that I saw everyday, it was just so badly damaged that it resembled a car. Andy and I ran up the mountain road looking down the bank into the woods for

any sign of Mike. Andy told me that he was driving behind Mike and saw him fly through the windshield when the truck first hit the guardrail, so he could be quite far from where the vehicle actually stopped. We ran up a little further and I saw him and froze. He had been stopped by a tree and was lying up against it – not moving. Andy started down the bank and at that time, I heard someone else moaning in pain, so I ran back down towards the noise. Mike's girlfriend had been in the truck as well and was lying in the road behind the truck. She was in shock, losing a lot of blood, and wasn't aware of what had happened. I tried to calm her and keep her still while Andy started CPR on Mike.

At that time, more people arrived at the accident, but still no ambulance. When the ambulance finally did arrive, I was appalled at how slow the paramedics moved to help Mike. I remember thinking, did they not understand that he was young and had his whole life ahead of him? As they went over the bank, I remember looking down at the horrific scene and thinking that it would be ok. I thought that nobody dies that young; that the paramedics would take care of him and I would see him in the hospital, and he would return to school for our senior year. I was very wrong. The paramedics stopped working and I watched Mike's body disappear under a white sheet. My body went numb and the rest is more of a blur. I remember seeing Mike's English composition book (a class that we shared) ripped open on the road along with McDonald's french fries, and his favorite CDs. I remember the police asking the same questions over and over again. And most of all, I remember the look on the face of Mike's dad when he arrived at the accident and learned that his son died in a terrible car accident less than a mile from home. It was a look that

equaled the epitome of true heartache and sadness; a look that I have seen many more times after that day in my mind and will never be forgotten.

Although I wanted to try to just put that day out of my mind and pretend it was just a bad nightmare, the days that followed reaffirmed the reality. I attended the viewing with my guidance counselors and my two friends, Gina and Andy. I walked in and saw that the casket was opened. I was surprised given that Mike's face had been so badly damaged. As I approached the casket, I heard myself gasp. Mike's face was not right and his skin was not at all the color that any skin should be; it was a last minute decision to keep the casket opened. As I walked away, the guidance counselors suggested that we talk to Mike's parents for a minute. The counselors explained to his parents that we were the first to the accident and we tried to help him. Mike's mom responded by saying that all Mike ever wanted was to fit in and be liked and that all of us kids made that very hard for him. Then she turned to me and said that it was sad that Mike had a crush on me and I never gave him the time of day. I didn't understand at the time how she could have said that to me. Her words sparked uncontrollable crying as I ran from the funeral home. I contemplated those words of hers over and over in my mind, especially in the following days and weeks. Sure, Mike and I had grown completely apart as teenagers. We were different people with different friends and interests, but that is what happens throughout life. We just weren't friends but that doesn't mean I ever picked on him and I certainly never even knew that he had a crush on me. At the time, I felt as though she wanted someone to blame and to feel the pain she felt, and I was the person standing directly in front of her; but even this rationalization didn't make the guilt, pain, and sadness that overcame me lessen.

When the funeral ended, I forced myself to think that I was going to be able to put this all behind

me and move on with my life. Senior year was approaching and college wasn't too far behind. This was supposed to be one of the best years of my life, but somehow I just couldn't shake what had happened that summer. I would lie in bed at night and think about it and finally fall to sleep only to revisit it in my nightmares. I avoided driving as much as possible because I was convinced that every car looked as though it was too close; that it could hit me head-on with just a little movement. When I did drive and would pass the place where the accident took place (which was necessary every time I drove to town), I would refuse to look in my rearview mirror because I was sure I would see Mike standing there in the road, staring angrily at me because I didn't save him. I became afraid of the dark and silence at 17 years-old because that is when the thoughts of guilt, sadness, anger, and hopelessness would attack me the most. I began to get dizzy or even pass out at the sight of blood or someone showing physical pain, which never happened before the accident, and meant that my consideration of going to medical school one day was now completely out of the question. And a couple of months afterwards, when I was feeling a

“...although it hasn't been the smoothest journey, it has been one of much growth, especially in terms of understanding my emotions and feelings and those of others.”

little bit back to myself a group of French students and their teacher from my neighboring town died in a plane crash. Back into a funeral home I found myself, and mixed with the pain from this recent

tragedy, all I could see was Mike and hear was his mother's words as I attended yet another funeral of a teenager.

One of the worst parts of all of this is that I dealt with it all myself because nobody really knew what was taking place in my mind. I was very close with my family, my boyfriend, and some friends, but I worked hard to cover it all up because I thought that it was wrong for me to feel

that way and that people wouldn't understand what I was going through, especially since I didn't understand it myself. Unfortunately it did seem to

people as though I was often tired or in a bad mood because the memories and feelings would take over me and I couldn't push them away enough to be back to my normal self. I am sure I wasn't a pleasure to be around in those days. It just seemed as though everyone else was moving on, so why couldn't I? I always thought, "What is wrong with me that I can't get over this?"

Quite some time has passed since those days, and although it hasn't been the smoothest journey, it has been one of much growth, especially in terms of understanding my emotions and feelings and those of others. What I have gained the most from this experience is the ability to have unwavering empathy for others, to understand my emotions and those of others, and see the world through perspectives other than my own. After my experience, I would often look at people who appeared upset or angry and wonder what was going on in their lives since I learned from myself that so much can be happening introspectively without anyone knowing. I became very aware of people's body language and expression of their feelings and emotions, even to the slightest degree. I gained an automatic sensitivity to people who, to some came off as mean or bad people, because I considered what their journey could have been in their life for them to act that way. This quality has also affected how I interact with others in a great way. I feel as though this perspective taking and empathy are two of the most important qualities of any relationship because these skills allow me to understand how someone feels and thinks even if I don't feel the same about the topic. These skills also allow me to connect with all sorts of people because I have such an appreciation for people's different life experiences that have molded them into the person they are today.

This focus on understanding others seemed to come fairly easy, however what wasn't so natural was having this awareness of my own emotions and feelings, particularly since my emotions felt highly uncontrollable for quite some time following the accident. At first, my awareness of my own emotions and feelings came after I was feeling them. A few days after a fight with a friend I would think of how I was too dramatic in the fight and that the fight probably only occurred

because I wasn't aware of the feelings that had been building up over time to cause the big blow. I would also just try to put my feelings aside, thinking that I could get by with just ignoring them or dealing with them later, which never worked since what was bothering me would just come back in my dreams or result in a larger problem down the road. With time and effort, I became much better at understanding my emotions and feelings in the moment and dealing with them then. Although I thought I was quite aware of others before, this new self-awareness increased the quality of my relationships, which was such an important piece to the puzzle that I had failed to recognize earlier.

These skills and qualities are central to my personal and professional life today. While I can probably cite more instances of this at this point in my life than you have time to read, I would like to share how this growth has connected me with, and is very important in, my passion of working with children with autism and their families. Writing this story has helped me realize that part of why I am so intrigued by these children is because I am fascinated by how they think and feel and what their perspective is on the world. Figuring this out is very difficult, especially since some of these children do not speak much, however this has also taught me that you don't need words to connect with someone. One of my first clients with autism was a very cute and bright little 3-yr old. One very difficult morning filled with tantrums and biting, I got down on the floor and just silently observed him playing. He came over to me and looked into my eyes, smiled, and held the eye contact for quite some time. It was his own little way of connecting and telling me that he trusts me. It said so much without a single word.

Managing my emotions and feelings in the moment is also key in this work because it can be highly frustrating when a child is throwing a tantrum for 30 minutes and you need to ignore the behavior in order to not reinforce it or when a child is biting or pinching you and it is very painful. At these times, I always stop and think what they must be going through inside. It allows me to never be angry with them and to be the calmest person in the room and think clearly in the midst of havoc.

My relationships with the parents with whom I work is another area where emotional intelligence makes a meaningful difference. These parents generally have their lives turned upside down when their child is diagnosed with autism. I am sure that I will never fully understand what they are experiencing but my constant willingness to try helps to nurture my relationship with them and, therefore, allows me to make a more significant impact on the family as a whole.

Well, I have taken you through my journey from trauma to growth. Looking back, I wouldn't ask

for my life to have been any different. While my quest has been very challenging and painful at times, I know I wouldn't be the person I am today had I chose the way to the mall that avoided the mountain road that summer day. It has taken me many years to have this perspective on things, and it is still an ongoing challenge with every loss I experience. However, realizing and focusing on my growth always comforts me and allows me to see that I have come so far and plan to continue to grow myself and to Hold the Door for Others to do the same.

\*Names have been changed to preserve anonymity

## **Reflective questions**

Breanna's losses and traumatic experiences have allowed her to have an increased sensitivity to others. Has your loss helped you to better understand people or perspectives that you once did not understand?

Sometimes when confronted with loss it seems easier to ignore your emotions rather than to deal with them. Is there a time when you discovered the strength to face feelings that you had been trying to escape?

Breanna says that looking back in retrospect she would not choose to change any of her life experiences because they have sculpted her into the person she is today. Are there ways in which you have grown from your loss? Are there ways you would like to continue to grow from the experiences you have had?

## **About the Author**

"I hope you dance," the song by Lee Ann Womack connects with Breanna's passion of reaching out to others and challenging them to grow, flourish, and achieve their dreams. This is evident in Breanna's devotion to helping children with autism and their families thrive through her Behavioral Specialist Consultant position with the Devereux Foundation. Breanna also volunteers as a Growth Consultant for Hold the Door for Others where she is currently focusing her efforts on encouraging people to recognize their growth through loss. In addition, Breanna is a Positive Psychology Researcher for Swarthmore College and the University of Pennsylvania.

Breanna received her Master's degree from Boston University and will be one step closer to her dream of becoming a psychologist specializing in the early detection and early intervention of autism by starting a Clinical/Developmental PhD program at Bryn Mawr College this fall. Breanna values her connections with her family, friends, and the children with whom she works and is hoping to instill in others the importance of reaching out and Holding the Door for someone, in some way, every single day.

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# Stories of Growth

## Resilience

Resilience is your ability to adapt, bounce back, and respond with strength to adversity, loss, and challenge.

*Donna Craig*

My son Hunter died 6 years ago in a car accident driven by one of his best friends on October 19, 1999. I find it much easier to talk to a group of 100 police officers or 200 high school students than to type the words.

Six years ago, we were excited about Hunter's acceptance into New England College in Henniker, New Hampshire. He was so happy he would be playing college lacrosse, and we were happy he was going to college. Now we could concentrate on the rest of the year. Hunter was captain of the Marblehead Hockey and Lacrosse team, just finished up with soccer, and received The Coaches award for leadership. Hunter asked me one day when we were driving to a hockey practice (he was a junior at the time), if he would ever be captain of the team. I said, "No", not to disappoint him, but Marblehead has so many bright high achievers and Hunter had a hard time with academics and was over looked many times before in sports. He proved me wrong 2 months later and became one of the youngest captains at Marblehead High in hockey. I think he knew what each team member needed and made himself stand out. He made friends easily with teammates and coaches. He wasn't the best player; he played hard and put everything into it.

Lacrosse was different; he excelled. Hunter had the second highest points in the state and played with his younger brother, Robby. Almost every goal Hunter had, Robby assisted. The newspaper called him Goodwill Hunter and often wrote "What was going on with the Craig brothers in Marblehead." It was a fun watching the two of them working so well together and both being recognized. Hunter and Robby were 22 months apart. We all did so much together as a family, and sports were always important for us.

Hunter was the middle child, and as I said before, he had difficulty in school. In third grade he was tested, and his reading skills were below grade level. He had audio processing problems; school would be hard. I knew at that time I would not let him fall through the cracks, I would help him be as happy and well adjusted as he could be. He went to summer school for 3 years for reading, he read along with the book on tapes, and had special help in class. Hunter was kind, compassionate, and a very loyal friend to all. In his junior year I was afraid he may not get into a college. We had to do an independent European History class which meant chapters had to be read every night. I would read to him after hockey practice and then we would talk about each chapter. He would sit beside me and twirl my hair just like when he was little, how was he ever going to make it in college without me. New England College is a small school of 600 students and has a wonderful support system, however I knew it still would be hard. Hunter would play lacrosse and maybe play a little hockey and have all the help he would need. They even had study groups for the lacrosse team.

Hunter's older sister, Allison, was a senior at Colby Sawyer College just 20 minutes away in New London, N.H. Allison was looking forward to a fun year with her brother so close and to watch his lacrosse games in the spring. The four of us went up to Colby Sawyer for Robby's birthday, September 12<sup>th</sup>; he turned 17. We had such a nice time, had dinner at the local tavern, and took a picture of our three children; this picture is one of my favorites. Later when we dropped Hunter off at his school, he was walking up the path with his yellow "Life is good" hat on; he seemed so confident and mature just in a few

weeks. Then we heard a girl yell “Hunter Craig we missed you,” I knew then he was going to do just fine.

Hunter started fall ball lacrosse in October; this is when we would see how Hunter would do with his new teammates, as freshman, and how much time he would play. Hunter sent us the schedule, and his Dad and I started to make plans on what Sunday games we could make. He had a 3 day college break and there was a big rally on Sunday in Springfield, Mass. Hunter was anxious to be home. His friends would be in Marblehead, the Red Sox were playing the Yankees and he would see Jen (Hunter’s close girl friend). Rob, his Dad (also called Hunter), and I would go to Springfield to watch the lacrosse game. There would be a cookout after for the families of the players; this would be a good time to meet other parents.

It was a great weekend; I picked up Hunter after his lacrosse practice. We had a nice ride home catching up on everything: Rob just finished golf and had a good start to his junior year, Allison was doing well and getting ready to student teach, and Hunter was very happy with New England College. Hunter took his sports seriously Saturday night; he was in early knowing he had the game on Sunday. He always made any curfew we had for him, but he did this on his own. It was a long drive to Springfield and there were many other teams playing so it was a long day.

Hunter ended up playing only 45 seconds, but it was worth every second, and he was doing what he set out to do be part of the team. The cookout was fun. Everyone made us feel welcome, and we met the other freshmen players and their parents. The rest of the weekend went smoothly. It would have been nice if Allison had been home, but her college break was the weekend before.

Monday we all were excited to watch the Red Sox and Yankees game. The four of us had a nice dinner and watched a movie before the 8:00 game. I remember Hunter standing behind me twirling my hair as he went to grab his “Life is good” hat and his jacket. The hat wasn’t there; he was all mad. I told him it probably was up stairs in a t-shirt he just took off. But that would take too long to go look, and he gave us a big wave, put his

lacrosse hat on, and out the door he went. This was the last time we saw Hunter. I still can see him standing in our kitchen saying goodbye; he was so handsome with his blue eyes and a big smile. He was a typical teenager; not always perfect, but he made us all so proud.

The Red Sox lost that night to the Yankees. The game was over around midnight, Robby watched the game with us; it was a school night for him and we went to bed soon after. Hunter’s Dad asked a couple times why Hunter wasn’t home yet and I said he is just down the street at Scott’s house. Hunter had our car and it wasn’t that late.

By 1:00 a.m. we both were wide-awake. At 1:40, we heard a car and heard someone coming up the walkway. Hunter would always take two steps at a time and come bursting into the house no matter what the time was. Then we heard the knock on the door, and when I saw the police officer’s face I knew it was serious. He asked if I was Mrs. Craig. I said yes. He said Hunter was in an accident. I asked if it was serious, it was, and Hunter was at Salem Hospital. I remember just turning around and leaving him there, going to the stairs and telling Robby to get dressed; his Dad was already up. When we went out the door, the police officer was gone. Marblehead is a small town; I am sure he came because we didn’t know him very well. We had to drive ourselves to the hospital, but I knew when I saw the officer’s face that Hunter was gone.

It doesn’t really matter how Hunter died but to finish the story, he hopped in his friend Mike’s car to give Amanda a ride home, Scott went too. Amanda told us Mike was driving too fast. Hunter and she were in the back seat; Scott in the front with a seat belt on. Hunter and Amanda tried to get the seat belts out, but they were jammed under the seat. Amanda asked Mike to slow down when they dropped her off. A few minutes later going 80 miles an hour they hit a tree. We were told Hunter was killed instantly. Mike and Hunter were thrown out of the car; Scott was saved by his seat belt. Mike was in a coma for a month and had head injuries. Scott was released and was able to attend Hunter’s funeral.

We sat waiting for the sun to rise, knowing we had to make phone calls, but most important was

to get Allison home. My thoughts were of course of Hunter, but how were we ever going to go on as a family without him. I knew right away I would have to be strong. Allison and Robby had to know we loved them very much and even without Hunter we were going to make it. I just didn't know how much courage it would take to do this. I was remembering how hard Hunter worked; the summer school classes, his determination to be captain. He was my hero and my inspiration.

Hunter's yellow hat was right where I told him, tucked inside his T-shirt; I knew it was important to him I could just tell. This hat was so simple. It was different from all the others, the worn out blue hat, his favorite red hat, and his lacrosse hat. Why this bright yellow hat with the three simple words, "Life is good?" Hunter was buried with his red hat, we kept his blue hat, and we never did get the lacrosse hat back, but each is a symbol of his life. Where is the yellow "Life is good" hat? I don't know. It was passed around from friend to friend for awhile. Robby wore it for a time. It doesn't seem to matter. What matters is to remember Hunter and those three words Life is good!

Since then we have given out over 8,000 yellow pins with "Life is good" on it. My husband

Hunter wears a pin every day for the last 6 years. The first 50 were given to Hunter's friends in the high school on his 19<sup>th</sup> birthday. Allison gave Jen a bear with a yellow sweater and a "Life is good" pin for Christmas, which is now called the Hunter Bear. Every year we give out at least a hundred Hunter Bears to Marblehead and Swampscott new drivers, a reminder that life is too good to waste, please drive safely, responsibly, and buckle up.

Hunter and I are still working at our stores in Marblehead and Swampscott; both communities have been wonderful to us, they have honored Hunter in so many ways. Allison taught school for 5 years, and became an indoor track coach at Marblehead High School. She met Brian, her assistant coach, and they are planning an August wedding. Robby is still finding himself; he worked as a carpenter for 2 years after school. He is living in Boulder, Colorado until April. They both seem very happy.

Robby once said to me about safe driving, "Mom, we just don't get it." Every year there are inexperienced new drivers and every year we will give out Hunter Bears to remind them please buckle up, drive safely, and responsibly. Life is good!

"Since then we have given out  
over 8,000 yellow pins with  
"Life is good" on it."



## **Reflective questions**

The color yellow and the phrase “life is good” became symbolic to Hunter’s friends and family. Is there something specific, maybe an item or phrase, which reminds you of your loved one? Think about this reminder. What makes it so special?

The phrase “life is good” is a message of optimism and hope which has been inspirational to the Craigs throughout their loss. Evaluate your loss. While you do this, try to think of specific events which remind you that life is good. Remember the simplicity of this phrase; it may be the simplest things that truly make life good.

The loss of their son inspired the Craig family to tell young drivers about the importance of safe driving. Is there a message that you would like to share with people as a result of your loss?

## **About the Author**

Donna Craig lives in Marblehead, a small seacoast town 25 miles from Boston, Massachusetts. She married her husband Hunter in 1976 and they opened a hardware store in the next town over, in Swampscott. Over 30 years, Donna and Hunter raised and enjoyed their children Allison, Hunter, and Robby in Marblehead. Six years ago a sweet and loveable wheaten terrier named St. Patrick was added to the family. Emmy their cat welcomed her new friend. Both give much laughter and happiness to their home.

Donna now owns a small gift shop in downtown Marblehead. She is very thankful for all the community support especially from the Citizen Scholarship and the Penny Bear Workshop that keeps the Hunter Bear program going.

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# Stories of Growth

Resilience

*Christine Uscher*

There is a big piece missing from my life. Huge. Willie was my husband, and to me he was magic. From the moment my eyes met his, I knew he was the one. He had a kind and loving way, mixed with whimsy and joy. He had the most contagious laugh, and being with him was guaranteed fun. He loved with the deepest of passion. He was unafraid to show his sensitive side. In all ways, his genuineness was on display, for all to see and share. To touch him was to feel complete. The way his eyes would follow me gave me a thrill beyond belief. To love and be loved so greatly, to live and laugh deliberately and with the greatest measure of our being, this was the life Willie and I shared.

Someone said, "It is a heartbreak and an honor to be the most important person in someone's life." I know this to be true. Here we are, just 1 year into our married life, and my husband is diagnosed with cancer. Immediately, and with the fervor he used in life, he began the battle to preserve his life. He spent sleepless nights on the computer, researching. He flew all over the country, to the best of cancer centers, and armed himself with the ammunition necessary to fight and conquer this cancer that threatened his very being.

Willie's greatest source of power, I believe, was his ability to amuse himself and others during this time. His impish smile was still great, his laughter deep and hearty. With his army of doctors now positioned, Willie was comfortable enough to let them do what they had to do, and he would do his part. Each morning he would head over to the cancer center, wearing the most obnoxiously colorful button-down shirt over his Tommy Hilfiger trousers, carrying his laptop in one hand and his Three Stooges lunchbox in the

other. The infusion room was made up of eight chairs, each paired with the stand containing the intravenous drip, the poison used to fight poison. Willie spent the hours at the infusion center watching movies, playing games, sending emails, and listening to music - whatever he could do to amuse himself.

We were about to embark on a new, radical treatment - a new hope - that required a month-long stay in a hospital in New York. We spent the weekend prior to that in Atlantic City, playing games and having fun, when we got the call from one of his doctors. The cancer had spread to Willie's brain. Willie just looked at me. I saw the rush of emotions in his eyes - first disbelief, then disgust, and finally resolve. Then he said to me, "f\*\*\* it, let's play!" And so we did, one last time. One month later my husband was dead. He was only 43-years-old.

We have a beautiful home. It had become my tomb. The fact that life went on outside these walls was, to me, disgusting and insulting. I kept minimal contact with family, even less with friends. There was no celebration of holidays for me. There was no joy for me. There was no purpose at all. Just despair, just a quiet, desperate longing. My heart was empty. My soul was still. What happened to me? Perhaps it was fear of the future, or desire for the past, or the hope that if I just stood still that nothing would ever find me and hurt me again.

This was no way to live. There was no way out, but out. A tearful plea left on my answering machine by my brother and sister-in-law, "come back to us, come back to life" was the catalyst. By choosing to not live I was denying my husband's very existence! It was not easy,

coming out of the Stygian darkness I lived in. I was the same sad woman, only now I was vertical with a little makeup, so to the world I looked ok. I began to look to others who had suffered loss, and found comfort, compassion and inspiration – a belonging. From there, I made new friends, special friends, who continually guide me and push me because they believe in me.

I learned to be responsible for my own happiness. I learned that I could again be the woman my husband fell in love with. And I learned I could love again, and accept love - with its intimacies and heartbreaks - and still look at myself at the end of the day and say, it's ok. I learned I could bring joy and laughter back into my home, and it's ok. I can go dancing, and sing and laugh, and it's ok. It's life, one moment at a time. I learned I could

share my grief with my new life, side by side, and be the best person I can possibly be.

My challenge now is to live, one moment at a time, and with great passion. I'm taking Willie's hopes, his inspiration, and I'm running with that. In my husband's memory, we have raised monies with annual charity softball games, and we have created the Willie Uscher Entertainment Center at Holy Name Hospital's Cancer Center. Patients now have individual access to the internet, movies, games, music, and television via computer monitors placed at each chair side - a source of amusement, inspiration, or just a simple form of distraction, to momentarily take them away from their own thoughts. It's Willie's way, an infusion of joy. This is his legacy.

"I learned I could **share** my  
**grief** with my new life,  
side by side, and **be** the  
**best** person I can possibly be."

## **Reflective questions**

Often times after experiencing loss, it is common to feel guilty or upset about continuing to enjoy life without your loved one. Reflect on these types of feelings that you may have had, and then think about what advice your loved one would give you about dealing with these feelings.

Christine dealt with her grief by placing her life on hold, and it was not until she received a plea of “come back to us, come back to life” that she decided to move forward. Did you or are you going through a similar time of introversion? If so, what was it that gave you the strength to move past it? If you are still feeling introverted, think about the people who are missing your presence and about how much you miss good times spent with them.

Christine says she learned to share her grief with her new life. In which ways have you learned to balance the pain of your loss with the joy and promise of your new life? How could you further achieve this type of balance?

## **About the Author**

Encouraged by a group of very special friends, this is Chrissie Uscher’s story of personal growth after the death of her husband, Willie. It is written to speak to others who have experienced the intensities of deep love and deeper heartbreak. Inspired by the courage and grace shown by her husband, who lost his fight with cancer at age 43, it is an expression of hope, understanding and the importance of living in each moment.

Chrissie Uscher currently works as a legal assistant in Hackensack, New Jersey. She resides in River Vale, New Jersey with her four precious pugs.

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# Stories of Growth

## Spirituality

This resource can only be defined by you, as it is the most personal of all resources. An example of a personal definition is: the level of connectedness to people and the surrounding world. Spirituality may also be defined as the inner spirit and passion for relationships with others.

*Angie LeVan*

Sometimes I feel the more faith you have the more susceptible you are to adversity. I didn't grow up in a religious household, though my parents believed in God. But there's an infinite difference between believing and having faith. Belief is merely the predecessor of faith and then perhaps true faith is the predecessor of hardship.

Before I had faith, heck, before I even hit the age of 5, adversity made its mark on my life, but not that I knew it then. As I grew older, these things that I didn't have the mental capacity to understand as a 4-year-old child suddenly revealed themselves to me through a warped adaptation of an epiphany. Not only had I discovered that the reason my parents split up was because my father was a doped-up drug addict – and a dead-beat dad, whom I've seen once since the age of 7 - but I also realized what had actually happened to me when a much-older cousin took me alone into my bedroom, comparing his genitalia to a lollipop. Sometimes it's hard to imagine that that was my early childhood. Sometimes it feels like someone else's story, perhaps something I read in a magazine, years ago.

But then I look at my life and it makes sense that I grew up fast. By 14 I was doing a lot of things I had no business doing at such a young age and the chain of unpleasant events carried on. At 16 I was raped, over winter break of my sophomore year in college I was held up at gunpoint at a bank I worked at, and after a 3.5-year marriage I went through a divorce at 25. You could laundry list events of my past and many would assume that someone exposed to so much at such a young age couldn't possibly end up resilient, let alone normal. There are statistics that prove that, statistics about

people like me, people whose eyes are opened to the malevolence of life at such an early age.

As I see it, adversity will do one of two things to you: it will either make you cling to faith or, make you reject it entirely. Up until the age of 25 I truly believed in God. I taught Sunday school and attended church twice a week. My divorce, however, was the last straw. When everything I thought I knew my life to be just dropped out from underneath me, I had no other practical choice but to "just have faith!" That's when I realized that I'd been living my whole life in fear. Now I stood at a point where I had no idea which direction my life would go. I had nothing to grasp onto except for faith. My life went belly up and it was time to sink or swim, or in my case, fly.

I had always wanted to travel but had barely ever set foot outside the state of PA. So, I booked a flight to Europe and spent 3 weeks backpacking, two of which I spent entirely on my own with limited contact to friends and family. It was one of the most riveting adventures of my life! Shortly after returning home from Europe an opportunity arose for me to move to California – a place I had always wanted to move to. Despite many loved one's pleas, begging me not to go, I decided to make the move anyway – and to again "Just have faith!" With nothing to tie me down in PA - being single and tired of the job I spent the last 4 years at - I truly had nothing to lose. So, I quit my job, packed my VW Beetle, and schlepped a few personal effects across the country – "Cali or Bust!"

Two days into the trip the transmission in my New Beetle died just outside of Nashville, TN. I'll

admit, I thought to myself, "This is either a sign that I shouldn't be going, or it's a test." I suppose I passed with flying colors because 3 days later I got my car back, continued my journey westward, and started a new job within my first week in LA.

California was amazing on so many different levels. Life was easy, too easy. I lived in a gorgeous Marina del Rey complex with a roommate who was barely ever home. I ran a traditional M-F 9-5er, at a job that was so simple, that on Monday nights I would head out with the girls to hit up the Hollywood clubs - we never knew which celebrities we'd run into. Weekends I would sleep in - venturing out late on a Saturday morning for breakfast on the beach with friends or a lone cruise up the Pacific Coast Highway in my VW Beetle. Could it have gotten easier?

In the midst of all of my "California Dreamin'" I had another epiphany, realizing that my new-found faith must've tapped into something much deeper than merely taking a chance on a cross-country move. Despite the ease of my California routine, there was a very unsettling nuance stirring inside of me - perhaps the yen for something more. The more I grew in faith, the more I realized that my life is about something much greater than myself - and perhaps the string of unfortunate events in my past paved the way to the path I thought I had just merely stumbled onto.

Through faith I had found a way to thrive through adversity, and I had realized that I wanted to commit my life to the pursuit of helping others to do the same. After spending 6 blissful months in California I was faced with a decision to make: would I stay in California or would I begin the pursuit of a new vocation? Would I choose a life of pleasure or a life of meaning? Now I can see how this choice appears obvious, and it was, but it came with a lot of sacrifices in store, some of which I've already made and others which are yet to come. A wise friend told me "you have to go through the have-tos, before you get to the want-tos." He's absolutely right! But that's much easier in theory than practice.

I've told you about my California life-style, but there's much more to explain. Deciding to commit my life to helping others seems simple, with the exception of the field in which I chose to do so. Having graduated over 6 years ago from a state college, my chances of pursuing a PhD in Clinical Psychology are not all that promising, but again I bolster my mantra, "Just have faith!" After spending a year considering the prospect of this grand pursuit, I decided to take the plunge and "just have faith!"

One of the most vital and time-consuming things I needed to do in the process of my pursuit was to obtain research experience. The choice to move back to PA was solely for an opportunity to volunteer for a psychology research project connected to an Ivy League school. So, as history will repeat itself, I quit my job, packed up the VW, and schlepped 3000 miles back to the pitiless

town that seemed to be kicking me out since I was 4.

Not only has this town picked its fair share of fights with me, it's been

deemed the cancer capital of PA. This, in part, is the reason I've chosen to work with a cancer population once I enter grad school. When I say cancer hits home for me, I mean it! Not only was I born and raised in a cancer-intimate environment, sadly my grandfather (my Pop) was diagnosed with cancer about 2 months following my return to the east coast.

At that time, I was volunteering on a research project and waiting tables on the side. When I found out that Pop was diagnosed with cancer I began spending most of my free time with my grandparents. For 10 months I watched him struggle with the cancer; it was an extremely painful affair and just less than 2 months ago he passed away - I can still feel the intensity of holding his hand as he took his last breath. It was one of the most difficult periods of my entire life and despite my prayers to trade my life for his, there was nothing more that I could do than to just be there with him.

"Despite many loved one's pleas,  
begging me not to go, I decided to make  
the move anyway - and to again  
"Just have faith!"

The month he passed away I had started a new research position for the same Ivy League school. It was beyond stressful, but faith alone saw me through it. My Pop was a great man – rare for this day and age. He was filled with a sense of hope that transcended this life and enough faith to move a mountain. He believed in God for a long time; however, he developed a powerful sense of faith after he got cancer. While tears are settling in the corners of my eyes I'll candidly admit to you that since my Pop's passing there hasn't been a single day when I haven't wanted to quit the pursuit of this goal. I truly wish I could say that the past year has been a good one, or even, that it's gotten easier. In contrast, returning to California seems all too easy compared to my current routine: juggling 3 jobs, spending 15 hours on the road per week commuting, sometimes with a 2-hour morning commute to a city that makes me rather uncomfortable. I live with my parents and sleep in my brother's bedroom while he's away at college.

“But if there's one thing I've  
**learned** from past experiences  
it's that not only can I **survive**,  
but I can **thrive** through anything.”

Still, I've refused to fall prey to the illusions society has crafted into a barometer for measuring success.

While most of my friends are married and having children I barely have time for a relationship on any level. I'm 28 with a biological clock that won't stop ticking no matter how young I look or feel. I've watched my bank account nearly zero

out, only to build it back up and watch it dwindle once more.

Most of the time I'm so tired I can't quite remember how I even got from point A to point B.

There's so much flux and instability in my life that it's sometimes nauseating, and the further I get into this goal the

more physically and emotionally taxing it seems to become. But if there's one thing I've learned from past experience it's that not only can I survive, but I can thrive through anything. Despite the hardships and day-to-day life stressors amongst facing so much uncertainty there's just one principle I base my life upon and that is: "Just have faith!"

## **Reflective questions**

Angie exudes incredible resilience, and no matter what form of adversity she is faced with, she still continues to persevere. Reflect upon times you have persevered through difficulty and what factors helped you make it through (e.g., connecting with loved ones, hope for the future, pursuit of a goal)?

Angie's mantra is "just have faith". Think about what faith means to you. Has your faith helped you through your time of loss?

After going through a divorce, Angie learned how to function on her own by taking a vacation to Europe alone. What is most difficult for you to do without your loved one? Do you feel that you have accomplished something on your own since your loved one has passed? If so, how do you feel about this accomplishment?

## **About the Author**

Prior to embarking on a career path of greater personal meaning, Angie LeVan was a graphic designer for over 6 years. Now her ambition is to pursue a PhD in Clinical Psychology to conduct research that will support the creation of positive psychological interventions for cancer patients and their caregivers.

A native and current resident of Pennsylvania, Angie is extremely passionate about photography and traveling throughout the U.S and abroad. Angie also places a high value on her faith in God and connections to other people.



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# Stories of Growth

Spirituality

*Thomas O. Wicks*

My grief process started at a very early age. My mother died just hours after my birth. I did not grieve her death. As a child I had no understanding of grief or loss. I didn't miss her, and no one in the family thought to talk to me about it or ever explore the impact it was having on me. I lived in a foster care home until I was four and a half. Then, I was introduced to my blended family. It was made up of my father and a stepmother. By this age I had (wrongly) figured out how I was going to run my life. I was molding myself into an individual who would hold his feelings in and only let things out with a burst of temper.

The first time I realized that things were different in my life was when I was taken to a cemetery and shown my mother's marker. I was 8 or 9. The visit to the cemetery changed my thinking, unfortunately in a very negative way. I now knew that I was different. I was not from a real family. By then I had been having difficult times with my family and at school. I had always been a child who was very difficult to discipline. I was restless, constantly distracting the class, staying after school. At home I was always breaking the rules set down by my father and stepmother; always testing their authority. Defiance was my position and I would maintain that behavior for many years.

Unknown to me, from a young age I was grieving my mother's death. I never shared it. I hardly asked any questions about her, but I wondered what it would have been like if she was alive and here with me. As children who go through the early death of a parent, I knew things were wrong; I had a stepmother. My friend next door had a real mother a real family; I was a stranger in this family. I would dream about my mother and what

she would have done. This shaded my ability to be part of my family. As I got older, and entered high school, these memories were deeply repressed, but they had made their mark on my behavior and outlook on life. They fed into my excessive use of alcohol.

I was married 7 years and was father to 3 children. At 30 I was divorced. I was an angry person who suppressed his rage and disappointment with life and used alcohol on a daily basis. Soon after my divorce I sought help for my drinking problem. That was the beginning of a new lifestyle. Now I was facing my emotions without the crutch of alcohol. Each day I was learning to live within a 24-hour window of both opportunity and reality. Opportunities came as I began to look at myself, and the things that had affected my life. I was taking a personal inventory. Through that inventory I began to explore the repressed pain of my mother's death. I had tried to hide from those emotions all of my life. But they were always present just under the surface; they expressed themselves in depression, which was manifested by anger.

My life changed when I married Helen in 1980. We had many similar childhood feelings, although she had both her parents alive and well, living about a mile from us. During the next 20 years, I very slowly began to process the feelings I had about my mother's death. At the same time, I had learned to believe in a Higher Power. The importance in having a spiritual life, based on a power greater than myself was important to me when things happened which I had no control over. Helen and I found out what having no control meant when she contracted breast cancer in 1988. She had a mastectomy and months of chemotherapy and was able to stay positive. Our

friends and family always encouraged her. I remember her saying, "God speaks through people." She had a strong believe in that spiritual axiom. I learned to believe that also and was able to be there for her through her treatment. For the next 15 years we both worked as she continued to visit the oncologist, first monthly, then every 3 months. One day she came home and excitedly said, "From now on I go every 6 months." We both saw light at the end of the tunnel.

Helen was retired for a little over 1 year when she had a reoccurrence of cancer, this time in the form of ovarian cancer. We were both stunned. We thought we had statistically beaten it. Together we took inventory of our spiritual lives: What were our strengths? How would we absorb this shock? The first thing Helen did was to say, "Let's get it going! I want to go to Paris next September." The cancer was vicious and there would be no trips, especially not to Paris; we adjusted. There were many visits to the infusion center for chemo, hours at a time. I would take her first thing in the morning, and a friend would show up, 20 minutes later. We were always relieved that there was a network of caring, loving women who bolstered Helen's spirits through the hours of treatment. Many have said that it was Helen who made them feel special and ok at the center. The roles may have been reversed. Miracles happened in the form of bonds being made deeper. Helen's spiritual grace seemed to blossom.

Our family and friends enabled both Helen and me to be brave, face the tough decisions, cry together, support each other, and look for strength from a Higher Power together. Our blended family was our bedrock; the adult sons and daughters were constantly at Helen's side. As sick as Helen was getting, she glowed with the love being lavished on her from everyone. Helen was losing the battle with cancer, but her spirit was stronger each day. All who visited her would say, "I feel so much better. I came to cheer her up and she cheered me up."

In the mid part of September of 2003 it was decided to stop the chemo and have the Hospice

program assist Helen and our family. On September 20th Helen died. I was devastated. The horror of the disease hit me full force. All of our trying, hoping, and fighting for the cure had succumbed to this disease. I was not prepared for what happened next: grieving on two fronts. Helen's death left me emotionally open to the feelings deeply hidden about my mother's death. I remember thinking, "I can't do this, it's too much, I don't know what to do." My family and friends encouraged me by being there, listening for countless hours, and letting me talk out the feelings. I kept putting one foot in front of the other; I woke, got up, and tried my hardest to show up for life.

A major breakthrough came when I attended my first session of a local bereavement group. I was skeptical at first with thoughts such as: "What can they do for me?" "My heart is in a million pieces." I decided to give it one try. I would go to one meeting but I didn't give it much hope. That

"I kept **putting** one foot in  
front of the other; I woke, got up,  
and **tried** my **hardest**  
to show up for life."

night, at the meeting, I heard a woman share from depths that I have visited. She understood. She was expressing my pain. I returned for a second meeting. After the eight sessions finished, a few of us kept in touch for about a year. This was quite a spiritual experience. We shared hope, encouraged each other, and shared our pain and successes.

Over the past year I have shared with a close friend the deep pain of Helen's and my mother's death. I didn't realize how deeply I was affected by my mother's death and that it had such a grip on me all of my life. It was part of my journey that both of their deaths came together in my heart, emotions, and spirit. I was opened wide emotionally. Hours of sharing helped me address both of these deaths of the two women who played the largest roles in my life. They were honored by being truly grieved. I didn't try to hide from the pain. With the help of my support system, this time I didn't run or get angry. I reached inside to a belief in a Higher Power and asked for strength. I remembered what Helen said, "God speaks through people."

## **Reflective questions**

Tom's loss of his wife allowed him to experience other feelings of loss that he had suppressed for a very long time. Has your loss helped you to realize or reconnect with emotions of which you had previously been unaware, and if so what have you gained from this insight?

Tom discusses "taking inventory" of his spiritual and emotional status to discover his strengths and methods of coping. In doing your own "inventory" what strengths and ways of coping do you see in yourself?

Tom discusses several sources of support ranging from organized groups to loving and caring friends. Are there people who have supported you during your time of loss, and how have they helped you?

## **About the Author**

Tom Wicks, Executive Director of New Views, a non-profit organization designed to treat people with Mental Illness and Substance Abuse Disorders, has worked in the Human Service field for 30 years. He is the father of two sons, one daughter, and proud grandfather of three girls. His hobbies include writing, photography, reading, travel, and exercise. Since the death of his wife, Helen, in 2003, he has shared much of his grief process through his writing as he devotes much time to reaching out to others through his experiences. He has lived in Ridgewood, NJ for the past 25 years.

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# Stories of Growth

## Self-Confidence

Self-confidence is your belief in yourself and your personal resources.

*Janet Fazio*

“On A Clear Day” was always one of my favorite songs, but now it only brings tears to my eyes whenever I hear it played on the radio. September 11, 2001 was a very clear day. A day that changed my life and my children’s lives forever. I lost my husband of 33 years who I met at the office water cooler when I was 19. He was my best friend.

Today I spent the day talking to my financial advisor about my future and my lawyer about updating my will since I am now a grandma. Five years ago, Ronald would have been taking care of all these details. We would have discussed the particulars but he, being the businessman that he was, would have taken care of all the details.

From the very beginning, I had very good guidance from my friends and business advisors who kept stressing how important it was for me to stay in control of my life in every possible way. It was not an easy thing to do. I just wanted to close my eyes and not think about anything or feel anything. It just hurt too much. My three children wanted to take care of me the way they felt their dad would have and they did. I soon realized it was in my best interest to start being more responsible for myself.

After having my first and only panic attack 1 week after Ronald died, I started seeing a psychologist. He is still a necessary part of my life. Sometimes the need is greater than other times. His guidance is something that I know has helped me become the person I am today. I realize now that I was always a strong person and capable of making all the decisions that I make for myself today.

A month after Ronald died, our son Ronnie, Jr. was married. It was an event we had all planned for 16 months prior to that day. My family and friends helped make it a day of celebration as it was intended to be. When people have since said to me, how did I ever get through that day, I just reply that Ronnie and Diane deserved to have a happy memory and it was what my husband would have wanted for them. It was probably the hardest thing I have ever had to do but something that I am so glad that I was able to do for my children. I was able to dance with my son at his wedding and that’s something that I know my doctor and children gave me the strength to do.

When my son, Robert became a psychologist, after many years of schooling, I gave him the celebration party that his dad had dreamed about but was not here to witness. He was there in spirit with his love all around us. Although I shed many tears when Robert received his doctorate, I was so happy to be able to be there for him. I saw in his eyes how he wished his dad could have been there for him. I am so proud of him.

Ronald and I always talked about traveling to Europe when the children graduated from college but, obviously, we never got a chance to go. I did get to experience two wonderful trips to Europe with my daughter Lauren. I always hated flying and since 9/11 the fear is even greater, but those trips were filled with so many meaningful and exciting experiences that I am just so grateful to have had the opportunity to enjoy them with my daughter. We have scrapbooks full of happy memories that I will always treasure. She helped me to appreciate all the artwork that we saw and helped me see another side of her that I wasn’t

aware of. We hope to make another trip while I can still walk for 12 hours a day.

Right now I am in the process of fulfilling another dream that Ronald and I had for our retirement - rebuilding our shore house. It took me 4 years to make this very big decision. For 16 years we spent all our summers down at the shore in a very tiny house. Again, we felt with the college years behind us, we would make the house bigger. I went to the beach for the first time last summer by myself to see if I could handle the loneliness that I feel whenever I am there without him. I even went to breakfast at our favorite place alone and survived that also. After many meetings with architects and builders, my children and I together are rebuilding our shore house for us all to enjoy for years to come.

About 8 weeks ago the Fazio family received a wonderful gift from God. Brianna Marie. What a joy she is. I just love her to pieces. She looks a lot like her grandpa. He used to tell Ronnie and Diane that when he retired he would help take care of their babies. I will try and do that in his place. After first finding out that Diane was pregnant, my first reaction was that I couldn't be a grandmother without him beside me. After some more therapy, I was made to realize that this was very normal for me to be feeling and that I would be able to overcome those thoughts. I did and now when there is a clear day, I just think how much fun it will be to take Brianna for a walk and to play at the seashore when she is older.

Two weeks ago we lost a very important member of our family. Our dog, Linzi, was 15-years-old.

I bought Linzi for Ronald after he had a quadruple bypass when he was 46-years-old. I read that having a pet helps to alleviate stress. I never had a dog and still am very afraid of dogs. He adored her and after he died, she would sleep on his side of the bed. She had been sick for awhile, but we just didn't want to let go. The children and I made the decision together. Another part of Ronald is gone. The house is even emptier now, but Lauren and I are still here doing the best we can.

“Now, when someone tells  
me that I am a **strong** person,  
I don't just shrug it off.  
I say thank you and  
count my **blessings**.”

My life is not the life I dreamed of as I face retirement, but it's the one that I have. Some days are definitely better than other days. Now, when someone tells me that I am a strong person, I don't just shrug it off. I say thank you and count my blessings.

With continued confidence in myself, I know my life will continue to grow. The many trips that I have taken with friends these past several years have helped me broaden my horizons in so many ways. Looking back at all of these wonderful times that I have mentioned, Ronald's wife would not have been able to accomplish them on her own. But I have become a stronger and more confident person and am looking forward to even more challenges in my life and ways to grow through those challenges.

## **Reflective questions**

Janet remembers being advised to maintain control over her life and how difficult it was to do so in the wake of her loss. Has there been a time since your loss when you felt as though you were losing control? If so, how did you regain control? Is there something in your life right now over which you wish you had more control? How do you think you might be able to gain more control?

Loss can sometimes get in the way of plans for the future. Janet and her husband had plans to travel to Europe and to rebuild their shore house, but instead of letting her loss end their plans, Janet adapted the plans to fit her new life. Has loss affected any of your plans? How do you think you could adapt your plans to fit your life after loss?

As a result of her loss, Janet has had to accomplish many things on her own. When looking back at all that she has done without her husband, she feels a sense of pride for her own strength and perseverance. Has your loss caused you to do things without help that you were used to having? If it has, what do you think you have gained by accomplishing things independently? Is there something that you hope to accomplish on your own in the future?

## **About the Author**

Janet Fazio was born and raised in Queens, NY. She currently resides in NJ and has lived there for 37 years. Her two sons, Ron Jr. and Robert, and daughter Lauren live nearby. She is the proud grandma of her first grandchild Brianna Marie, 4 months old. Janet does volunteer work and enjoys traveling with friends and spending summers at her beach house at the Jersey Shore.

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# Stories of Growth

## OTHERS(S)

OTHERS(S) ties all of your personal resources together, and emphasizes relationships. This resource is the most important by far. It is your ability to build relationships in your social-network, and heal through helping others.

*Matthew Bitsko*

I am pleased and honored to offer this story of growth. I have much respect for Hold the Door For Others and one of its primary founders, Rob Fazio. For these reasons, I offer my brief story below. This is a written update to the story I first presented in the *Gaining From Loss: Our Journey Continues* CD-ROM. On March 17th, 1991, St. Patti's Day, my cousin Greg was killed in an automobile accident. I must convey that Greg was like a brother to me in many ways. My family has always fostered close relationships with our cousins; on that day, I'm sad to say, I'd almost wished they hadn't.

Late that evening, Greg was driving a car with two other occupants. He and one passenger were killed, and the other suffered severe brain damage. Greg was driving while intoxicated and ran a stop sign less than a half mile from his childhood home. He was 22 and a recent graduate of Penn State. I can't go into my many thoughts and emotions of guilt, anger, and responsibility, but I believe they play, and continue to play, a role in my coping with this process (I can't believe I just called it a process).

In the spring of 1991, I was a freshman at Randolph-Macon College and was experiencing a wonderful year of fun and exploration. On St. Patrick's Day of that year, I pitched a no-hitter for Randolph-Macon's baseball team. As you can see, this will be a story of extreme ups and downs. To be brief, allow me to say that I celebrated that night. It strikes me still to this day that I was probably in the same mental mindset as Greg in those very same moments that night. In hindsight, I suppose I was lucky to be celebrating at a small residential college that did not require any driving – but that gets into chance and circumstance

which I'm not willing to consider right now. Please know, however, that these facts have never been lost on me. I awoke, quite hazily, that morning to receive the phone call of his death.

My story from that night to this day revolves around a concept I've come to know as time perspective. I reacted to Greg's death during my college years with an even more "devil may care" and unbridled "you never know" mentality. I would work hard and play hard, with, perhaps, special emphasis on the playing hard motif. Looking back, it is safe to say that I was certainly focusing almost exclusively on the present moment with an almost hedonistic bend to most all of my interactions. As it always does, time marched on. The years since 1991 saw me navigate personal, academic, career, and relationship developments. These events made me consider my past, present, and future. I guess that gets me to the "what did I do" part of this story.

Rob at Hold the Door suggested that I consider how this loss has helped me deal with future adversities, relationships, and, perhaps, a new appreciation for life. I believe I have grown in many wonderful ways as a result of Greg's death. From the time of his death, I guess I've always had the mindset that I wanted to somehow allow this to make me be a better person. As you may understand, this notion brings both guilt and pride. How selfish of me to try to grow from this experience?! However, I didn't want to consider the alternatives.

So what did I do? I've always tried to maintain that present focused "time perspective" (what a sterile term!) that enables me to live in the present moment and always make the most of my

relationships. To me, this has often meant staying up way past my “bedtime” to enjoy and build the bonds between friends and family. I drive and fly great distances to keep up those relationships, even though it often borders on insanity. Paradoxically, this present focus gives me constantly renewed faith about my future relationships with these many people. Further, it has helped me look back upon these relationships with satisfaction and contentment.

Essentially, I believe that grieving the death of a loved one presents us all with one common question: How will I approach future relationships? Will I run away from them (“shield”) or will I “fuse” myself to others as I attempt to hold on tightly? We all have to answer this question for ourselves. For me, I have tried to cultivate strong relationships since Greg’s death. This may be the choice point for us all. But what, indeed, are the options? Do we knowingly

cultivate future strong relationships knowing that ultimately losing these people will result in much pain, or do we actively (unconsciously) pursue relationships that are shallow to shield us from the inevitable pain of losing them?

Importantly, I have focused my attention on a relatively small amount of people – my family and close friends. This concept also applies to the wonderful women I met in my mid twenties. Kelly and I got married and are “cultivating” our own beautiful family while maintaining balanced relationships. To this end, I suppose that maintaining sanity and balance in my relationships is where I currently stand and will continue to evaluate.

Thanks for listening. I know writing this has been helpful for me. I hope it has been helpful for you.

“From the **time** of his death,  
I guess I’ve always had the  
**mindset** that I wanted  
to somehow allow this to  
make me be a **better** person.”



## **Reflective questions**

Matt talks about the impact which loss has on one's relationships. Have you felt more inclined to guard yourself in your relationships? Have you felt inclined to be more engaged in your relationships? Has this been a positive change?

Matt discusses experiencing a range of emotions when learning about his cousin's death, and he says that these emotions still play a role in his coping. Think about each of the emotions you have experienced since your loss. How do you think each has affected you? How do you think each will continue to affect you?

Matt's loss has taught him to live in the present and value each day spent with loved ones. Have you had a similar experience with your loss? If you have, reflect on the greatest lesson about relationships that your loss has taught you.

## **About the Author**

Matt is currently a resident in psychology and staff counselor at Virginia Tech's counseling center in Blacksburg, VA. He has experience with both adults and adolescents in a variety of therapeutic settings and modalities. Matt's therapeutic and consulting experiences have included work with cancer survivors, elite athletes, and business executives within the private and public sectors. Other areas of interest include positive psychology and group therapy.

Matt is slated to enter private practice this fall in Richmond, VA. Most importantly, he enjoys running, hiking, traveling, and playing with his wife and family.

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# Stories of Growth

OTHERS(S)

*Elizabeth Dickey*

To mark this year's anniversary of September 11th, Mayor Bloomberg's office decided to invite siblings to read the role call of those who died in the towers. I had never made the pilgrimage to Ground Zero before. Our family was one of the "lucky" ones to have recovered my brother Stephen's remains a week after the attack, so I never had the feeling that this sacred ground mattered much for me personally. But I discovered that it is, in fact, sacred and belongs to all of us.

Four years to the day, I stood on the edge of the pit under an unbearably blue September sky and reflected that we are still trying to staunch the flow of raw grief, a grief that now takes different forms. The initial coming together in an attempt to cling to some semblance of a recognizable world, after the world as we knew it had collapsed in the space of 90 minutes in lower Manhattan, Washington, DC, and a field in rural Pennsylvania, is no more realized than before the first plane hit.

Immediately after September 11th, "United We Stand" placards and stickers were plastered everywhere. It didn't matter if you were a firefighter from Staten Island, CEO of Marsh McLennan, bus boy at Windows on the World from Ecuador, or the black sheep of the family. We vowed both collectively and individually to put aside our differences, they looked petty and inconsequential in the shadow of such a traumatic event. We rallied around this surprise assault, reaching out to comfort and support those families, cities, and companies who suffered a direct hit. We had the outrage, sympathy, and good will of the world behind us then. But what I saw at Ground Zero on September 11, 2005 made me sad.

We had to check in at our assigned tent early in the morning, which gave me plenty of time before the ceremony began. I walked along the edge of the pit. There's nothing very dramatic to see, all sanitized and tidied up with the new Path station operational in the southwest corner of the foundation. What did strike me about the space was the quality of absence, the emptiness of those acres once teeming with commerce and life. It's only in this juxtaposition that we understand how this empty pit stands as a symbol of the chunk taken out of the lives of individuals, our city, and our country. That chunk we no longer take for granted. In art we talk about negative space; those white areas on the canvas; the pause between two notes; words not written that define and give shape to what we do, see and hear; presence in absence. We need to learn not to rush in and fill these gaps. For in the absence of steel and stone, flesh and blood, I felt the powerful presence of those towers and all who perished there that day.

I observed other families milling about or wandering over to the fence to gaze down at this sacred space. I saw scabs that had been carefully protected, ripped open anew. But I suspect there was a changed quality about this oozing grief. How many families have failed to maintain United We Stand, internalize it, and live it? I had tried to heal the wound of my brother's death by mending and reconciling relationships in my family. We came together briefly like our country and put our differences aside, but slowly over time resumed the same old dance and permitted the same old distances to stretch out between us. We failed because we allowed our differences and grievances, and in the end our individual grief, to separate and define us.

My story is personal and painful; it could end there with me and the center of MY tragedy. That notion could solidify in my psyche, forever a family member of a 9/11 victim. But by some weird twist of fate this past July, I found myself near the epicenter of yet another brutal, if not massive, terrorist attack. Months before we had switched our vacation plans in order to spend the time with friends in London. So here I was, sitting in a pew in an empty church on Kensington Church Road in the wake of two terrorist attacks in the space of two weeks, reflecting on the grief and resolve that had descended on another city.

As I breathed in centuries old incense that through the osmosis of time had insinuated itself into the hard wood of the pews, the chalky plaster of the walls, the lumpy needlepoint cushions on the kneelers, I felt privy to the experience of those caught up in this latest web of terror. I tasted the salt of their tears and felt their pounding hearts, understood their disbelieving minds and their fist slamming rage. In my own strange small way, just being in London I felt a redemptive connection and comfort out of which has grown a desire to be a bridge rather than exist on my own island of concerns and grief.

“My experience  
of loss has given me  
an ability to connect  
to people in their pain.”

My experience of loss has given me an ability to connect to people in their pain. In January I traveled to Rwanda on a humanitarian trip. These people have witnessed horrific events and, like me, are living daily with the consequences. As I looked Rwandans in the eye, I saw that it was through the absences (negative spaces) in our lives that economic and cultural differences melted away. Our shared sense of loss and our pain as human beings helped me connect to the people I met; and helped ease the ache of our loss regardless of whether it's inflicted by a terrorist bomb, a machete, or the slow ebbing of life from disease and hunger in the third world. The Rwandans were not just the objects of my charitable gestures; we are the same – people who laugh, love, hurt, and bleed.

I still remain very committed to helping my family cope and navigate through life in my brother's absence. But I have found healing in stepping out on behalf of others who find themselves suffering loss or deprivation as the result of war, terror, poverty, or death. This connecting with others has become part of my ongoing relationship with my brother, which grows deeper as his memory continues to shape the person I am becoming. There in the white spaces on the canvas or the page, and in the lull between the notes, my brother is very present.

## **Reflective questions**

Elizabeth has healed some of her pain by reaching out to others who are also grieving. Is there an organization or a particular person that you would like to assist? If you choose to reach out, how will you go about it?

As described in the story, loss can bring people together. Has your loss helped you to reconnect with someone, and if so, how has reuniting with that person had a positive impact on your life?

Volunteer work is Elizabeth's way of staying connected to her brother. What is it that you do to stay connected to your loved one?

## **About the Author**

Elizabeth Dickey is a graduate of Georgetown University and Manhattanville's Master's of Arts in Writing program, where she is also poetry editor for the literary journal "Inkwel." Her brother worked at Cantor Fitzgerald, WTC North Tower, 104<sup>th</sup> floor and died September 11<sup>th</sup>. Elizabeth notes that the images and the impressions from 9/11 haunt her and that poetry has allowed her to explore and express her reaction to the events that fall as she tries to make sense of the senseless. She lives in Old Greenwich, Connecticut with her husband and four children.

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# Stories of Growth

OTHERS(S)

*Kathryn Disori*

My Cheeko was my life. I was 18-years-old when we eloped and we built a beautiful family together with six children. We had difficulties along the way. Money was always tight, but we found a way to get by and he always did little things to show how much he cared for me. It was difficult for me to watch his decline and be unable to prevent it. My only option was to care for him. It was even harder to see him go and to move on with my life by myself after 40 years. I found connecting with others as a way to ease my pain and overwhelming loss after Cheeko was gone.

It started slowly. Cheeko began acting differently during the summer 1982. He would ask me questions over again, and sometimes he would forget where we were going. We went to the doctors and later found out that he had Alzheimer's disease, and that he would slowly lose his functioning. His decline soon followed after we learned the diagnosis.

First, his mental capacities and judgment were affected. We would drive places and he would forget where we were going or even why we were going. I never had my driver's license, so I was dependent on him. I didn't know what to do when he started going the wrong way on one way streets and not obeying traffic signs. I was scared often, but I thought it would pass. It didn't, and unfortunately it was only the start of the downward spiral. At one point he attempted to get out of the moving car because he thought it was stopped. I knew then that our freedom to travel and visiting our children were limited.

His physical attributes were what failed next. My Cheeko was always a proud man and provided for his family with everything he could his entire life. To see his physical capacities fail broke my heart.

Cheeko started to not be able to walk well and it took all I had to get him up the stairs. He then lost his daily functioning skills. I had to bathe him, change him, and sometimes feed him. I felt like I was caring for one of my infant children, but this was the man I was married to for over 30 years. A proud man, a man that helped me through every obstacle I had for the majority of my life. I did not know what to do, and I did not realize that it was going to get worse.

I remember the last time I could get him up the steps. It was a struggle. I pulled and pushed and he almost took both of us down the stairs. Our daily walks stopped occurring at this time because Cheeko could not get around. Then he fell in our living room. I didn't know what to do. I called the ambulance and we went to the hospital. After that he was bed ridden, and I had to learn to take care of him.

For 4 years my life had a routine of caring for my husband. He needed to be turned every 2 hours to prevent bed sores. I needed to give him sponge baths to keep him clean. Over the 4 years of being bedridden, Cheeko never had a bed sore. I was determined to keep the Cheeko I knew around. I treated him as normal as possible. What ever I ate he ate as well. The only difference is that I blended the food for him and fed it to him. It became common during our family gatherings. Thanksgiving dinner, birthdays and other holidays, he would eat everything we did. He was my husband and I was not going to let him not participate in our family functions.

He continually had problems, though. He had two strokes, many bouts of pneumonia, and other varying illnesses that accompanied a person that was bed ridden. I continue to read and learn about

how to care for him. I am happy that I had three daughters that were nurses to help me out. Many days and nights I felt tired and overwhelmed. I did not know if I had the strength to continue. I cried at times which made me feel better. I started to pray a lot and found solace in religion.

In October 1988, Cheeko went to the hospital. This was one of the many visits that we had. It was different this time. I knew that he was not going to make the night. He was taken off his respirator. He struggled to breath at times and then seemingly caught his breath. After 10 minutes of fighting to breath Cheeko passed away with my hand in his. It was serene and peaceful. After a 6 year struggle with Alzheimer's disease, strokes, and being bed ridden, the fight was over.

Initially I was confused and overwhelmed. For the first couple of months after my husband passed I had much to do. I had to arrange for the funeral, get my finances straight, and start to develop a life of my own. For the first couple of weeks people checked in on me to see how I was doing which was kind. Then it was quiet. People stopped coming to see me as much, I had a lot of free time, and I felt my purpose was gone. I did not know what to do. I continually told myself to keep busy and to not feel sorry for myself.

So I kept busy. I started walking everyday, I got a job because I needed to, I became more active in the Church, and I spent as much time with my children and grandchildren as possible. I became a Special Minister in the Catholic Church. I would

visit home bound people and give them Communion. I found that I would spend time with others and help them; I felt better. I did not realize what was occurring at the time but it started to ease my hurt. I started to help others as much as possible. I found the more I helped others the more it comforted me from my loss with my husband. I could relate to other people who are going through difficult times in their lives as well as their family members that are going through the experience with their loved ones.

The church gave me an avenue to help others. I started visiting hospitals and nursing homes. I found that I could connect with almost everyone I had come into contact with. It did not matter if

"I found that I could  
connect with almost  
everyone I had come  
into contact with."

they were dying, lame, or lonely. I started working with hospice patients and visiting them. I go to our local hospital and homes for the aging about twice a week now. It is difficult at times because I feel drained, but I

still feel an overwhelming satisfaction that helped me through the loss of my husband.

From my experiences with my husband and all the pain and loss I experienced, I could connect with other people who were going through similar experiences. I know I can not take their pain away, but I feel that I can share it with them. I have found a fulfillment in my life, after the loss of my husband, from helping others and connecting with them. I appreciate everyday that God gives me and every opportunity that I get to help another person out; I try and make the most of it.

## **Reflective questions**

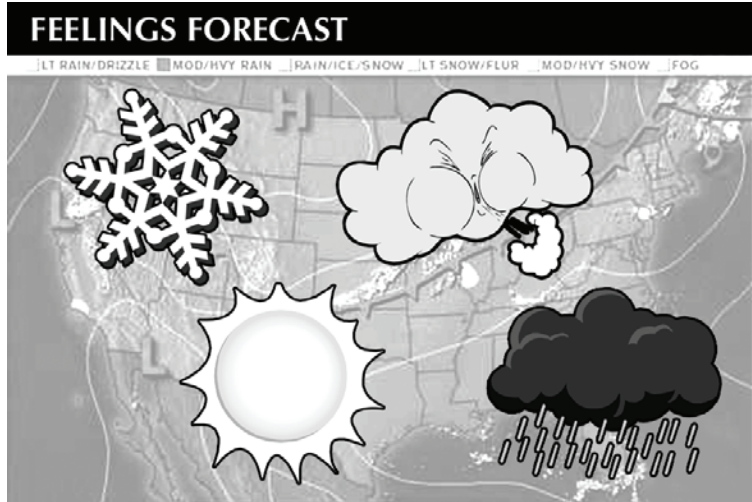
Finding a new routine is often an important part of continuing your life after the loss of a loved one. Have you added any new activities to your regular routine? Are there other activities that you would like to begin?

Kathryn cared for her husband for many years, and after his death she began to reach out to others who were in similar situations to her own family. Kathryn used her volunteerism to fill the void that was left when she could no longer care for her husband. What special things did you do for your loved one? How are you using your time that was once spent with your loved one?

Through her work Kathryn met others who were also experiencing the loss of a loved one. Connecting with these people provided Kathryn with fulfillment and satisfaction. Have you felt alone during this time of loss? Do you think that helping others in similar situations might help fill an emptiness that has been caused by your loss?

## **About the Author**

Kathryn Disori is 76-years-old and lives in Shamokin, Pennsylvania where she spends most of her time with her family. She has six children, 16 grandchildren, and now the great grandchildren are starting. She has five great grandchildren with three more currently on the way. When she is not spending time with her family, she visits her friends at the senior center where she brings them Communion and talks with them. She enjoys her morning walks and since spring is here, will be starting her garden soon. She looks forward everyday to interacting with others and meeting people with whom she can spend some time.



What am I feeling right now?

Why am I feeling this way?

What am I likely to feel tomorrow?

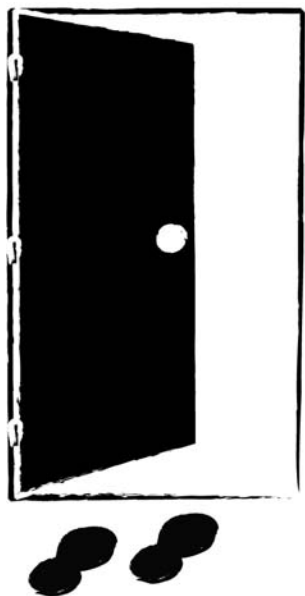
Why may I feel this way?

What is coming up that may trigger my emotions?

What can I do to prepare for challenging feelings to come?

**Where are you related to the Doorway?**  
(How ready are you to take a step forward?)

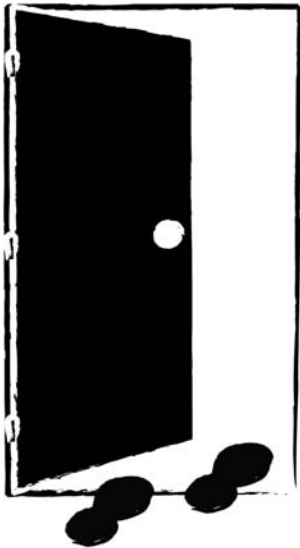
Outside (Not Ready)



Feelings:

Thoughts:

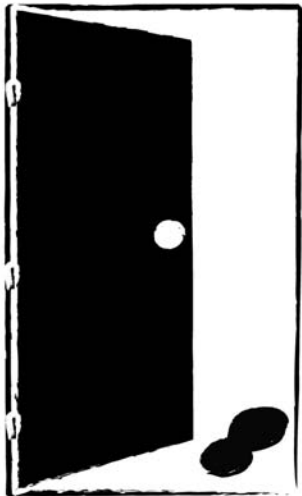
In (Maybe Ready)



Feelings:

Thoughts:

Through (Ready)

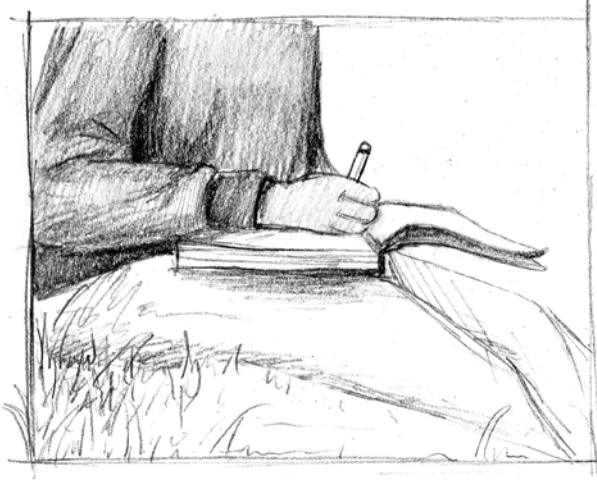


Feelings:

Thoughts:







## DOORWAY 9

# Write Your Story of Growth

*Breanna Winder, M.A.*

Now that you have read through the stories of growth that the writers shared in Doorway 8, the Hold The Door team encourages you to consider your own story of growth and which resource of the OTHERS(S) model connects with your

personal growth. You may already know which of the eight OTHERS(S) model resources resonates with your experience. If you are not yet sure, the reflective questions at the end of each story are designed to help you reflect upon your own loss and to encourage exploration of your growth, so referring back to them may be helpful. In addition, it is possible that you feel as though your story relates to more than one of the OTHERS(S) model resources. One way to approach that is to pick the one resource that seems to stand out the most, and then you can weave the other resource(s) into your story if you would like or just focus on the main resource for your story. In addition, we have listed the eight OTHERS(S) model resources below to help guide you in choosing one to represent your growth through loss and adversity. We encourage you to reflect on how your personal experience relates to any of the OTHERS(S) resources. Please feel free to write down your thoughts on the lines provided below each OTHERS(S) resource definition.

The OTHERS(S) model consists of eight resources that are based on the research that the Hold The Door For Others team has done, as well as their personal experiences. The resources are meant to empower people to grow through loss and adversity.

**Optimism/ Hope:** your ability to develop and maintain a positive attitude and hope even during challenging times.

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**True meaning:** your ability to make meaning of your losses and find purpose for the future.

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**Humor:** your ability to laugh and use humor to lighten the load of loss and adversity.

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**Emotional Intelligence:** your ability to be aware of your emotions, connect with people, read emotions in others, and communicate your emotions to others.

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**Resilience:** your ability to adapt, bounce back, and respond with strength to adversity, loss, and challenge.

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**Spirituality:** the level of connectedness to people and the surrounding world. Spirituality may also be defined as the inner spirit and passion for relationships with others.

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**Self-Confidence:** your belief in yourself and your personal resources.

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**OTHERS(S):** your ability to build relationships in your social-network, and heal through helping others.

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Now that you have chosen one of the OTHERS(S) model resources that connects most with your growth through loss and adversity, below you will find some questions to help guide you through your story.

### **Describe your loss or hardship**

1. What were your initial reactions (emotions, thoughts, behaviors)?
2. How did your experience personally challenge you?
3. How do the OTHERS(S) model resource(s) fit into your growth?
4. If you don't feel as though you have grown from your loss as of yet, which OTHERS(S) resource(s) do you feel is a personal strength for you? How will your strength in this resource(s) enable you to thrive from your hardship?
5. Where are you now in terms of your growth?
6. What are your plans for growth in the future?

### **Additional questions you may want to consider:**

7. How has your loss helped you deal with subsequent adversity?
8. Have you experienced stronger relationships?
9. Do you have a new appreciation for life? If so, how has your perspective on your life and others changed?

Although we at Hold The Door For Others believe that writing your story of growth through loss is an important aspect of the healing process, we also understand that it is a challenging task. Moreover, we know that asking you to share your story to inspire others may raise other concerns. Individual reactions to the writing process will vary. A challenge you can expect is that you will experience feelings as you retell the story of your loss. We encourage you to attend to these feelings and reach out to us or your friends and family if you see fit.

It is very possible that writing your story will be a pleasant experience. However, there are instances where reconnecting to your loss brings forth some feelings that may be challenging. It is perfectly normal to have a range of emotions such as sadness, depression, anger, fear, worry, and others. You may also experience a sense of joy because you learned how much you have grown, or you feel good because you are connecting once again with your loved one and helping people. Regardless of what you feel, it is natural.

Below is my personal account of the challenges I faced and overcame in writing my story of growth.

*When I first agreed to write this story, I couldn't stop thinking things like, "How am I going to do this, this is going to be so hard," and "I am not really sure in what ways I have grown so how can I write a Growth Story?" I knew I wanted to do it, but I really felt as though the task seemed quite insurmountable at first. I had planned to start the story on one day, and then found a really good excuse in my mind as to why that just wasn't the right day, and I must say, that this did not happen only once. Finally, I sat down one night and just decided to write anything that came to mind and go from there. I decided that, although this was personal and it was important to me to consider what others would read, I could always go back later and edit or change something. Before I knew it the first page was complete. While it was very sad to think about that time in such detail and remember all of the events, I was quite satisfied that I had begun to put my story down on paper.*

*Once I was able to summarize the details of my loss, I had another challenge of figuring out how exactly did I grow from this event that was so horrible to me in many ways and which concept within the OTHERS(S) model truly related to my growth following my loss. So, I took some time to review all of the concepts to see which one(s) resonated with me. It became clear to me that there were little and big aspects of Emotional Intelligence that were weaved all throughout the growth related to my loss and very related to the person I have become since that experience. I had never realized before how such a positive part of my life and who I am today was related to the struggles I faced as a result of my loss. Gaining this awareness has really allowed me to look at things through a different perspective and has encouraged me to explore other ways in which I have grown and ways that I would like to continue to grow. It has also made me realize how important it is to connect to people and share examples of growth with others in order to help them see ways in which they have grown too.*

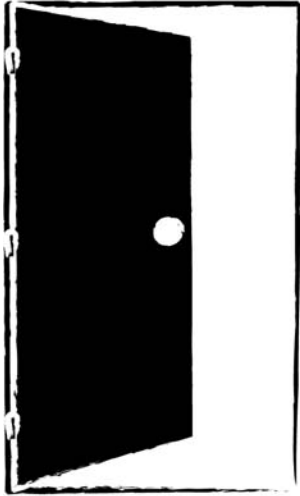
Members of the Hold The Door team are available to help you through the process of writing your growth story and/or answer any questions you may have along the way. Please feel free to contact us at [info@holdthedor.com](mailto:info@holdthedor.com). You may also contact us if you would like your story added to the Hold The Door For Others website and possibly to future resources or publications related to Hold The Door For Others.

We would like you to know that by reading this chapter, you are already making steps towards recognizing the growth you have made through your loss and adversity. We hope that you do choose to write your story of growth to help you to realize the growth you have already made and the potential for future growth and to help others do the same.

## Where are you related to the Doorway?

(How ready are you to take a step forward?)

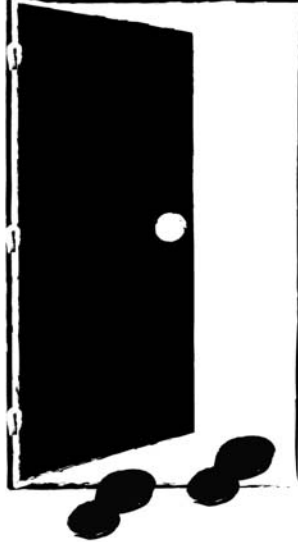
Outside (Not Ready)



Feelings:

Thoughts:

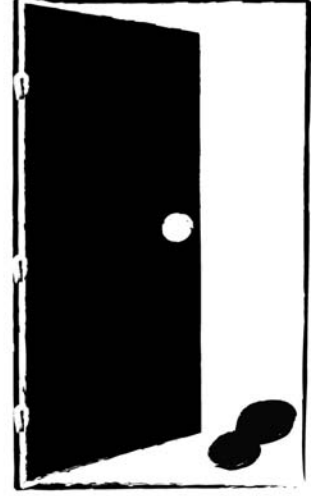
In (Maybe Ready)



Feelings:

Thoughts:

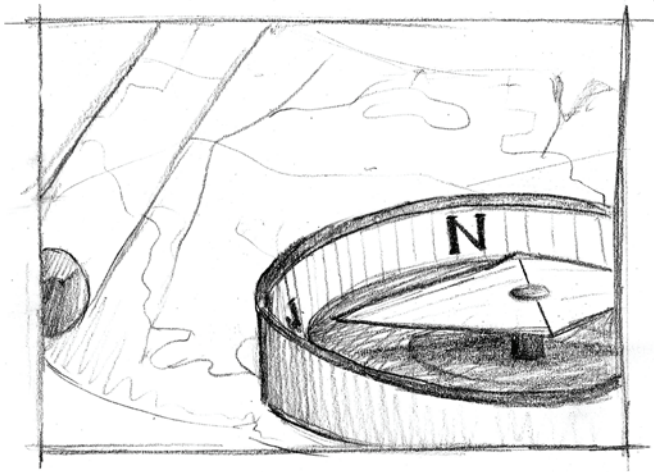
Through (Ready)



Feelings:

Thoughts:





## DOORWAY 10

# Preparing for Loss & Adversity

As you may already know our vision at Hold The Door For Others includes three integrated approaches to life Preparing for, Living with, and Growing through loss and adversity. All

three are essential in living a healthy life. This Doorway is about take steps to better prepare yourself for future adversity and loss.

A harsh reality that we often don't talk about is that the only certain thing in life is death. It sounds morbid, but it is an absolute truth. For some reason the American culture does not reinforce talking about death. But why? Death is a part of life and it is going to happen to all of us and everyone we love.

Once we accept that passing on is a part of our lives it is much easier to manage. It is well known that two factors that make losing a loved and managing adversity complicated are lack of preparation or the unexpectedness and not having the necessary resources to manage the through the process. By knowing that loss and adversity will be part of your life and developing personal and social resources such as outlined in the OTHERS(S) Model you will be better equipped to manage the challenging experience that loss and adversity bring with them.

Everyone responds different to loss and adversity to begin with. When people experience multiple losses and many experiences of adversity, they also respond in a variety of ways. Some people become more fragile with each loss or bout with adversity. Other people draw strength each time they face trauma, loss or crisis. The difference in the responses that people have are well they have developed their resources.

Let's take some time to think how you can prepare yourself for future loss and adversity. Refer to the previous pages where you charted your scores to answer the following questions.

1. Do you have any absolute strengths?
2. Are any of your absolute strengths a surprise to you? If so, which ones?

Pick one of your absolute strengths and write a few sentences about how it relates to who you are as a person:



3. Do you have any relative strengths? If so, what are they?

4. Do you have any areas of further growth? If so, what are they?

Pick one area of further of growth that you would like to develop:

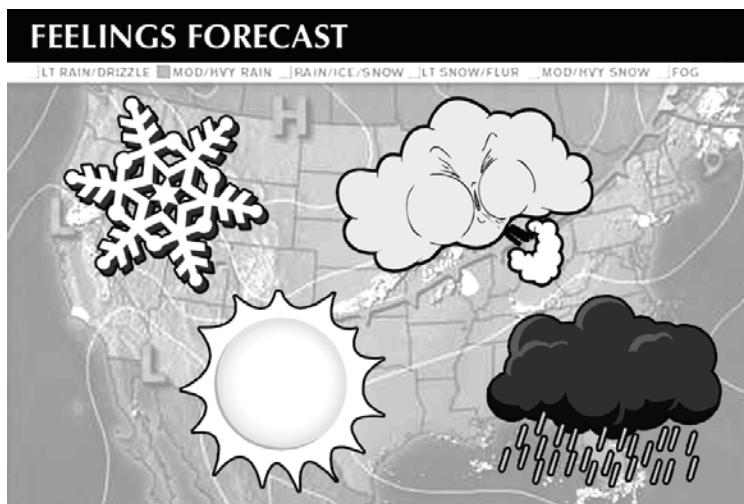
5. Why is it important to you to develop this resource?

6. Who do you know that displays this resource in a positive way on a consistent basis?

Schedule some time to talk with this person about how they can help you develop this resource for yourself.

7. What is your favorite OTHERS(S) resource? Spend some time thinking about how you can help someone you care about develop that resource.

Our Personal Growth Guide includes in depth activities and suggestions on how you can enhance every one of the resources in the OTHERS(S) model. Read through your results above and identify 1 to 2 resources that you want to further develop. If you do not have a copy of the Personal Growth Guide, you can download it for free on our website, [www.holdthEDOOR.com](http://www.holdthEDOOR.com), or you can email us and we will send you a hard copy, [info@holdthEDOOR.com](mailto:info@holdthEDOOR.com).



What am I feeling right now?

Why am I feeling this way?

What am I likely to feel tomorrow?

Why may I feel this way?

What is coming up that may trigger my emotions?

What can I do to prepare for challenging feelings to come?

## Practical Tips on Preparing For Loss

**Sensible hope:** When thinking about what the future has to hold, it is important to have *sensible hope*. This relates to having the understanding that challenging things can happen in this world and at the same time maintaining hope for a positive future. Another way to think about this is to be realistic, yet hopeful. We know that adversity is going to happen in our lives, and one way to better prepare is to have self-awareness and continue to enhance your personal and social resources associated with the OTHERS(S) Model. Consistent challenges to people are images that appear related to a traumatic event that they have experienced. The next section will provide you with some practical ways to manage your responses when witnessing images associated with a traumatic event.

**Have a plan:** Take the time to plan out how you are going to manage potentially challenging situations. It may be an anniversary, a certain social event or something else. Ben Franklin once said “an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of treatment.”

**Build your relationship muscles:** Always be thinking, “How can I expand my network of friends or colleagues?” The more people that are in our network, the more people that we have to call upon when the time comes. Building, maintaining, and deepening relationships also allows you to be in a place where you will have the opportunity to help others as well.

**Grow a little each day:** Make an effort to do one activity a day in our Personal Growth Guide (email [info@holdthEDOOR.com](mailto:info@holdthEDOOR.com) for a copy). The more areas that you grow in, the more prepared and able you will be to manage the challenges of life.

**Check your blind spots:** Have a consistent focus on enhancing your self-connect resource. This means consistently working on your self-understanding and knowing what your strengths and areas of growth are. Just like anything else in life, your strengths and areas of growth will evolve and go through changes. Keep up-to-date on who you are.

**Know your Grief Grabbers:** Previously I wrote about knowing what your *Grief Grabbers* are. These are your emotional triggers that connect you to your loss. It can be anything ranging from a scent to a scenario. Your emotional triggers have memory and can build up over time. It’s important to know what you’re *Grief Grabbers* are so you can practice some self-care exercises to lower your level of stress.

**Monitor your stress:** Keep track of when you are stressed and what may be the cause. It may be a good idea to keep a stress log. The more aware you are of what causes you stress and why, the better you will be able to manage future stress. We all have a certain limit for stress, but our limit can be increased and our levels of stress can be decreased. In other words you have the ability to not only lower your stress levels through some of the activities in this workbook and our Personal Growth Guide, but you can also increase your tolerance for stress.

## Helpful Hints on Managing Your Responses to Images and Media

If you don't know where you are or where you want to go you can end up somewhere you don't want to be. Having a plan can help guide you through a potentially challenging experience. Know that feelings and grief can grab you at any time. Although you cannot control if and when you will be exposed to movie trailers and media coverage of traumatic events, you can have a plan of how to manage your feelings and thoughts if you do see something that upsets you.

Any reaction that you have to an image is normal. Understand that feelings are your body's way of talking with you. The more aware you are of yourself and your feelings the better chance you will have of managing painful emotions and thoughts. Here are some ways that you can help yourself through the experience.

**Self-Connect (Self-Understand):** Understand what you are feeling and what you are thinking and why. You may experience a host of emotions that seem to come all at once. What's important is that you take time to understand yourself so you can address your needs and take steps toward decreasing any painful emotions and increasing positive thoughts and feelings. Again, know that whatever you are feeling is ok. It is important to be ok with your feelings and seek ways to manage them rather than avoid them. Below you will find some examples of how you can gain a deeper understanding of yourself and how certain experiences may affect you.

**Self-Care:** Once you gain an understanding of what you are feeling and why you can begin to take care of yourself. There are several pathways to care for yourself. Make attempts to learn strategies to recharge your emotional battery. Some people reach out and talk with loved ones they trust. Other people practice deep breathing, yoga, writing stories about their experience, imagery, or journal writing. Below you will find some examples of how to care for yourself.

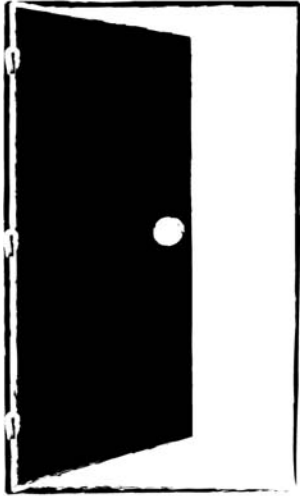
**Self-Challenge:** Based on your new platform of self-connection (understanding yourself) and self-care you can begin to challenge yourself to grow through the experience. You may not be ready to challenge yourself and that is ok as well. Once you feel ready we encourage you to take steps toward growing. This can include reaching out and helping others due to your experience or it can be as simple as writing down the things that you have learned from your experience. Growth and challenging yourself can happen at any time, even when you have experiences that are painful. The important aspect is that you try and try again. Below you will find some examples of how to care for yourself.

If you feel as if you are becoming overwhelmed by your feelings and thoughts it is best to seek the consult of a professional. Later in this workbook we have provided you with some professionals that you can contact.

## Where are you related to the Doorway?

(How ready are you to take a step forward?)

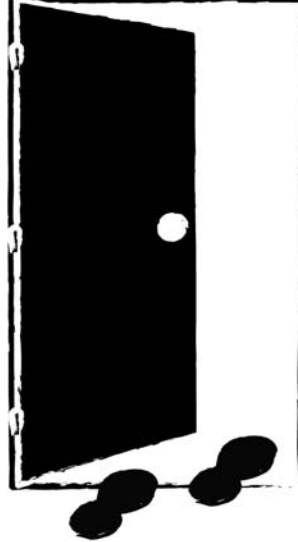
Outside (Not Ready)



Feelings:

Thoughts:

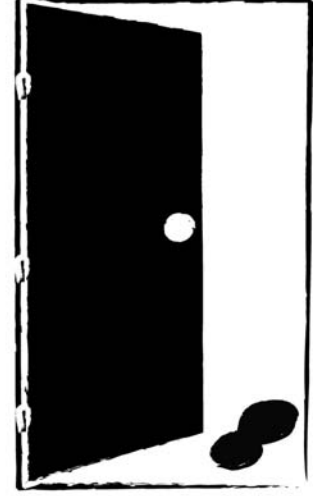
In (Maybe Ready)



Feelings:

Thoughts:

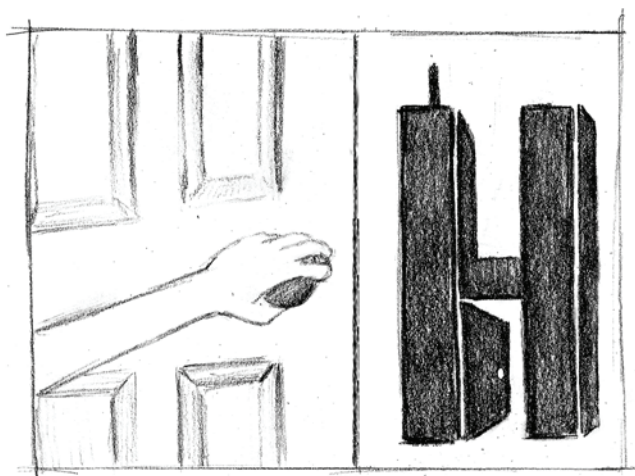
Through (Ready)



Feelings:

Thoughts:





## DOORWAY 11

# Hold The Door For Others

Living with the effects of trauma, loss, and adversity is not an easy task. If you are reading this right now you have traveled a journey that

has included learning about yourself and how your experience can serve as a catalyst to personal growth. Remember, everyone's journey has different paths and various time periods. As long as you are making an attempt to help yourself heal and grow, you are on the right path. It is perfectly normal to become frustrated, sad, angry, and want to give up. I want to continue to encourage you to keep challenging yourself.

A main philosophy of Hold The Door For Others is the concept of healing through helping OTHERS(S) Model. One way to keep the legacy alive of a loved one you have lost or growing as a result of adversity is through helping others. The insights that you have gained through living through your experience can be very helpful as others manage their challenging experience. Many people find comfort and strength in knowing that people have not only lived through extremely difficult experiences, but they have grown despite the experience. This is the driving force through the stories of growth.

I'd like to share with you some brief words about three people who have truly lived their lives consistently with the Hold The Door For Others philosophies. Every year at Hold The Door Day we award a person with the Dr. Micah McCreary Hold The Door Healer Award. The award is given to a special person who exemplifies, healing through helping others. Dr. McCreary has been a tremendous mentor to me and has taught me how to accept trauma and adversity, grow through the experience, and help others help themselves heal.

Two years ago the award was given to Christine Uscher, whose story of growth you may have already read earlier in this workbook. Ms. Uscher has an amazing story. She lost her beloved to cancer. As a result of her love and passion for her husband she has made major strides to open doorways for others. Ms. Uscher felt there was a need for people who are living with the effects of cancer. She created a better life for people with cancer and their families by setting up video equipment in a hospital. Her efforts added some comfort for people with cancer and their families. We are honored that Ms. Uscher was the first recipient of the award at Hold The Door Day.

The following year the award was presented to a woman who has dedicated her life to being there for others. Mrs. Irene Sheehan is a model citizen among model citizens. She and her family have dedicated countless hours to helping people in need throughout her community. Mrs. Sheehan has always been the first person to volunteer no matter the cause. We are honored to have Mrs. Sheehan be a big part of our spirit and inspiration.

I am very proud of you for making efforts to help yourself. I hope that you will continue to stay connected to us at Hold The Door For Others.

Welcome to our Family and I look forward to hearing from you and learning how you are Holding The Door For Others!



# Appendix A

## Deep Breathing and Imagery

I asked Doug Hirschhorn who is a motivation coach to provide us with some practical tips on how to perform some of our suggested strategies on recharging your emotional batteries. Here is what Doug had to offer.

### Circular Breathing

First, learn to listen and feel your normal breathing. Pay close attention to the sounds and feelings as the air moves into your lungs and then gently exhales as you naturally breathe. Take a few seconds to note your internal cycle. Good.

Next, focus on the air moving in your lungs and filling them completely. Taking a deep breath, feel them fill up but don't force it, just let it happen. Feel the air flowing into your lungs and then leaving your lungs as a continuous cycle such that as soon as you are done breathing in, you are completing the cycle by breathing out. While you do this, imagine that the air coming in is a refreshing clear, blue color and then as it leaves it changes to a smoky brown. Now go ahead and take several natural, deep breaths like this, each time imagining the color of the air changing from blue to brown.

Now take some of those deep breaths you have just learned. And as you fill your lungs up make sure that you keep your shoulders relaxed and chest steady. To do this you will need to breathe from your diaphragm (abdominal area). As you do this, keeping your chest as steady as possible, hold each breath for a brief moment and then exhale. Do this a couple of times until you can feel it become comfortable.

Now, as you continue to do your circular breathing, bring back that image of the entering clear blue air and exiting smoky brown air. Do you see it? Now think of the blue air as clean air, which is feeding your body and your mind, and the brown air as dirty air, which is removing your stress and anxiety. Let the brief pause in the breathing cycle represent that moment when the clean blue air is transformed into smoky brown, as relaxation is brought in and stress is removed. Continue this exchange for a minute or two.

Once you have removed the dirty brown air, go ahead and return to your resting, quiet breathing pattern that you discovered at the beginning of the exercise. Again, listen and feel the air gently flowing into and out of your lungs. Continue to do this for a minute or two.

You are about to end your circular breathing exercise but as you do, remind yourself of how refreshed, anxiety free, and positive you feel.

Take three deep breaths, filling your lungs while keeping your shoulders relaxed. As you do this, begin to feel energized and alert. To help you do this, you may want to add some of your positive self talk such as "I am relaxed, stress-free, and confident! I can do this. I am ready for the day."

### Muscle Relaxation

Before you can gain the full benefits of Muscle Relaxation, you will need to maintain a normal breathing pattern. To do this, you can simply go back to the first part of the Circular Breathing exercise and focus on your normal breathing pattern. When you are ready, you will begin a series of what is known as



“Tense-Hold-Relax” exercises progressing through the major muscles in your body. You will begin at one muscle area “Tense-Hold-Relax” and then move to another (adjacent) muscle area and repeat the exercise. From a physiological perspective, what happens is that after muscles are tensed, they are able to reach a higher level of relaxation once they are relaxed.

Basically what you are going to be doing is ‘forcing’ your muscles to relax. I will walk you through this process for the first couple (obviously not all) of the major muscles in your body but if afterwards, you decide to use Muscle Relaxation, you can certainly shorten or lengthen the exercise as you deem fit. Please keep in mind that you are **not to put yourself in pain at any time!** If you have a problem with one of the muscle groups we are going to cover, simply skip the TENSE part and just do the RELAX part. Now let’s get started.

1. Begin with your neck muscles and slowly bring your chin to your chest until you feel the muscle become TENSE. HOLD it there for a 3 seconds and then RELAX the muscle by raising your head back to its natural position. As you RELAX the muscles, feel the tension being released and then take a second to notice how different it feels compared to before you did the TENSE-HOLD-RELAX (T-H-R).

In order to get the maximum benefits, you should repeat each T-H-R twice. Of course, if that becomes tedious, once is always better than none! Now let us move on to the shoulders.

2. Slowly raise your shoulders up until you feel the tension. Hold it there for 3 seconds and then relax. Again, feel the tension drain out of the muscle as you relax it and notice how different it feels compared to before you did the T-H-R.

Now that you have the sense of what to do, below is a list of muscle groups to T-H-R. Again, feel free to make any changes you like but you may find that muscle relaxation works best if you do it in a logical order like the one I have outlined below.

3. T-H-R your right bicep muscle (curl your arm up to your shoulder)
4. T-H-R your right tricep muscle (extend your arm out fully)
5. T-H-R your right forearm (clench and make a fist)
6. T-H-R your right hand (extend and spread your fingers out)
7. T-H-R your left bicep muscle (curl your arm up to your shoulder)
8. T-H-R your left tricep muscle (extend your arm out fully)
9. T-H-R your left forearm (clench and make a fist)
10. T-H-R your left hand (extend and spread your fingers out as far as you can)

Now move to your Chest

11. T-H-R your chest muscles (bring both arms back as far as you can)

Now move to your abdominal muscles

12. T-H-R your abdominal muscles (tense stomach and bend your upper back downward)

Now move to the lower part of your body

13. T-H-R your buttocks muscles
14. T-H-R your right leg muscles (press foot to floor or extend your leg out)
15. T-H-R your right foot (curl your toes)
16. T-H-R your right toes (spread them apart as far as possible)
17. T-H-R your left leg muscles (press foot to floor or extend your leg out)

18. T-H-R your left foot (curl your toes)

19. T-H-R your left toes (spread them apart as far as possible)

Once this is complete, take a brief inventory of your entire body to see where you still have tension. If you missed a spot go ahead and do it now. If you still have tension in a spot then go back and T-H-R it again. Once you are tension free take a moment to identify this feeling of complete relaxation and then repeat a cue word or phrase to yourself that you can associate with this feeling. Some examples of this might be “relaxed and ready” or “calm and collected.” The point of bringing in these words is to train your body to return to this state of relaxation anytime you repeat them. With enough practice, you will be able to relax your entire body and reduce anxiety within seconds just by saying these simple words.

Adapted from the book: *The Trading Athlete: Winning the Mental Game of Online Trading* (John Wiley & Sons, August 2001).

## Visualization

Visualization, if done correctly, can be the most powerful mental tool a person can possess. In order for visualization to be a valued relaxation strategy, you need to start by identifying a previous or imaginary moment in time when you were (or will be) relaxed, confident, comfortable, and happy. Understandably this may be difficult for many of you to do because many of your happy memories may be linked to a loved one that was lost during September 11, 2001. For this reason you may choose to focus on a future or imaginary experience such as a dream vacation or the graduation of a loved one from school. What is important to understand is that visualization is a powerful tool and if you are going to use it as a relaxation strategy, it is essential that you focus on a positive image. To assist with this, you can incorporate looking at a painting or photograph to create an image for yourself. The process of visualization is only limited by your imagination and creativity.

Here is a sample of a visualization script that I created. I realize you may not be able to immediately identify with this example (after all it is mine), but I believe that after reading it, you will be able to get the idea of how powerful of a relaxation and anxiety reducing tool visualization can be.

A key to creating an effective visualization is to incorporate as many senses as possible (colors, smell, taste, touch, etc.).

### Visualization Script

You are on the beach with no one around. It's early in the afternoon and the sun is full and glowing. It's about 80 degrees out and there is not a cloud in the sky. There is a nice breeze off the shore, which you can feel blowing softly on your skin. The sound of water lapping against the shore as the waves roll in seems to fill you with this incredible sense of tranquility. You are sitting on a chair under the shade of a palm tree, coconuts hanging from above. You can hear birds singing in the trees in the distance as if to welcome you to their island. In the distance, you can see a sailboat moving across the emerald green ocean, just gliding along. You take a sip of your ice-cold beer and as it glides down to your stomach, cooling you off, you realize that you are totally relaxed.

Now how was that? Not bad huh? Could you *hear* the water landing on the shore? Did you *see* the coconuts hanging from the palm tree? Could you *feel* how cold the beer was as you drank it? Notice how in this visualization script I included as many sensations as possible to make the experience more real. I do not know about you but I am feeling pretty relaxed right about now.

Remember, when you are done visualizing, it is important to associate a cue word or phrase with the feeling you have. Some examples might be “Relaxed and Re-energized” or “Peaceful and Proud” or “Calm and Strong”. Again, just as with the other relaxation strategies that I have discussed, with enough practice, these words or phrases will allow you to return to that special moment of relaxation within a moments notice.

Adapted from the book: *“The Trading Athlete: Winning the Mental Game of Online Trading”* (John Wiley & Sons, August 2001).

# Appendix B

## Honoring Your Loved One

I asked Bridget Leonhardt and Joanna Strong to identify a variety of techniques to honor your loved ones. I know the tone of this book has been on developing your skills to deal with your grief. I am aware of the importance of honoring your loved ones as you continue to grieve and form your new identity and purpose. The following is a list of suggestions on how to keep the memory of your loved one alive.

1. Plant a tree/garden in your loved one's honor
2. Write about the person's life in the form of a diary or a letter to initially be read/seen personally with the hopes of sharing with others later on
3. Create a photo album of pictures with the person making captions under each picture so generations to come will be able to know the loved one as well. Make sure you use all acid free materials!
4. Do something special on each holiday to remember the person – lighting a candle, placing a special ornament on the tree in their honor
5. Have special religious services in their honor
6. Donate flowers in their name to your church, synagogue, or other important group
7. In religious services, donate flowers
8. Make endowments in the person's name to organizations (i.e., higher education) that the person was passionate about
9. Donate money or volunteer at the person's favorite charity
10. Keep special/favorite pictures in the house of the person
11. Go to or have support groups with people to honor and talk about your loved one
12. Write the person a letter telling them how you feel
13. Set a special time aside each day to think about the person
14. Carry on things/do things that that person was passionate about
15. Name a child after the person
16. Write a book about the person – a memoir
17. Donate/name an area of a public place after the person (i.e., a park, a bench in a park)

More structured activities:

1. Set aside a specific time each day to think about/do things related to that person
2. Write about a good holiday memory
3. Write about a fun trip you had with the person
4. Write about your best talk you ever had with the person
5. Write about the person's best qualities
6. Write about a joke or something that only you would know about the person
7. Encourage others to talk about the person – let them know it is okay to remember, bring up their name, and talk about him/her

# Appendix C

## Contact List for Mental Health Professionals

### Psychologists/Therapists in West Virginia:

1. **William P. Hall, M.A. (Licensed Psychologist)**
  - a. Trinity Family Services
  - b. 3761 Teays Valley Road – Hurricane, West Virginia 25526
  - c. (304)-760-0499
2. **William B. Webb, PhD, LICSW**
  - a. Oasis Behavioral Health Services, LLC
  - b. P.O. Box 219 – 689 Central Ave. – Barboursville, West Virginia 25504
  - c. (304)-733-3331
3. **Heidi Spencer, PhD, LICSW, BCD**
  - a. P.O. Box 3008 – Sheperdstown, West Virginia 25443
  - b. (304)-728-8059
4. **John F. McFadden, Psy.D. (Licensed Psychologist: WV #313)**
  - a. Behavioral Health Management Group, Inc.
    - i. Stress Management, Crisis Intervention, Individual Counseling
  - b. 1025 Main Street, Suite 708, Wheeling, West Virginia 26003
  - c. (304)-232-7232
5. **Patricia M. Bailey, PhD (Licensed Psychologist: WV #801)**
  - a. Bailey Behavioral Health, Inc.
    - i. Stress Management, Crisis Intervention, Individual Counseling
  - b. 30 Medical Park, Suite 231, Wheeling, West Virginia 26003
  - c. (304)-242-6988
6. **David R. Blum, Psy.D. (Licensed Psychologist: WV #464)**
  - a. Northwood Health Systems
  - b. 111 – 19<sup>th</sup> Street, Wheeling, West Virginia 26001
  - c. (304)-234-3500 x292
  - d. [www.northwoodhealth.com](http://www.northwoodhealth.com)

### Psychologists/Therapists in Louisiana:

1. **Adrian S. Elfant, PhD**
  - a. 1426 Amelia Street – New Orleans, Louisiana 70115
  - b. (504)-319-6800
2. **Robert C. Allanach, PhD**
  - a. 430 N. New Hampshire – Covington, Louisiana 70433
  - b. (985)-893-2570
  - c. [www.ysbworks.com](http://www.ysbworks.com)

- 3. Lisa S. Tahir, LCSW**
  - a. 8115 Hickory Street – New Orleans, Louisiana 70118
  - b. *(Second Office Location):* 2133 Silverside Drive – Suite E2 – Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70808
  - c. (504)-261-4443
  - d. [www.nolatherapy.com](http://www.nolatherapy.com)
- 4. Anne L. Morgan, LCSW**
  - a. 3500 Saint Charles Avenue – New Orleans, Louisiana 70115
  - b. (504)-895-6075
- 5. Bill Calkins, LCSW, BCD**
  - a. William Calkins & Associates
  - b. 730 Colonial Drive – Suite E – Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70806
  - c. (225)-927-6444
  - d. [www.billcalkins.net](http://www.billcalkins.net)
- 6. Walker E. Marsh Jr., PhD, LMFT**
  - a. North Shore Family Counseling, LLC
  - b. 85 Wisperwood Blvd – Suite 2C – Slidell, Louisiana 70458
  - c. (985)-661-0560
  - d. [www.northshorefc.net](http://www.northshorefc.net)
- 7. Jizette Heims, M.A., LPC, LMFT, NCC, C.A.M.F.**
  - a. All Things Therapeutic, LLC
  - b. 1201 Canal Blvd – Thibodaux, Louisiana 70301
  - c. (985)-447-7316
  - d. [www.allthingstherapeutic.com](http://www.allthingstherapeutic.com)
- 8. Christopher Le Blanc, PhD (Licensed Psychologist: 479)**
  - a. Southeast Louisiana Hospital
  - b. P.O. Box 3850 – Mandeville, LA 70470-3850
  - c. 985-626-6350
- 9. Leigh Anne B. Terrebonne, PhD (Licensed Psychologist: 855)**
  - a. 1426 Amelia Street – New Orleans, LA 70115
  - b. 504-864-0800
- 10. S. Webb Sentell, PhD, M.S.C.P. (Licensed Psychologist)**
  - a. 8504 Line Avenue – Shreveport, LA 71106
  - b. 318-868-2001
- 11. James P. Morgan, Jr., PhD (Licensed Psychologist: 500)**
  - a. 2250 East Gause Boulevard, Suite 310 – Slidell, LA 70461
  - b. 504-643-5154
- 12. Peter Clark, PhD (Licensed Psychologist: 571)**
  - a. Child, Adolescent & Family Psychology
  - b. 769 Robert Boulevard – Slidell, LA 70458
  - c. 985-643-4480

**13. Seth Kunen, PhD, Psy.D. (Licensed Psychologist: 523)**

- a. Earl K. Long Hospital
  - i. Group Psychotherapy
- b. 5825 Airline Hwy – Baton Rouge, LA 70805
- c. 1-225-358-3942

**14. Bryan C. Eckert, Psy.D. (Licensed Psychologist: 878)**

- a. Specialties:
  - i. Mood/Anxiety
  - ii. Family & Couples Therapy
- b. 7341 Jefferson Hwy., Suite I – Baton Rouge, LA 70806
- c. 225-927-7778

**15. Ivory L. Toldson, Ed.D. (Licensed Psychologist: 256)**

- a. Center for Psychological Health Care
- b. 861 Main Street – Baton Rouge 70802-5529
- c. 225-383-3013

**16. Paula Varnado-Sullivan, PhD (Licensed Psychologist: 821)**

- a. Family Therapy Clinic
- b. 7913 Wrenwood Blvd, Suite A – Baton Rouge, LA 70809
- c. 225-927-2455

**Psychologists in New Jersey:**

**1. Joe Luciani, PhD**

- a. 491 Closter Dock Road – Closter, NJ
- b. 201-767-9290
- c. <http://www.self-coaching.net/index.php>

**2. Helen J. Rosen, LCSW, PhD**

- a. 44 Cooper Street (Suite 209) Woodbury, NJ 08096
- b. 856-853-0222
- c. [www.buddhaonthecouch.com](http://www.buddhaonthecouch.com)

**3. Center for Family Guidance**

- a. 6 North Broad Street – Woodbury, NJ
- b. 856-251-0500

**4. Bruce Merhige, PhD**

- a. 1152 Cooper Street, Deptford, NJ
- b. 856-848-8668

**5. Jeffrey L. Bessey, PhD**

- a. Woodbury, NJ
- b. 856-848-5937

**6. Roger T. Barr, Ed.D.**

- a. 488 Glassboro Rd, Woodbury Heights, NJ
- b. 856-848-3279

7. **Alan S. Kagel, Ed.D.**
  - a. 800 Jessup Rd # 804, Thorofare, NJ
  - b. 856-845-7800
8. **Emil Soucar, Ed.D.**
  - a. 305 Lenape TRL, Wenonah, NJ
  - b. 856-468-7767
9. **Lawrence G. Mintzer, PhD**
  - a. 5581 Route 42, Turnersville, NJ
  - b. 856-228-8844
10. **Frank McManus, PhD**
  - a. 4150 Route 42 # 104, Blackwood, NJ
  - b. 856-629-9925
11. **Frances Baker, PhD**
  - a. Marriage and Family Resource Center
  - b. 455 State St, Blackwood, NJ
  - c. 856-262-0226
12. **Washington Psychological Services**
  - a. Greentree Rd. & Herit, Blackwood, NJ
  - b. 856-589-4147
13. **Psychological Wellness Associates**
  - a. Blackwood, NJ
  - b. 856-228-1836
14. **Kenneth Goldberg, PhD, Licensed Psychologist (2258)**
  - a. 15 East Centre Street – Woodbury, NJ 08096
  - b. 856-845-5955
15. **Howard Adelman, PhD**
  - a. 411 North Main Street, Glassboro, NJ
  - b. 856-863-1800
16. **Richard Sparacio, PhD**
  - a. 260 High Street East, Glassboro, NJ
  - b. 856-589-2889
17. **Michael Natale, PhD**
  - a. Glassboro, NJ
  - b. 856-881-8730
18. **Mark C. Cox, PhD**
  - a. 1043 North Main Street # B, Pitman, NJ
  - b. 856-582-0052



## **Psychologists in New York:**

### **1. Julie Jarvis, PhD, Licensed Psychologist**

- a. 345 Seventh Avenue, Suite 1602  
New York, NY 10001
- b. 212.946.1040
- c. Julie@drjuliej Jarvis.com

### **2. Maria Gonzales, Psy.D., Licensed Psychologist**

- a. 115 E 82nd St Ste 1A  
New York, NY 10028
- b. EastWest Psychology, PLLC
- c. (212) 579-7666
- d. <http://www.apapo.org/DrMariaGonzales/>

### **2. Robert Udewitz, PhD (Licensed Psychologist: 012108-1)**

- a. 114 East 90<sup>th</sup> Street, NY, NY
- b. 646-522-7795
- c. [www.behaviortherapyyny.com](http://www.behaviortherapyyny.com)

### **3. Robert M. Fraum, PhD (Licensed Psychologist: 005306)**

- a. Specialties:
  - i. Anxiety/Panic Attacks
  - ii. Grief/Loss
  - iii. Trauma Recovery
- b. 71 Park Avenue, Suite 1D – NY, NY 10016
- c. 212-213-6593
- d. [www.psychotherapyandcoaching.com](http://www.psychotherapyandcoaching.com)

### **4. Elissa Ganz, PhD (Licensed Psychologist: 015863)**

- a. Specialties:
  - i. Young Adults/Adolescents
  - ii. Anxiety Depression
  - iii. Career/Work Difficulties
  - iv. Trauma/PTSD
- b. 103 East 86<sup>th</sup> Street – NY, NY 10024
- c. 212-426-8851

### **5. Judith R. Malamud, PhD (Licensed Psychologist: 006359-1)**

- a. Specialties:
  - i. Grief & Loss
  - ii. Communication
  - iii. Inner Guidance
- b. 412 Avenue of the Americas, Suite 500 (between 8<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> Streets) – NY, NY 10011
- c. 718-398-2354

### **6. David Kelley, PhD (Licensed Psychologist: 4740)**

- a. Kenwood Psychological Services
  - i. Individual/Couple/Child Therapy
- b. 124 East 84<sup>th</sup> Street – NY, NY 10028

- c. 212-744-2121
- 7. Susan Ko, PhD (Licensed Psychologist: 015173)**
  - a. Specialties:
    - i. Children
    - ii. Couples/Family
    - iii. Young Adults
  - b. 2 West 86<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 502 – NY, NY
  - c. 212-252-6824
- 8. Elizabeth Kronk, Psy.D. (Licensed Psychologist: 014875)**
  - a. Specialties:
    - i. Family Therapy
    - ii. Child/Adolescent Psychology
  - b. 247 West 87<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 7F – NY, NY 10024
  - c. 212-721-0729
- 9. Joyce Nathan, PhD (Licensed Psychologist: 007060)**
  - a. Specialties:
    - i. Abandonment/Loss/Grief
    - ii. Stress Management
    - iii. Post-Traumatic Stress
    - iv. Depression/Anxiety
  - b. 303 North Street, Suite 304 – White Plains, NY 10605
  - c. 914-328-0797
- 10. Frances Magallanes Lafferty, Psy.D., M.H.A. (Licensed Psychologist: 015760)**
  - a. Specialties:
    - i. Bereavement
    - ii. Depression
    - iii. Stress
  - b. 104 Little Market Street – Poughkeepsie, NY 12601
  - c. 845-242-3999
  - d. [www.drfranlafferty.com](http://www.drfranlafferty.com)



**HOLD THE DOOR  
FOR OTHERS™**

PO Box 755, Closter, NJ 07624

1-888-314-DOOR(3667)

Info@HoldTheDoor.com

Hold The Door For Others™, Inc. is a nonprofit organization inspired by the acts of Ronald C. Fazio, Sr., who was last seen holding the door for his colleagues to escape the World Trade Center on September 11.

Hold The Door For Others™ is dedicated to empowering people to grow through loss and adversity and achieve their dreams.

The Hold The Door Team provides resources and hosts events for people regardless of how they lost a loved one or the adversity they face. You can stay connected to us and learn more about Hold The Door through our website.

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