

BECOMING A
HEALTHY
GRIEVER
FOR LIFE!

Grief is Inevitable, Despair is Not

A manual designed to encourage people to deal with grief and trauma in a way that lightens the load of past and present grief, while preparing to better handle future grief.

The Hope and Help Network

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PREFACE

by Chaplain Tony Tilford

“I don’t know where all this emotion is coming from, but I have to find out why.”

These words I spoke after I had a very strong reaction to words spoken by grief educator Dr. Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D. I was at a workshop/seminar on trauma and grief in May of 2004. I went there as a hospice chaplain expecting to learn some things to be able to share with others. What I received was a whole new direction in my life through an awakening to the deep grief I was carrying.

In the words of Dr. Wolfelt, this grief *“cries out for the attention it needs to be paid.”*

On this day, the cries were heard! Like never before.

In my case, it was the deep pain and grief surrounding the mental illness in my family. In particular, I had lost my sister, Mary, 11 years before to a depression-aided heart attack, after years of institutionalization following a nervous breakdown at age 18. On top of that, at the same time as the Seminar, another sister was living in a type of half-way house/mental health care facility not long removed from her decades-long journey through state psychiatric hospital stays.

When Dr. Wolfelt said, *“Isn’t mental illness like what might have been, but wasn’t?”* I felt an immediate deep stomach jerking, and tears rushed to my eyes. It was as if all the years of sadness over my two sisters’ sad lives presented themselves before my heart and mind in an instant. My body could not handle it.

I later learned to call my experience an *“emotional hijacking”* and understood that it was not in my rational control to stop it. What I needed to do was listen! This was an awakening to my need for what Dr. Wolfelt called *“Catch-up mourning”* – dealing with past grief and loss in the present that you did not deal with in a healthy way at the time of the experience.

This was the beginning of what I called my *Journey of Healing* and I started to do more and more *Catch-up mourning* relating to my sisters, but also surrounding the forgiveness issues I had with my father (deceased since 1977). Over the next months and years, I learned a lot, cried a lot, and grew a lot. I also began creating my own materials to use in workshops and services that I began to put on through the hospice I was involved with.

Having always found the use of acronyms a helpful way to learn, myself, I decided to put together the concepts of healthy grieving and incorporated the acronym G.R.I.E.V.E. into my teaching and material. (You will learn all about this in the following sections.)

Five years after that first seminar in 2004, Dr. Wolfelt returned to the area for another one. I was excited to attend the workshop and also present to him the poem “*What A Difference Five Years Makes*” where I sought to capture a little of the benefit his teaching had on my life.

I also shared with him the early stages of a manual I was putting together of both my original materials (worksheets and graphics, especially) and a sharing of what I learned from him and others in those five years of my *Journey of Healing*. That manual was approximately 29 pages.

The present form of that manual, which you have in your hands, is much larger (three times) and has come to include many more insights from others, especially in the area of trauma. As you will read in the Introduction, it is the work of three people, not just me. All of us have gone through significant grief-experiences and feel we have found our way to more healthy grieving. Our fondest hope is that this manual will help you find your way there, too.

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From the Authors' Hearts: An Introduction

Welcome to the manual you probably thought you would never read or need: one about how to grieve in a healthy way. You might be thinking “*Doesn't everybody know how to do that already?*” or, “*Don't we all learn to just 'get over it' and 'get on with life?'*” There was a time when we might have answered those questions with something like, “*Yeah, we just find a way to move on and move beyond.*” That was until we discovered that we apparently had *not* done a very good job of that with our own grief experiences in life!

After many years of encountering thousands of people ourselves and reading about countless others, we agree with those who say that we are a nation (world) in need of deep healing. So many people are affected, even crippled by their unhealed grief. Through our work with people seeking comfort from despair, *Healthy Grieving* was developed. It is designed to help us deal with unhealed grief. We suffer emotionally, physically, and spiritually when we don't address our deep feelings of grief and loss—whether from death, or any other types of grief, job loss, divorce, racism/prejudice, and so much more.

This manual is also designed to help people learn about what may be called *typical grief responses* and *traumatic grief responses*. These are important concepts that we have labored hard to make understandable. All three of us who have worked together developing this manual are survivors of traumatic grief and have applied the concepts in this manual first to our own lives before presenting them to the public. Our individual stories can be found in the *From Surviving to Thriving: LIFE! after Grief* section (p.68) if you are interested in reading them. We call them T.G.I.S. (Traumatic Grief Injury Survivor) stories.

Further, it is important for us to say upfront that nothing contained in here is necessarily a *new idea*, nor do we claim to have any deeper insights than those already working in the field. We see ourselves as *facilitators* as much as teachers. Our major purpose has been to take what we have learned from others and our own experiences and put that into a format that makes it easier for others to both comprehend and apply. That explains why there are so many acronyms found on the pages ahead!

The whole idea behind the manual's title, “*Becoming a Healthy Griever for LIFE!*” implies the idea of developing a lifelong *lifestyle* of grieving in a healthy way, with certain truths built into the fabric of one's heart and mind. Understandable and memorable concepts, along with sayings, are needed for that to take place.

We feel that it is important to note that *The Hope and Help Network* is a faith-based organization, in a particular religious tradition. However, it has been our express purpose to create a manual that can hopefully speak, at some level, to persons from all the different faith traditions, as well as to those who have no faith commitment. There are certain basic principles to what we call *healthy grieving* that we are convinced are universal, and beneficial, regardless of one's background or traditions.

However, we do recognize that there are many varied, and long-standing, practices of mourning and grieving in the world's many religions and cultures. We could not begin to cover all

of these, nor do we feel qualified to either properly represent them or evaluate their effectiveness.

While it will be clear to all who read this manual that it is most certainly *spiritually influenced*, we have sought to never appear preachy, or dogmatic. We certainly believe that spiritual realities—faith in God/Higher Power, spiritual disciplines, etc.—are foundational to gaining wholeness. This accounts for why there is such an emphasis on prayer throughout. But in addition to the definite spiritual focus, we have sought to have a kind of *alliance*, or even *alignment*, between spirituality and the best of modern science.

We recognize the need for, and great helpfulness of, an understanding of what is happening **in our** bodies when we have troubling life experiences. These experiences can be called STRESSORS, but in the end, they are all grief-producing. As you shall see going forward, our *wider* perspective on grief (more than just a loss of a loved one) leads us to the conclusion that you could almost state that grief = stress.

In our brain/body connection the two are essentially the same.

This is why we have included material on the stress-response system, and other scientific understandings—especially from the realm of neuroscience and the mental health field. Our discussions of these are elementary and introductory but are included because we feel they are essential to understanding our *selves*, and to becoming wise and understanding healthy grievers.

Many people have become familiar with the term *emotional intelligence*, and the great need for it. So too, we are convinced there is a need for greater, and deeper, *grief intelligence*; a concept that has come into use in the past years. The combination of education and application is our desired end for all who engage in this process.

In the broadest sense we see a movement toward healthy grieving as part of a larger awakening for our nation (world) surrounding the need for deep level healing from a multitude of abuses (emotional, physical, sexual, addictions, and over self-medication...), stressors, racism/prejudices, pandemic concerns, cancers, and so much more—ALL resulting in deep grief, pain, and more instances of traumatic grief than ever before.

We believe our Creator sees this and desires to bring peace, healing and wholeness, even as a great number of persons in the medical, mental health, and psychology fields seek the same.

The reality we are working in is that NOBODY has been uninjured by grief, and MANY are unaware that their grief injuries have been traumatic, creating many difficulties, emotionally, relationally, and physically. And sadly, FEW appear to be getting the help they need.

We are fully convinced that a movement toward healthy grieving can change this reality!

In the end, our hope, and prayer, has been to do the best we could with the knowledge and experience we have gained. And experience we do have, not only in working *with* many people over a number of years (decades), but just as importantly, in *our own* lives as people who have experienced grief, even traumatic grief, and who have survived, indeed, as those who have moved beyond just surviving, to thriving!

This manual was birthed as much to get out our stories/journeys, as it was to get the concepts out. This is not because we are somehow special or unique, on the contrary, is it because we are just like everybody else (you!). Therefore, the healing and growth and wholeness we have experienced is available to all who will be open to seek it.

It is our sincere desire and hope that every person who puts the effort into seeking to become a more healthy griever will discover, as we have, a richer and fuller life. We see true healing as going beyond just restoring or recovering what we had before, to experiencing life as never before. This idea is behind the section, “*From Surviving to Thriving—LIFE! after Grief.*”

Like all things in life, it is a journey. We invite you to join us on this journey.

We start that journey together by providing you with a *Grief Experience Survey*, to examine the losses in your life. Please complete this survey first before moving on to the underlying assumptions, the foundation upon which *healthy grieving* and other concepts are built in this manual.

Let the journey begin!

Seeking Greater Health and Healing with You,

Tony Tilford, Marian Stroup, and Pat Zeller



Grief Experience Survey

- Lost a pet (died or ran away, or other)
- Cut from a sports team.
- My parents divorced
- I divorced
- There is mental illness in my family.
- We moved constantly during my childhood.
- My Mom and/or Dad passed away.
- My brother and/or sister passed away.
- My child passed away.
- I was bullied in school and/or work.
- I was bullied at home.
- I lost a someone close due to the pandemic.
- I had a parent and/or close relative in prison.
- I was passed over for a promotion in my job.
- Sometimes I get emotionally hi-jacked with anger () or sadness ().
- Experienced a health challeng. (not Covid)
- My hope/goal was to become a _____ but it didn't happen.
- People I have been a caregiver for have passed away.
- A close friend passed away.
- A close friend moved away.
- I don't/can't trust people like I used to.
- I don't have a relationship with my child/children.
- I have regrets and if I could go back, I would do things differently.
- I had some precious things stolen from me.
- I suffered a miscarriage.
- I experienced racism in my job, or school.
- I suffered financial losses due to the pandemic.
- I was sexually harassed at my job.
- I lost a close relative (Grandparent, or Aunt/Uncle).
- Sometimes my memories feel like I am reliving them now.
- Suffered and still recovering from Covid.



Grief Experience Survey

- I lost a close friend and/or family member to suicide.
- I lived with a parent suffering with drug and/or alcohol addiction in my childhood.
- Wasn't picked to participate in a school activity.
- Missed final episode of my favorite show.
- I lost an expensive lawsuit.
- The person I admired most disappointed me greatly.
- I struggle with my faith.
- I am (it seems) unable to have a healthy personal relationship with anyone.
- I was humiliated at my job by a co-worker or boss.
- I was emotionally, and/or physically, or sexually abused by a close family member.
- I lost my family connection years ago due to my drug/alcohol addiction past.
- I am anxious about everything in my life.
- I constantly try to please people.
- I have a hard time forgetting my painful past.
- I missed the big lottery drawing by just one/two numbers.
- My child (children) are out of the house now (sadly).
- I have a heavy heart over painful experiences I have had.
- I have a heavy heart and I don't know why exactly.
- A fire (or other tragedy) ruined our home, lost special possessions.
- This survey was tough to do.
- I feel like I can't get ahead in my life.
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Section 1—Understanding Healthy Grieving

Poem: Everybody's Grieving Something

The 7 Assumptions Underlying Healthy Grieving

What it Means to Be a Healthy Griever — The 6 Healthy Grieving Tasks

Establishing Healthy Grieving Goals

Prayers for the Healthy Grieving Tasks

Everybody's Grieving Something

Everybody's grieving something.
Pushing it down is the way we've been trained.
Yes, everybody's grieving something,
something lost or something never gained

You might be surprised to find
how deeply hurt you've been in life,
there were things you thought you would surely receive
and people and things you never thought would leave.
Once in a while the tears come pouring,
from where and why we can't explain;
so we pass it off as just nostalgia
and don't identify the pain.

But everybody's grieving something.
Pushing it down is the way we've been trained.
Yes, everybody's grieving something,
something lost or something never gained.

by Chaplain Tony Tilford

The 7 Assumptions Underlying Healthy Grieving

The first task on the journey will be to identify for you the SEVEN major assumptions that provide the foundation for the concepts in this manual:

1. Grief is far more than just the loss of someone to death. A *wider* view of grief is needed.
2. Everybody grieves. Everybody has disappointments, trials, struggles, and losses in their lives (and will continue to have them!).
3. Our society, and many of our home environments, have not done a very good job preparing us to grieve those disappointments, trials, struggles, and losses in a healthy way.
4. Unhealed grief from disappointments, trials, struggles, and losses not dealt with in a healthy manner, will create problems in our lives.

Unhealed Grief

Unhealed grief will take its toll,
on the mind, the body and the soul.
So, do whatever you can to find
a way to regain your peace of mind,
or find a peace never known before
from a truth that reaches to your core,
bringing comfort to the pain you're feeling,
along with health and hope and healing.

by Chaplain Tony Tilford

The above poem was written to help people to see the role grief plays in their lives, and how unhealed grief can produce ill-health emotionally, mentally, physically, relationally, and spiritually.

It has been amazing to see how many people have come to realize that they did, in fact, have unhealed grief, but had never considered that their fears, lack of peace, times of sudden sadness, or difficulty in maintaining close, intimate relationships might be related to past or present experiences of grief. They were weighed down by grief but were not really aware of it.

Rare is the person, if they exist at all, who can confidently and realistically claim that they have *no* unhealed grief in their lives, or claim that they have *no* lingering sorrow, anger, guilt, regret or any other deep-seated emotion resulting from any of the trials, struggles, disappointments or losses they have had in their lives.

While losing a loved one may be the deepest and hardest experience of grief, it is only one of the many, many causes of grief in our lives. We all experience many different types of disappointments, trials, difficulties and losses in our lives. Some of us may experience these less, or less intensely than others, but it is grief, nonetheless. It is important to be open to see that.

There are many losses which occur in our lives. We could lose a job, a relationship, a home, or experience a traumatic episode in our lives which causes our grief. Furthermore, it is important to realize that while it is possible to have grief without trauma, you can't have trauma without grief. Dr. Bruce Perry tells us, "*Trauma is defined as an experience, or pattern of experiences, that impairs the proper functioning of the person's stress-response system, making it more reactive or sensitive.*" Trauma is a loss of power, safety, and control. You'll find more on trauma/traumatic grief in the upcoming section entitled "Understanding Trauma as Traumatic Grief Injury."

5. It is possible (and highly recommended) to take the time to look to our past, to the times of grief we have had, and to *catch-up* on the healing we may have missed *back then*.

Dr. Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D. renowned grief counselor, created the term: "CATCH-UP MOURNING." He said it is a process of "*going backward and giving attention to any grief you have carried from past losses in your life.*" The word *attention* is an important word in this whole process.

In the first place, Dr. Wolfelt explains, "*until grief is transformed, it will stay present, driving the person's life, trying to get the attention it needs.*" He goes on to say: "*It is by experiencing your feelings that you activate your capacity to be touched and changed by experiences you encounter along life's path.*" Additionally, he says, "*to integrate grief into your life requires that you are touched by what you experience.*"

Susan's Story—Her Tears Were Not for Princess Di

Susan was a staff developer at a facility that I (Tony) went into for my hospice work. I was talking with her about a *Balancing Life's Challenges* worship workshop that I was going to

be doing with her staff coming up. Grief concerns would also be part of the workshop. As we set up the details, Susan paused at one point and said, “*Chaplain, can I ask you a question? It’s a little more personal about something in my life.*”

She went on to tell me that she had been watching the funeral for Princess Diana (Di) on TV recently and found herself breaking down in deep crying. It confused her at the time because she really hadn’t followed Di much at all, and the news of her death had not really moved her.

I asked, “*Has there been any loss or death in your life in the past few years?*” “*Yes,*” she replied, “*My brother died three years ago and then my mother just passed last year.*” When I asked her if she felt she had healthily mourned and grieved their deaths, her face got very somber-looking and she said, “*I don’t think so. I don’t think I had really gotten through my brother’s passing and then my mother passed. It was so hard.*”

This led into to a serious conversation about complicated grief and how multiple losses in a short period of time can be so heavy on the heart and mind.

She acknowledged as well that her job responsibilities had probably interrupted or interfered with her proper grieving and mourning.

I then shared with her the idea that Dr. Wolfelt put forth about the grief that we carry in us (and need *catch-up mourning* for). This *carried* grief seeks to get the attention it did not receive before. We both agreed that the Princess Diana funeral was a trigger for her. Something deep and unhealed was seeking attention. It was clearer now that it was the deep losses she had experienced in such a short space of time.

Susan seemed relieved to have some insight into her “over-reaction” to the funeral, and she also made a commitment to pay her grief the attention it was asking for.

Author Stephen Levine explains: “*unattended sorrow narrows the path of our lives.*” As spiritual people, we believe God wants us to *expand our path in life*. When it comes to dealing with grief, the first step is to **start with the catching-up process**.

6. Once people recognize the benefits of doing *grief-work* (catch-up mourning, etc.), they are on the edge of an adventure and journey that can radically transform their lives, and the lives of those near and dear to them, as well.

There are many reasons to do *catch-up mourning* in our lives. Following is a list of some of the benefits that Dr. Wolfelt said would come to those who do catch-up mourning. It has to do with getting *more* of certain things in our lives. If you feel that you could use more of any of the

following in your life, then maybe it is time to consider paying *more* attention to the grief that you may be carrying.

MORE meaning and purpose in life
MORE energy
MORE feelings
MORE possibilities
MORE love, intimacy and connection
MORE faith and spirituality
MORE satisfaction and fulfillment

What do you think? Any of these seem beneficial or desirous to you? (Read them again.) Often, when people really begin to *see* their grief, and the way it is weighing them down, and/or robbing them of some, or all, of things on the list above, they become more open to doing what we call grief-work.

Grief-work is simply taking the time to *work at* (put time and effort into) trying to discover any unhealed grief in your life, identifying how that grief has affected you, and *then* doing certain tasks to help yourself become free of any kind of unhealthiness that has resulted. It is not an easy, do-it-in-a-day process. It is a journey through the often rough terrain of emotions and feelings. But it is well worth the effort!

A major goal is to *lighten the load* that grief puts upon the heart, mind, and whole being, and to gain a measure of peace in one's spirit and mind. We can also say that the goal is to become a *healthy griever*. Since we all have grief—past, present, and certainly future—learning to grieve in a *more* healthy way is surely a key to living the best life possible.

What we are saying is that it is possible that life can become *better than it ever was*. That is why we have included the section entitled “*From Surviving to Thriving*.” Many people have discovered that the life-long grief, or traumatic grief, they have been carrying has so affected their lives emotionally, mentally, physically, relationally, and even spiritually, that when they are released from it, a whole new world of possibility opens up before them.

Again, we do not just learn this, or do this overnight, but positive effects can be felt early and then increase as the healing progresses.

We would like to give here the fuller definition Dr. Wolfelt gave for *catch-up mourning*. It carries within it that sense of the possibility of a fuller life to be experienced.

“*Catch-up mourning is going backward and giving attention to any grief you have carried for past losses in your life, EVENTUALLY FREEING YOU TO GO FORWARD WITH NEWFOUND MEANING AND PURPOSE.*”
(Emphasis added).

7. Experiences of grief—disappointments, trials and losses—are inevitable and unavoidable, but despairing over them is not!

There seems to be an epidemic of despair in our nation, and in the world. First off, COVID has brought dire consequences to millions of people, and the long-term fallout will surely be painful, and absolutely grief-filled. But even before the pandemic, suicide rates were alarmingly high for all ages, and there were many other tragic incidents resulting from mental, emotional, or relational health issues. Today, these tragic incidents continue to increase as despairing people act out of their desperation – and grief – hurting others and themselves. The word *despair* itself is an Old French word that basically means “without hope.”

Unfortunately, many people who experience life’s disappointments, trials, and losses, cannot see a way out from under the weight of them, and they lose hope that they will ever be out from under it. This is one way to understand what we call *despair*.

It doesn’t have to be that way. We believe that becoming a healthy griever is a major step away from despair and will help us to deal with our grief when it inevitably enters our lives. And though it requires effort on our part to find and work on those places where we may be stuck on our journey of healing, it also frees us to find or make some meaning out of the losses we experience.

Finding some meaning in our grief experiences is an important way to keep from falling into *despair*. As David Kessler, noted grief expert and author, said in his article, *Finding Meaning in Loss*,

“Grief is extremely powerful. It’s easy to get stuck in your pain and remain bitter, angry, or depressed. Grief grabs your heart and doesn’t seem to let go. But if you can manage to find meaning in even the most senseless loss, you can do more than get unstuck. When circumstances are at their worst, you can find your best. You can keep growing and finding ways to live a good and someday even a joyous life, one enriched by the lessons and love of the person who has died.”
(March/Apr 2020, psychotherapynetworker.org)

We would add that Kessler’s words apply to whatever type of loss you have experienced. And by the way, finding meaning in your loss doesn’t mean that you have to be fine, or even okay, with what happened. It simply means that you have found a way to transform some aspect of the pain of your loss into something that has significance for you. Our ability to make meaning from our loss can help us heal.

And the meaning we make will be as individualized as the people who experience the loss. It can take so many forms: a lesson we have learned; a new appreciation of what is good in our lives; a deeper understanding of human nature; a way to commemorate the loss in a meaningful way (contributions to charity, volunteer work, planting a garden, and so on); a slight

(or major) change in the direction of our lives; the deepening of compassion for our fellow human beings on our shared journey in life; gratitude for the presence of that relationship or position for the time that we had it; and on and on. Here is an example:

Ike's Story

One day on my rounds as a hospital chaplain, I (Pat) crossed paths with a patient named Ike. He remarked that being in the hospital can give a person a lot of time to think, to remember, to take stock. What he was remembering, he told me, was when he worked at the hospital, when it was being built.

Ike worked construction. In his younger days, as a man with a young family, he and his wife faced every parent's nightmare: their baby, otherwise apparently healthy, had suddenly died. He was away on a job, and by the time he got back, the baby's body had been moved to the hospital morgue, which is where he went to view his child.

A short time after this tragic death, the company Ike worked for got the construction contract to handle the hospital expansion. When Ike reported for work at the beginning of the job, his boss was putting together crews to work on various aspects of the job, and the guys were volunteering for the things that appealed to them. When the boss announced that he was taking names for the people to work on building the new morgue, not a hand was raised. No one, unsurprisingly in our death-averse culture, wanted anything to do with going to work every day, building a morgue.

But Ike thought about it, and slowly put his hand in the air. He became the foreman, and some of his work buddies, who knew about his loss, also signed up. Ike's reasoning for his choice was this: in the most painful time in people's lives, when a loved one has died, and they need to visit the morgue, it should be a place that is as well constructed as it can be, that affirms the dignity of everyone in there, of everyone who must visit there, of everyone who works there. Ike could help to construct a place that would do just that. Ike poured the care he could no longer give his child, and the concern and empathy he felt for everyone else who would stand in the place that Ike once stood in, into that construction job. He said he did it to honor his child.

Ike took the grief he felt and used its energy to make things a little better for the people who would have to walk the same path he and his wife had walked. He said it helped him come to terms with the loss, and to heal. Ike found a way to make meaning, in his life, of the loss he had experienced.

However we choose to do it, making meaning of our losses helps to restore hope, which allows us to move forward with our lives.

We must always be mindful of moving forward. That is one of the main reasons we have

put this manual together. By learning to be *healthy* griever everyone can not only deal with/heal past or even present griefs, but also be ready to meet future (unavoidable) griefs head on. Healthy grieving, therefore, is about being both CURATIVE and PREVENTATIVE.

It is a matter of putting the effort into *learning* and then *applying*.

Maybe you are thinking that much, or at least some, of what has been said so far applies to your life. Perhaps you're thinking to yourself: "*Maybe I have viewed grief too narrowly; maybe I have been affected by my unhealed grief, maybe I have some catch-up mourning to do, maybe I need to roll up my sleeves and do some grief-work!*"

If so, then the adventure and journey is just ahead of you.

Another word of encouragement and challenge. When asked about working with their past grief, many people (maybe yourself?) are fond of saying: "*I don't want to live in the past, it only saddens me and holds me back from living for today and my future.*" That *might* be a sound philosophy of life *if* we have not discovered that something else is going on inside all of us. It is captured by this next phrase:

**YOU MAY NOT WANT TO LIVE IN THE PAST,
BUT NEVER FORGET THAT YOUR PAST LIVES IN YOU!**

So, as we have already said, by doing grief-work we can bring healing to our past griefs, removing the weight/heaviness they placed on our hearts, minds, and bodies. It is all ahead of you in this manual. Before we introduce you to the Healthy Grieving tasks, we want to share with you another story: a story of someone who used this manual to become a more healthy griever.

Ralph's Story

... as my hands strummed over the simple chords that I (Tony, chaplain and ACOA: Adult Child Of Alcoholics) had put together to match the words I was singing, I could see Ralph sitting in the front pew. He was very attentive, and obviously being moved. Soon tears began to fall from his eyes as I reached the chorus of the song, a song intended to be from the heart of God to whoever was listening.

"I can heal you. I can heal you. If you open up your heart."

After the service, Ralph came up to me and asked if we could get together. He knew I had been involved with putting together a manual about learning to grieve in a healthier way. He went on to tell me that he had struggled with alcohol over time, leading to involvement

with AA and working the 12 Steps. Presently he was having a tough time in life.

As I gave him an extra manual that I had in the car, I told him how I very much wanted the worksheets and other materials in the manual to be used as a kind of supplement (or complement) to the 4th Step. I encouraged him to do a “searching and fearless” *grief* inventory, and then we would sit and go over it together (like the 5th Step process). He liked the idea and went off to do his inventory.

The next week we met together at his favorite local restaurant for breakfast, where he felt comfortable sharing with me the results of his doing the *Sorrow, Anger, and Guilt Worksheet*, and the follow up section found in the manual. I was impressed at how seriously he had engaged in the process. We would meet one more time to look at some of the written prayers contained in the manual on “anger” and “bitterness” and other places we can find ourselves stuck at in life.

Ralph was very appreciative of what we did together, so I asked if he would send me a little testimony of his experience and could I have his permission to share it with others. He eagerly agreed, saying “*Any way I can help others I want to do it.*” This is what he sent me:

Pastor Tony, it's Ralph.

I just want to take a moment to tell you what an incredible blessing your packet on grieving has been to me and my life. I was brought up in a manner that did not teach me healthy grieving, and so when I have to depart from people, or they depart from me, and I suffer loss I did not know how to handle it; for years it devastated my life when I was divorced from my wife.

I would always get stuck you know with my drinking and drugs and history. I would get stuck in the anger part of the grief process and hurt myself through drinking and drugging for years.

Your teaching and your packet were an epiphany for me to help me realize what I was doing to myself and how I was not honoring God and I was never getting to the resolution part of the grief and loss issue. So, I just want to say thank you, thank you, thank you, and I would encourage everyone and anyone who needs some help in this area of their life to check out your packet, pastor Tony. God bless you and thank you very much.

Ralph was the first person with whom I used the manual and the worksheets as a kind of 4th Step/5th Step process, but he was not the first person that I sat for and listened to their 4th Step. In the Big Book of AA, it is suggested that a “clergy person” might be a good person to have listen to your 4th step inventory.

Over the years a few people have asked me if I would be their 5th Step person. Sometimes, they were already aware that I was an ACOA (Adult Child of Alcoholics) and had struggled myself with addictive substances in my early years, starting with huffing glue and stealing my dad’s Ballantine beers out of the back fridge at age 11. Perhaps it made them feel that I would understand them better, I am not sure.

Some also knew that I considered myself to be “in recovery,” not from alcohol or drugs, but from *perfectionism*—something that ACOA’s, alcoholics and other addictive personalities often struggle with. In relation to this perfectionist recovery, back in the 1990’s I had been helped with doing a 4th Step for myself by my friend and pastoral colleague, Martin Rolfs-Massaglia. After listening to me share my list, he looked at me and said, “*I think you need to do some grief-work.*” He was right, but at the time I did not realize how right he was, and I did not yet understand the problem of carrying unhealed grief! So, I did not do the grief-work at that time. It would be almost a decade later before I would begin to do that in earnest. (That is another one of the stories found in this manual.)

Other opportunities to share with persons in recovery have crossed my path. Each time I am made more aware of how important this grief-work is, and sadly, how few have really taken the time to do it—just like I did not take the time back with Martin.

A few years ago, I was invited by a friend of mine to share the healthy grieving material with a group of people at a well-known recovery center. He worked on a floor where everyone had been a *repeat attender* at many rehabs over time. I shared the concept of healthy grieving with them one Friday evening and gave them some worksheets to fill out to come back the next Friday, if they so desired.

The next Friday, ten of the first week’s fifteen came back, with two more who had come onto the floor that week; so, there were twelve in all. There was an incredibly powerful time of sharing, about sorrow, anger, guilt and more. Many saw clearly how their deep experiences of grief—whether from their own actions, or the actions of others toward them--were a cause of great pain within them, and that their addiction was as much a self-medicating mechanism as anything else. I was not surprised by this.

However, what did surprise me was how many said afterwards:

No one had ever really directed them to look carefully and searchingly at their grief.

So much focus had been on correcting what they had done wrong. They were grateful for the sessions we had. These experiences with Ralph, the recovery center persons, and others who have used the *Becoming a Healthy Griever* manual with me, have led me to desire even more to encourage those already in recovery to use this manual in their 4th Step process.

What It Means to Be a Healthy Griever

If they are honest, all counselors, therapists, and even writers of manuals on grief will agree that there is no magic formula, no one size fits all, no single manual or workbook to rule them/heal them all. And close observations of manuals and workbooks reveal some similarities between concepts, along with acknowledgement of the contributions of others to the field.

The manual in your hands has both some unique concepts and, as you have already seen with the use of Dr. Wolfelt's helpful material, contributions from the work of others. Probably what is most *unique* or *different* about the concepts herein is the use of acronyms to try to make the material more understandable and memorable. The goal is to have you build these ideas into the very fabric of how you think about and respond to grief, and to life, in the future.

One last note before introducing the healthy griever acronym—it is not intended to be a series of stages that one goes through, from G to E, so to speak. Rather, all together they are *tasks* that you can integrate into your grieving process at some point or another. The great hope is that you will *carry* this information with you as you head into the future, allowing you to meet the inevitable trials, disappointments and losses that come your way in a new and healthy way.

Let's begin. We suggest you read through each *task*, listed on the next page, and then reread it right away.

The 6 Healthy Grieving Tasks

To be a healthy griever is to:

Give to yourself.

Give yourself time to heal and recover hope. Give time to integrate the grief into your life and grow with it. Do not listen to those who say: “*Just get over it,*” or “*You ought to be beyond that by now.*” Everyone heals at a different pace. Go slowly, but deliberately. You may want to think about giving of yourself to others if you can; it can help *you* heal. This can also help guard against isolation.

Recieve from others.

Let others be there for you. Do not turn them away. Do not be too self-reliant and independent. This is a time when you could use some companionship. If someone is reaching out, they may know a little about what you are feeling. Give them a chance.

Invoke others to journey with you.

Ask for help, especially from sympathetic family and friends. If spiritual things are important to you, keep the dialogue going with God/Higher Power (or start one if you have never had one!) It is okay to ask “why?” and to seek a greater understanding of what happened. Prayer is more than just asking for things, it is a conversation. (See the many prayers on the next pages.)

Be open to a support group of some kind. Many people have been greatly helped by joining one.

Examine your life.

Look to your past and present grief experiences and your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, using some method of analyzing them. This can begin by carefully going over the upcoming section on *trauma* to see whether your grief experience is typical or more complicated, and therefore possibly traumatic grief.

Following that, you will find the “*Learning How Not to SAG Beneath the Weight of Grief*” section, with its “*Identifying My Sorrow, Anger and Guilt Worksheet.*”

Take some time to work on it! It can help you to learn where your heaviness and sadness may be coming from, and what triggers your emotions. After the *SAG* material, there is the *Journey of Healing* section; it is another way of examining what is going on inside your emotions and feelings. There are additional self-examination materials in Section 4.

Value yourself.

There is a love of/for oneself that is healthy and a key to opening the door to being loved by others. To have thoughts of worthlessness and inappropriate shame can be very unhealthy and hinder healing. You value yourself by caring for yourself, and one way to do that is by doing the grief work that will help you grieve in healthier ways.

Expect that you will have good days and bad days.

There will be times when some trigger (a smell, song, picture, etc.) will cause an emotional response, bringing you down, often quite unexpectedly and quickly. Remember, it is a long (life-long!) journey. Be patient. Go slowly.

It is obvious that each person reading this manual is at a unique and different place in their journey in life, and of course, in their grieving over anything in their lives. Therefore, some suggestions in the manual might be “*perfect timing, just what I needed*” for some, but “*I’m not sure I really need this now*” for others, or even, “*I don’t think I’ll ever need that*” to some others.

Each person should consider where they are and what is needed for their situation. This section here was intended to introduce you to the healthy grieving tasks, and to give *insight* into them. But insight alone is rarely enough to have something become of practical value and help to our lives. For that, there needs to be some form of application of the insights to our particular and individual lives. In short, to start *doing the grief-work*.

THAT is exactly what the rest of this manual seeks to help you be able to do.

Establishing Healthy Grieving Goals

One way to build these healthy grieving tasks into your life is to choose right now to turn one or more into goals that you will seek to reach and keep. Habits can form from goals. Make sure they are practical and realistic goals. Below is a worksheet with some examples/suggestions provided and some blank space for your goal. Remember, you can always ask someone to assist you.

Either after setting your goals, or before, you may want to look at the prayers on the next page. They could help in setting, and keeping, your goal(s), if spiritual things are important to you.

Give to myself. (I am going to let myself heal slowly and healthily.)

(I am going away for a few days on _____ to relax.)

Recieve from others. (I am going to respond to _____ and say “Yes.”)

(I will use the prayers provided to seek God’s help in my healing.)

Invite others to journey with me. (I will ask _____

to sit with me and let me share what is going on inside of me.)

(I will look for a support group that is dealing with what I am dealing with.) (I will pray.)

Examine my life. (I will circle *my* emotions on the “Journey of Healing Road.”)

(I will do the worksheet in the *SAG* section.)

Value myself. (I will do something special for myself, like going to _____, watching _____, or resting.)

Expect good and bad days. (I will allow myself to be emotional.)

Prayers for the Healthy Grieving Tasks

[According to your tradition and practice, please fill in the opening and closing.]

Give to myself [_____]

“I know I have had a difficult time giving to myself. I have not always taken the time I need. I need to heal and have my hope restored. I need Your help. Teach me how to trust that You will be with me.” [_____]

Receive from others [_____]

“It has been hard, you know, to receive from others. I have been very independent. I know others just want to help. I appreciate that. Teach me how to open up and let others give to me. Help me to let You give to me, also. Forgive me when I have been too self-sufficient when You wanted to provide for me.” [_____]

Invite others to journey with me [_____]

“You know how hard it is for me to ask people to be involved in my life, especially now, when it hurts to think about what happened. Help me to step out and invite them to journey with me, particularly those who have gone through experiences similar to mine. Show me how to choose wisely. Be with me as I go through this.” [_____]

Examine my life [_____]

“Give me patience and courage to look carefully at my life; to examine my present and my past. Help me to be open to forgiving others who have hurt me, and to ask forgiveness of those I have hurt. Show me how to forgive myself if needed. Lead me to discover any deeply-held feelings of anger, anxiety, fear or any other emotion that may be blocking my healing.” [_____]

Value myself [_____]

“I have not always valued myself as I should. For various reasons, I have not always loved myself in a healthy way. Help me to properly honor myself, especially now when I am trying to heal from my grief. Show me how much You love and value me.” [_____]

Expect good and bad days [_____]

“There are so many things that trigger my emotions. Help me to handle those unexpected, often sudden, experiences of sad memories. Give me patience to take it all as it comes.” [_____]

Section 2—Doing Grief-Work: Examining Our Injuries

Feeling Your Feelings

The Body's Stress-Response System in a Nutshell

Lessons from a Pinball Machine

Understanding Trauma as *Traumatic Grief Injury (TGI)*

Identifying Traumatic Grief—Taking a Look at Your Injury

Learning Not to **SAG** (Sorrow, Anger, Guilt) Beneath the Weight
of Grief

Journey of Healing Road — Understanding Emotional Responses
to Grief

Prayers for Help and Healing for the Emotional Responses

From Surviving to Thriving: LIFE! *after* Grief

Traumatic Grief Injury Survivor (T.G.I.S) Stories of Authors

Feeling Our Feelings

Let's take a moment to talk about feelings. Does the phrase "Feel your feelings!" perplex you? You are not alone! For some of us, when we hear that phrase, we come up empty. "*What does that even mean?*" we wonder.

If you are not sure if this applies to you, think back to your childhood. Did you typically hear things like: "*Stop that crying or I'll give you something to cry about!*" or "*You're too sensitive!*" If so, you may have learned, as so many of us did, to stuff those feelings down. We realized that if we allowed those feelings to surface in any observable way, we would soon be in an even worse position with Mom or Dad or whoever was scolding us for having a natural reaction: feeling our feelings.

The easiest way for us to deal with the challenge of having a feeling but not being allowed to express it was to stop acknowledging, even to ourselves, that we were even feeling anything. We sort of froze them out, especially the kind of feelings that were unwelcome in our family of origin, often the heavier, unpleasant feelings, like anger or sadness. And guess what? Stuffing our feelings, freezing them out, was a coping mechanism, and it probably helped us as kids. But it isn't helping anymore, and we can let that go, and get in touch with our feelings.

If we actually let ourselves feel them, we can use our feelings as signals that there is something wrong or amiss, and we can then attend to it, and choose our responses to best resolve the situation.

In the normal course of things, feelings arise, and when felt, pass through us, and are over and done with, kind of like clouds that float by. (Granted, grief itself isn't just a cloud floating by, it is its own storm season. Here, we are talking about various feelings, often the heavy ones, that are experienced in everyday life, and may well be components of a person's grief experience.)

Some people worry that if they allow a heavy feeling to be felt, they will get stuck in it. It actually seems that the opposite is true: it is the feelings that we feel just the edge of, and then push away, that actually keep us stuck. It's like a feeling keeps knocking at our door, and we won't let it have its day, and be on its way.

If you have any doubts about this at all, consider, as therapist Tina Gilbertson observes, that we don't ever worry about getting stuck in a positive feeling! No one says, "*If I let myself feel elated over this job offer/new relationship/ adorable puppy now living at my house, I will be stuck in elation for the rest of my life!*" We know from experience that happy feelings come, and eventually go, too.

If you think you have some heavy feelings (sadness, anger, guilt, fear, shame, etc.) and you are afraid they will overwhelm you, (or believe they are already overwhelming you), we urge you to *Value Yourself* and *Invite* someone that you trust has wisdom in this area, possibly a trained counselor, to help you process them.

In the meantime, to feel a feeling, try to get a little time to yourself, and sit quietly. Consider briefly a troubling or puzzling situation and how it has made you feel. Call the feeling by its name: anger, shame, sadness, humiliation, fear, and so on. (There are many lists of feelings

available online, if you need a little help identifying it.) Now try to just feel any physical sensations anywhere in your body, as you try to let this feeling arise.

This is not the time to analyze the situation further, or keep re-living it, or criticize yourself in any way for feeling the way you do, or for not saying the right thing in the moment. These actions may have their place in understanding what happened, and what you could do instead if you ever face this situation again, but for now, they are just distractions. (Probably welcome distractions! Because we really don't want to feel those feelings! We would much prefer to analyze or feel self-righteous!) But try to stay focused, and just feel whatever sensations you feel.

Be kind to yourself here, as you would to a friend who was going through something. You will probably be inclined to resist feeling a negative feeling, because they are unpleasant and because you may have been brought up to NOT feel it, but stay with those physical sensations as best you can. A tightness here? A churning there? A heaviness somewhere else? Perhaps a more rapid breathing rate? Take note of how this emotion feels, physically, inside you.

And then, notice if there is anything beyond or beneath what you are feeling. For example, it is said that anger is pain's bodyguard. So, beneath anger there is often some hurt, or sadness, or fear. Hmm. What might be going on there for you?

Consider, too, if you are truly resistant to fully feeling a particular feeling, or dealing with a particular situation, that there might be some reason, some benefit to you to keep the situation as it is. Sometimes folks *choose* (without really thinking about it) to stay in an emotionally difficult place because it feels familiar to them. Feeling angry, or sad, (or whatever) is what they are accustomed to. Change may seem harder or worse than keeping things as they are. And addressing the root cause can seem daunting. Or, resolving the situation may take them out of their comfort zone. Or perhaps they are actually getting some attention for feeling/behaving that way, and they like the attention, even if the net effect in their life, and others' lives, is a negative one.

Refusing to feel an emotion or parking oneself in an emotion are really two sides to the same coin of not dealing as optimally with emotions as we could. In a way, recognizing and acknowledging this is good news, though, because it means that improvement is possible, and life can get better.

When we actually feel our emotions appropriately, they can be signposts as to what is really important in our lives, and we can then act accordingly, to protect or shore up important relationships, to consider our long-range goals, to keep us from going off track. Getting better at feeling our feelings can tip us off about what we are feeling, before we ignore something we really need to deal with, or react in unhelpful ways, flying off the handle when we didn't even realize we were upset—that emotional hi-jacking we talk about in this manual.

So, we urge you to cultivate this skill of feeling your feelings. It will help you out throughout your life. And you will find that when an emotion gets to deliver its message, *and you deal with the issue*, it doesn't hang around for long. There are many worksheets and assessments in this manual that are designed to help you identify your feelings/emotions.

So, go ahead and feel those feelings!

Story: Coming to Terms with Feelings

As a staff chaplain at a hospital (doing my Clinical Pastoral Education), our primary tasks were to greet newly admitted patients, to see if they had any spiritual concerns, and to try to get them to engage with their feelings. And so, one day I (Pat) wandered into the room of a woman who was on my visitation list and introduced myself. She seemed interested in talking, and yet, hesitant.

She soon explained, “I never talked to anyone about this before. I need to talk to a woman.” I assured her that there were other female chaplains on staff, if she wasn’t quite ready to talk, but she said, “No, I need to talk, and I think I need to do it now, with you.” Clearly this was something that had been bottled up inside her for some time. I sat down and she began.

“I was just 12 or 13, but physically, I developed early, and looked much older than my years. Our youth pastor at church took an interest in me and asked my parents if he could take me out on a date. I didn’t want to go, but my parents insisted that it would be fine, because he was a pastor, and they didn’t want to insult him. I wasn’t even interested in boys yet; I was still playing with dolls! But off we went.” She began to cry, then to sob.

What eventually ensued that night was not a rape, but was most certainly a sexual assault. She tried to push him away. She reiterated her age (which he already knew.) It was not the only time she had to endure a sexual assault from her youth pastor, as similar dates followed, until she convinced her parents to let her decline any further dates. She never told her parents what was happening, sensing that they would either blame her, or not believe her, and either way, she would be worse off. The youth pastor eventually left the church.

Time went on, she grew up, married and had children of her own. She wouldn’t let them go to church. “I taught them about God, and how much God loves us, about Jesus, and about the Bible. I taught them to pray and taught them hymns. But I was too afraid to let them go to church.” A family member fought with her about the children not going to church, said she was a terrible mother, and that she would be going to Hell for not taking her children to church.

I gave her a different theological perspective, of course, and we talked about her *feelings*, her *anger* at her parents, and at the youth pastor, her *confusion* as to whether she was in any way to blame for what happened with the youth pastor, her *sadness* at losing her innocence, and her continuing *inability to trust* clergy, thus her palpable discomfort with church and worship experiences, her *fears* for her children when they were young and vulnerable, and the *inappropriate guilt* that her family member had laid on her for raising them the way she did. And naturally, we prayed about all of it.

The next day I went back to check on her. I found her smiling. “I feel as light as a feather! Like such a huge burden has been lifted from me!” She told me that her children (now adults) came to visit her after our chat, and she opened up to them and shared her story. They were understanding and supportive, and of course, angry that [their mom](#) had had to experience such things. She was even considering looking for a church to attend, one with a woman pastor on staff. In our Healthy Grieving language, she *Examined her life, Invited*

others to journey with her, *she felt her feelings, and was dealing with the issues*, and she was now *Receiving from others*. And whether she realized it or not, in doing all of this, she was *Valuing herself*. Clearing out all those feelings had made room for hope, and a way forward.

The Body's Stress-Response System in a Nutshell

In the previous section we encouraged you to cultivate the skill of *feeling your feelings*. It would also be helpful to understand how the body responds when our emotions are triggered. This involves the body's *stress-response system*, and we thought we would give a brief description of how that system works. It is an essential part of gaining grief intelligence, since the stress-response system is at the center of our emotional responses to grief-producing experiences in life. A basic understanding of what is going on inside of us can be helpful.

Here we go:

Have you ever taken a walk in the woods, and seen something that scared you? Your body reacted, even before you had a chance to take in what was happening, and you had that “Yikes!!!” feeling all over. That was your stress-response system at work!

Here's what was going on in your body:

Your *amygdala*, (a part of your inner brain), constantly scans your environment for danger. That's its job, and it does it with gusto! If it perceives anything that even *might* be a threat to you, it jumps into action, and alerts the *hippocampus* (another area of the inner brain).

The *hippocampus* takes that “Threat!” information and signals the *adrenal glands* to release some *adrenaline* (epinephrine), which makes you more alert: you breathe more quickly, your heart beats faster, your senses sharpen, your oxygen levels increase, your blood is diverted from your digestive system and sent toward your muscles, to get that oxygen where it is needed. All of this happens so that your body is ready to fight or flee so you can survive this dangerous situation.

Next, *cortisol* (a brain chemical) kicks in, which keeps your body in this revved up condition, to maintain the heightened physical strength and stamina to deal with this “Threat!”

Then your *pre-frontal cortex* gets involved. This is a thinking, reasoning part of the brain, and its job is to assess the “Threat!” And this is when you realize, hopefully, that the thing over there in the shadows isn't a bear at all . . . it's a tree stump. You feel a surge of relief, but it takes some time for your body to feel physically calmed down, and back to normal, doesn't it?

Now, let's suppose instead that the “Threat!” concern is actually real. Maybe not a bear in the woods, but maybe some sort of harm has come to you, or someone you love. Or maybe it's your boss, harassing you, or perhaps your parent, abusing you in some way. Or it could be a natural disaster, or demeaning, intimidating words or actions that spring from discrimination, or any other example of an actual threat that you can conjure up.

How does your stress response system respond? Well, all the above happens, of course, and when the pre-frontal cortex decides that this threat is real, cortisol levels remain elevated. You might fight or run away, if they seem like winnable options to your brain, which has your survival as its goal. If your brain concludes that the threat is inescapable, a third option, to *freeze*, may occur. In this response, your body secretes endorphins to numb the pain, and a sense of detachment that is meant to protect us from further damage, occurs. This is called *dissociation*.

All these responses are meant to help people deal with threats in the moment, and are effective, helpful physiological responses for that. The good news is that if we deal with our grief and trauma, we can come out the other side of that experience even stronger and healthier than before. But if we don't deal with it, these stress responses can last a long, long time, far longer than the actual traumatic event. This is at the core of what is called being *traumatized*. As ongoing coping mechanisms, *fight, flight* or *freeze* can be unhelpful, and even damaging to us, physically, psychologically, emotionally, relationally, and even spiritually.

Here's another way to look at the stress response system that can provide some beneficial insight:

Story—Lessons in Stress-Response from a Pinball Machine.

When I (Tony) was a kid (young punk to be honest) in elementary school, we had a hot dog/soda joint named Charlie's near the school, in the basement level of an apartment building. I would love to hang out there, in my leather jacket and Cuban-heeled pointed toe boots, and play pinball with friends. There were two machines parked side by side. They had the same price to play, one quarter, but they were vastly different machines.

Looking back many years later, I realized that there was a great life lesson to be learned from playing those two machines at Charlie's. This was a lesson in how to deal with a stress-response system, like the one those pinball machines had.

It may seem strange to you to hear that a pinball machine has a stress-response system, but anybody who has ever played pinball, or watched somebody play, knows that a machine will only allow so much shaking of it (stress) before it *tilts* or shuts off (response). Furthermore, different machines have different capacities for being shaken before tilting.

For those confused as to why anyone would shake the machine to begin with, the answer lies in shakings' ability to re-direct the ball so that it either hits a desired target, or more importantly, gets kept from *sinking* and ending that *ball-in-play*. And regardless of how quickly or not a given machine tilts, the reality is the same for all—loss of the current ball, or even game over! And beyond that, the machine itself will then be in a period of what some call *tilt-mode*; that is, it needs to settle down a bit before you can play with *any* amount of shaking or it will tilt/shut off even more quickly. You could say it gets into a hyper-sensitive mode. (Are you beginning to see why the analogy of pinball may be helpful in everyday life?) There's more.

Smart players figure out quickly the limits of the machine they are playing—usually by having watched others play, or by their own first experience of tilting (learn the hard way)!

In addition, many machines, especially the older ones, have a built-in *tilt-meter*. This is very helpful! It is often a little box, with a window to it, where you can look inside and see a vertical strip of wire that will be still and vertical when all is well, but will sway back and forth after a tilting (after there is too much *stress* given to the machine). Thankfully, the

better, and more fun to play, of the two machines at Charlie's had a tilt-meter, since it was more sensitive to begin with.

The key is to *not* try to put another ball into play, or put any more money in the machine, UNTIL this strip has returned to its more vertical position. In a sense, it is a warning system to the player. You could say that the machine is “re-living” the stressful experience still, and will “hi-jack” your game (take control away from you) if you do not wisely wait for it to be calm.

Listen to what Bessel Van der Kolk, celebrated trauma therapist, and author of *The Body Keeps the Score*, has to say about what is needed for the *person/human being* in a hyper-aroused state of his/her stress-response system:

“In order to return to proper functioning, this persistent emergency response must come to an end. The body needs to be restored to a baseline state of safety and relaxation from which it can mobilize to take action in response to real danger.”

Are you beginning to wish that we were all equipped with built-in visible tilt-meters? Wouldn't it be nice to just look in the mirror, at your meter, and say: “*Ok, I need to relax a little longer before going out.*” Or to be able to look at other people's tilt-meters and know when they are more prone to be emotionally-hijacked, and perhaps “let you have it” with their anger, or other outburst?

Unfortunately, we are delivered into this world “*tilt-meter not included.*”

However, we can learn both how to better know our own body's stress level and our risk of hi-jackings, and learn to better *read* or detect this in others. It fits into what science journalist/author Daniel Goleman calls “*Emotional Intelligence*” and is described in his 1995 book of the same name.

As the authors of this manual, we want to say that much of what we are trying to do is to increase our readers' (your) understanding of grief/traumatic grief, the stress-response system and how to become someone who can become better at handling stress to the body going forward—to have greater emotional intelligence, grief intelligence, and be a more healthy griever. If using a pinball analogy in any way helps you, then my (Tony) misspent youth had some redeeming part to it!

Our goal is to help people apply certain concepts, tools, and assessments to determine what level of grief response they have had in the past, or even in the light of recent grief-producing experiences, so that healing and a return to stability can take place. Then beyond that, a commitment to the healthy grieving tasks, going forward, can reduce or even eliminate the possible harmful effects of unhealthy grieving. Knowing that there may be *typical* responses to grief or *traumatic* responses is an essential element of this manual's purpose. The next two segments give a more detailed explanation of trauma.

Understanding Trauma as *Traumatic Grief Injury* (TGI)

We said earlier that you can have grief without trauma, but you cannot have trauma without grief. This may sound like some kind of riddle, but the answer to it is to understand that trauma is a form of grief, though more complicated. That is why one of experts in the field of grief and loss, Dr. Alan Wolfelt, is calling it “traumatic grief.” This both distinguishes, and connects, traumatic responses from more typical responses to difficult life circumstances. By *typical*, we mean responses that most everyone has to difficult experiences, but that do not rise to the level of being traumatic. It can all be called grief!

Let us explain further.

Traumatic grief *may* come from experiences of abuse, whether physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, or severe neglect. Other root causes *may* be the loss of loved ones, spiritual crises, accidents, life-threatening circumstances (such as war, etc.) and many other experiences.

All of these produce the same heaviness of mind, heart and soul that are associated with grief. However, something else must take place before the result can be called trauma. That is why we used the word *may* in the last paragraph. It is *not* the experience or event that is necessarily and automatically traumatic. This is important to understand. It is the *body’s reaction* to what happened that will determine typical or traumatic grief.

This is a definition of trauma (traumatic grief) given by Bruce Perry, MD, PhD:

*“Trauma is defined as an experience, or pattern of experiences, that **impairs the proper functioning of the person’s stress-response system, making it more reactive or sensitive.**”* (Emphasis added).

If there is no impairment, then there is no trauma. If a person does not become *more reactive or sensitive* in their *fight, flight or freeze* responses in an ongoing way, then there may have been much grief from an experience, but not traumatic grief. An example from history may help to make the point.

Interestingly, the children who were sent out to the country—to be safe—during the Nazi air raids on London in WWII, had far more traumatic responses than did the children who stayed in town and experienced the wail of sirens, raging fires, and the imminent danger of bombs falling on them any moment. This would appear to go against common sense. We cannot go into the full reasoning here, except to say that it had much do with staying together as family units. The London-based children remained with those they were the closest to, and by whom they felt the most loved.

This, apparently, became a critical factor in how the children's bodies, minds, and spirits handled the stress of the bombing and its aftermath. There was grief, for sure, but not the impairing of *the proper functioning of the person's stress-response system*.

The point to be made, again, is that it was not the experience itself, no matter how severe, that automatically created a traumatic grief response. This, we believe, is an important factor in our promotion of healthy grieving. We have said that "*grief is inevitable, but despair is not*"; we would further say that while grieving will naturally, and normally, result from a difficult and even tragic life experience, it *does not* have to turn into traumatic grief.

We are convinced that there are *preventative* measures you can build into your life and mindset, which can go a long way in keeping trauma from taking hold. The healthy grieving tasks are a significant part of that prevention strategy. But having said this, we need to say that before we can really focus on the future, we must be mindful of the past and the present. We stated at the end of the seven assumptions, that *our past lives in us*. If this is true, then wouldn't it seem logical, and practical, that we should examine that past to see at what level our grief experiences have affected us? That *examining* is at the heart of why this manual was created!

Before we leave this section, there are some other very important things we need to point out. For one, the same Dr. Wolfelt that we have spoken about often, not only feels that trauma, (even what we call PTSD), needs to be reframed/reworded as *traumatic grief*, but he also believes that the word "INJURY" needs to be applied to *all* experiences of grief. Every disappointment, trial, struggle, or loss *injures* us in some way—whether physically, psychologically, relationally, spiritually, or otherwise.

Therefore, Dr. Wolfelt argues, the impairment of one's stress-response system, no matter how severe, should never be called a *disorder*, but rather an *injury*...a severe, and deeply wounding injury perhaps, one caused by some deeply disturbing experiences, but still an injury. And if it's an injury, **then there can be healing!** His work, and that of many others, including ourselves, is devoted to that very healing process.

Therefore, for the rest of this book, we will use either the term *traumatic grief*, or *traumatic grief injury* (TGI) when referring to responses to grief that are more impactful.

A few more points are necessary for you to gain a better understanding of all this. TGI clearly affects our physical bodies, as referred to in what happens to our body's stress-response system. However, it is how TGI can affect what we call our *heart*, our sense of self, and our perspective on life that needs to be understood, as well.

A TGI can result in a loss of power, safety, innocence, and control. It can shape our belief system about life, the world around us, and even God/Higher Power. It can leave us with a deep and profound sense of emptiness – feeling dead inside. We may have layers of traumatic grief buried deep in our hearts and bodies, closing us off to life.

Traumatic grief injury, as in all grief and loss, can also bring us face to face with our own inadequacy and lack of strength. The truth is, how we respond to our TGI (*especially* when there is the loss of security, innocence, and control) determines what happens to our hearts. Unhealed, un-attended-to TGI can cause us to lose a lot of living time trying to make life work while struggling to figure it out and make sense of all the problems that have come our way. Many people are greatly *stressed out* from seeking answers to all the questions they have about *why* these difficulties have happened to them.

We repeat, TGI is unique to each individual because it is not the *cause* (the event or experience that happened) but the internal *response* to the cause that determines what happens going forward. That is why some respond by entering into a constant state of *flight* (desiring to flee a situation, or even life itself), while others stand and *fight*, and some others get trapped in a state of inaction—their reactions and emotions will seemingly *freeze*. As we might expect, there may be some combination of all three over time, as other events come into our lives.

Make no mistake, these are powerful forces at work within us, in our bodies and our hearts. Traumatic grief can be a deeply embedded loss in our hearts, and it can control how we think and feel. We may not notice how much the injury of traumatic grief has affected our lives. There may be periods of relative rest, but usually the trauma resurfaces when we are triggered by an event, smell, sound, picture, or someone talking about the past.

These triggers can affect us very deeply, causing more stress and anxiety, and bringing to our minds the memory of the trauma-causing episode, only instead of being simply a bad memory, our bodies *re-live* the original experience. This can be terrifying. We may feel a rush of emotional pain well up inside us. For many, a sense of shame and guilt creates a deep pain in the heart.

We can try to push the emotion back down deep inside, while asking ourselves why these thoughts and feelings are flooding us. But the stronger and deeper the traumatic grief injury, the greater the loss of power and control. This, of course, often leads to such things as self-medicating with drugs and alcohol, the sabotaging of relationships, and even violence toward others, or toward oneself.

We felt it important here to give some description of the nature of TGI so that you can begin doing some *assessing* and *examining* of whether there has been some TGI in either your life or that of someone you love. The next section: “*Identifying Traumatic Grief—Taking a Look at Your Injury*” will give some resources to help you to do this.

Identifying Traumatic Grief—Taking a Look at Your Injury

So, we stated in the last section that all grief, however small or severe, is an *injury* in some way, an injury to the mind, heart, soul and even the body. The reason we ask you to take a look at your injury is because it is important to try to discover whether your *injury* (or injuries) brought you into traumatic grief.

You might be thinking, “*But wouldn’t I know already if my grief was of the traumatic kind? Wouldn’t I be tormented by nightmares, or so emotionally tied up that I could not leave my home or hold conversations? I’ve seen shows about PTSD patients, and I am nothing like that!*”

The short answer is: not necessarily!

It has been said that a large percentage of Americans have some form of traumatic grief, and yet only a small number of these persons are being treated for their *injury* to their *stress-response system*. Why? Because they do not know they have been so deeply injured. For example, those who have been in *Fight* mode have attributed their fighting and “pressing on, no matter what” attitude to their being strong, or resilient, or to “*I’m just like ‘my dad’ (or mom),*” or anything else other than that they have been in a constant *adrenaline-fueled response mode*.

In truth, it is easy to attribute being in a *Fight, Flight* or *Freeze* mode simply to our personality, or to “*that’s the way my family always handled things, so I do, too.*” Our *emotional hi-jackings*—becoming easily angered, saddened, offended, fearful, etc.—are often assumed to be caused by *something* (my job, the economy) or *someone* (my partner, kids, noisy neighbors, boss). It is true that any or all of these things may be real difficulties that trigger a response in us, but it may also be true that we are being *more sensitive and reactive* than we need to be. And that may be due to our having TGI.

Most of us have never explored whether we had TGI or not. Why should we have, if we assumed that trauma talk, PTSD, and all that was for the “really messed up” folk? This is especially true for adults who had childhood trauma-producing experiences that created *impairment of the stress-response system* but who never were diagnosed or treated effectively, or worse, were diagnosed wrongly. And perhaps medicated wrongly.

Or maybe we have gone all our lives thinking: “*Why am I like this? I don’t want to be.*”

We want to be clear; this manual was not created to be a substitute for counseling or therapy. Our assessments and worksheets are *not* scientifically tested by statistical analysis. They are rather intended to be a first step, or a next step, on the important journey of finding greater inner healing, and, to go from just surviving to thriving.

We placed this section here because we believe that if someone (You?) does have TGI, then they need more concentrated and direct help, as soon as possible. That does not mean this manual cannot be of help to you. Doing the worksheets and self-assessments that are contained here can be very helpful in assisting you in more precisely *pinpointing* where your experiences of grief have affected you emotionally, mentally, and otherwise. That will be helpful whether your grief is typical or traumatic.

In healthy grieving language, you might even take the next step here of *Examining* yourself, and then bring the results to the person whom you *Invite* to journey with you in further exploring the implications of what you discovered. That may be a professional counselor or clergy, or someone you know to be a good and confidential listener.

So, back to the task at hand: taking a look at *your* injury. Unfortunately, there is no accurate blood test, or an instrument that can be waved over you and give a reading (like something seen in science fiction). A professional therapist may have an assessment tool that is more accurate, should you choose to visit one. In this manual we have provided you with several tools/resources you can use.

One of the best tools in the trauma field is called the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study test and it will help you look back to earlier years to see whether certain experiences were a part of your reality. If any were, it will *not* automatically mean you had a TGI, but it raises the possibility and allows you to explore further with that *Invited* someone. You will find this test in Section 4.

Another resource is the information in the following paragraphs which helps to *Examine* the circumstances of the situation(s) causing grief. If you want to understand the impact of your grief injuries, then you need to know, as well as you can, the who, what, when, where, and why of the story. You know the *who*, (you!), the *when* and *where* (from your grief inventory), and part of the *what* – the event itself. The information below can help you to begin to grapple with the rest of the *what*—your body’s reaction to the event, and the *why* of a more impactful, or even traumatic, response, or as we call it, a grief injury. The answers to these questions can help you to get a handle on the situation, so you can come to a clearer understanding of your story. Clarity can help with such things as acceptance, forgiveness, and peace of mind, and even help you formulate a plan to take these, and other, next steps, so you can move forward.

Though the specific circumstances of an event that results in an impactful grief injury are quite varied, there are elements that run through them like common threads. Below we outline some of these elements. To gain a clearer perspective on what happened to you, you may want to check this list against your own experiences, to see if any, or many, of these elements were at play.

Helplessness or Powerlessness—How much a person can do, or can’t do, to affect the outcome of a situation is a significant factor in whether they react traumatically. This is true if they are physically trapped, as in a building collapse or being held by someone with a weapon, but also

very much the case in other situations. For example, a medical emergency, yours, or someone else's, can trigger traumatic situations when there is nothing you can do to make the situation better. A person may also be, or feel, powerless in abusive situations where the abuser is a parent, spouse, or other family member, a teacher, a clergy person, an employer/boss, or even a colleague.

Dr. Robert Scaer, MD, a neurologist, has noted that our culture's understanding of traumatic events is incorrectly limited to horrors and disasters, like war, and plane crashes. He offers a wider scope to understand trauma:

"In fact, any negative life event occurring in a state of relative helplessness--a car accident, the sudden death of a loved one, a frightening medical procedure, a significant experience of rejection--can produce the same neurophysiological changes in the brain as do combat, rape, or abuse. What makes a negative life event traumatizing isn't the life-threatening nature of the event, but rather the degree of helplessness it engenders and one's history of prior trauma." (emphasis added.) (psychotherapy networker.org, Nov/Dec 2006)

Distance—How close were you standing to the painful event? Did it happen to you? To a person you love? Your house? Your neighborhood? Our proximity to a loss-producing event heightens the likelihood that it will cause a traumatic reaction in us. Moreover, it isn't necessarily the actual amount of danger we face or damage we sustain that will make us react traumatically, but *our brain's sense of the danger* we are facing that will trigger the physiological cascade we refer to as trauma.

Time Span—How long the event lasted, or how often the event was repeated, can contribute to the intensity of a person's reaction.

Betrayal—Betrayal is a violation of trust. The more legitimate your claim/belief that you should have been able to trust someone, i.e., a parent, clergy, police, etc.; the more impactful it will be if they betray you. Our society has valid expectations that people in these crucial power positions will not abuse their power, but will have the best interests of those in their care at heart. When that is not the case, trauma can result. Also, if you tell a trusted someone about having been abused, and they don't believe you, or they blame you, or make fun of you, or make light of it, that makes it even worse.

Cruelty—Human cruelty and viciousness can be more impactful to a person than an accident or catastrophic storm, even when the threat of harm is similar. It seems that hatefulness—someone being mean just to be mean—is a significant factor in trauma.

Likelihood—How unexpected was this event or situation? Did you foresee it? Or did it come out of left field? When we can predict an event or situation arising, it is sometimes possible to change what we do, or even where we actually are, to avoid trouble. Our sense of power, safety and control is still functioning, and we can make some choices that could help us. However, if someone doesn't see trouble coming, and wham! —something bad happens, that will likely be worse. This could be the case in a sudden death, a disaster, or a behavior-based incident. So,

for example, having an abusive sibling is a bad situation, but a predictable pattern of abuse might help a child avoid some or most of it, just by being somewhere else at the time of day when the abuse tends to happen, say, right after school. More random, and therefore *unpredictable* occurrences would make it harder to avoid, and therefore, potentially more traumatic.

Loss—When the outcome of an event is the loss of someone or something significant in our lives, the chance of a traumatic reaction is greater. This applies to tangible things, like our home or community, as well as intangible things, like a career, our sense of safety, innocence, or the ability to trust others.

Degree of Harm—How much personal harm was done? No matter what caused it, if there is an injury, then the greater the injury, the greater the likelihood that a person will react traumatically.

Cultural/Societal Circumstances—How a person’s larger community or culture perceives the traumatic event affects the force with which trauma hits. For example, veterans of wars that are seen as *just* by the larger culture are regarded as honorable, and fare somewhat better when it comes to experiencing trauma, than veterans of wars that are viewed as *unjust*, who have been devalued, and even shunned, with the result being a higher impact of the trauma these soldiers experience.

Perpetrator Trauma—This may astonish many of us, but apparently people who behave in cruel ways can have traumatic grief injuries as a result. It would seem that acting in a way that goes against one’s own conscience, and causes harm to another human being, can actually have a fragmenting and devastating effect on the perpetrator.

History of Prior Trauma – It doesn’t seem fair, does it? But it makes sense that the stress of trauma can be cumulative, and subsequent traumas (remember: *ordinary, commonly experienced traumas!*) and how we process them can be affected by our previous trauma history—the whole *fight, flight* or *freeze* phenomenon. Please keep in mind that these traumas that so many of us experience do not predestine us to ill-health or other negative outcomes, but since those can be part of the picture, it is even more reason to deal with our grief injuries.

Now that we have a better grasp of some elements that can make a grief injury more impactful, let’s look at ways to deal with the emotions often felt when experiencing any kind of grief injuries. We suggest that there are three prominent emotions that seem to hover around almost every grief-experience—sorrow, anger, and guilt. Before we introduce you to the worksheets that will help you assess these emotions in your life, we have another short story that gives the history behind the combining of these three emotions. The story also shows that a good first step is to be honest and forthright about what we are feeling.

Darrell's Story: The Birth of S.A.G.

I (Tony) had officiated, or participated in otherwise, many difficult funerals before this one, young children, suicides and more. But this one seemed especially hard for me. Darrell was a friend who I had watched come out of prison, leave the drug world behind, do well in the business world, and by all measures appeared to have escaped the clutches of his troubled past.

Over time Darrell had revealed to me even more of that *darkness*, as he called it, lurking in the depths of his past and his memory. At this time, I was not a *trauma informed* person, and did not recognize all that was going on in his life, so I was not really able to help him deal with it. He eventually moved to another state and we lost touch for a bit. I assumed all was going well.

After some time had passed, I heard from his now estranged wife that he had gotten back into drugs and was exhibiting some erratic behavior. In a trip back home he visited me and, I too, saw the ways he had lost much of his confidence and composure. I tried to encourage him but did not feel I was very effective.

Then the call came. It was his wife again, this time asking me if I would perform his funeral. He had been involved in some kind of altercation with police down South and had been shot. Certain events leading up to the shooting indicated it may have been an officer-assisted suicide, as the term goes for a situation where someone appears to have put themselves purposefully in a position to be killed by law enforcement agents. He was only 36 years old. I was devastated by the news.

On the night of the funeral, I stood in front of his coffin and told the gathered crowd that I was dealing with these three very strong emotions at the same time—sorrow, anger, and guilt.

I was *sorrowful* and *sad* that he was gone. We had spent many hours together talking and playing pool and sharing our lives. It hurt to see his body in that coffin.

I was *angry* at how it all went down, even angry at Darrell at some deep level for allowing himself to get drawn back into the drug world, and then somehow positioning himself to get shot, if that was what happened. Only he knew. Even with a knowledge of how captivating and devastating drug addiction can be, I still felt angry. Even anger at myself.

On top of this, there was my *guilt* at feeling that I failed him somehow. Surely, I could have done more. Maybe this scene would not have been a reality.

All of these emotions were swirling around inside me like a single molecule of emotion. I shared with those there that I had a feeling many of them were struggling with one, two or three of those emotions themselves. I saw many nod their heads, and quite a few tears.

It was after this funeral that I put together the concept of SAG-*ging* beneath the weight of grief. I created worksheets to help people identify their emotions. But I used them on myself first.

Learning Not to SAG Beneath the Weight of Grief

Let's take another step into this grief-work. Using an acronym—S. A. G.— gives you an easier way to begin looking at your grief. S.A.G. stands for Sorrow, Anger and Guilt. There is a play on words here that is meant to help you remember how to understand your grief.

We all know what it is like to *sag* beneath the weight of some heavy load, from carrying a friend, to wearing a backpack, or anything else that weighs us down. Grief is like that. In fact, the dictionary definitions for words relating to grief all have something to do with the idea of heaviness or something being burdensome. That is what grief feels like—a weight, a burden on the heart, mind, and soul.

Sorrow, Anger, and Guilt often join together to give us grief's weight and pain. Any one of them alone is difficult enough, but often we experience a measure of all three.

One of the early goals of grief-work is to try to identify more clearly where your grief is coming from. Remember, many people are surprised to find that there are things troubling them that they didn't realize or expect, and sometimes, these are things they never considered to be *grief* at all.

In addition to this, people have made the mistake of assuming that certain things were either *over with* or are *not a big issue* anymore, or were *never* a big issue. So, please bring an open mind to the process of doing grief-work.

To further *Examine* these emotions, we have provided a tool, entitled "*Identifying My Sorrow, Anger, and Guilt Worksheet*." Use it to collect your thoughts and to identify your grief more clearly. This sheet is based on the wider view of grief that we have been mentioning, one that sees grief coming from many places and circumstances in life.

The worksheet begins with Sorrow. To help you better understand the concept of *a wider view of grief*, we will take a moment here to explain what we believe are *four* major types of experiences in life that may result in our experiencing sorrow. Each one is a type of loss, but they are all different in some way.

We are going to use marriage as an example to help you to understand the distinctions.

1. Some people *hoped* they would marry, but for some reason it *never happened*, and they feel grief and sorrow (regret) over that reality.
2. Some people did marry, *as they had always hoped they would*, but their experience is not a good one (*not what they hoped it would be*) and grief and sorrow follow. Perhaps a divorce results, or they stay married and find it very unsatisfying and even painful.
3. Some people marry and find it a very satisfying and wonderful experience, *everything they hoped for*, but then *something happens that diminishes that experience*. This can be seen in situations where Alzheimer's disease, or other serious debilitating illnesses or accidents, come into a relationship and there is less and less intimacy taking place on all levels of the relationship—emotional, mental, physical, etc.
4. Lastly, some people marry and have many different experiences in the marriage, mostly positive, but *then their mate dies* and there is the *sense of deep loss* and grief.

As we mentioned, all of these are a type of *loss*, but there are differences. Everyone is clear that losing someone or something they love produces sorrow and grief and can easily name that loss. However, many do not realize how much grief and sorrow come from the other three types of grief. You may feel the weight and pain, but not know exactly why. To identify the sorrow and grief is to take one step closer to finding some healing and lightening of the load.

The Anger and the Guilt sections are less complicated to understand, but are no less heavy and burdensome in our lives.

So, now it is time to identify our grief(s) and the probable causes. After you do, you will be given an opportunity to work on trying to find healing from them.

Identifying My Sorrow, Anger, and Guilt

Worksheet

S o r r o w

1. What was hoped for but *never was*...

When I was young, I thought I would be (do)

I always dreamed that _____

2. What was, but was *less than hoped for*...

I hoped for and received _____ but

_____.

I hoped for and received _____ but

_____.

3. What was as hoped for, but *then diminished*...

I had a special _____ but then

_____.

I had a special _____ but then

_____.

4. What was, but *was lost*...

I had _____ but she, he, it, they... are gone.

I had _____ but she, he, it, they... are gone.

I had _____ but she, he, it, they... are gone.

Identifying My Sorrow, Anger, and Guilt

Worksheet

Anger

I am angry at _____ for

I am angry at _____ for

I am angry at _____ for

I am angry at myself for _____

Guilt

I have/feel guilt because I (did, said, thought) ...

I have/feel guilt because I (did, said, thought) ...

I have/feel guilt because I *did not*...

I have/feel guilt because I *did not*...

Now that you have completed the *SAG* worksheet,

What are you *feeling* about all of this?

Have you felt a stirring in your spirit?

Is there a part of you *resisting* digging deeper into your past or memories?

If so, why?

Follow-Up to SAG Worksheet

Four Tasks for Lightening Grief's Load

In doing the worksheet, what surprised you? If you haven't noticed it already, you can see that your *Anger* and *Guilt* answers may be related to something you wrote down in your *Sorrow* section. That is only natural.

Did you feel any strong emotions inside of you? Which one(s)? Were you tempted to say, "*Who needs to do this?!*" and to stop? Well, those responses are natural and to be expected, too. Now, the question becomes, "*What do I do with what I wrote down?*"

Remember, the aim is to find a way to *lighten grief's load*.

Maybe you have someone you are thinking of right now who could be a *good listener* to what you have uncovered. To those in any type of 12 Step program, we can tell you that this may be a helpful resource in completing Steps Four and Five. Make sure that you bring the same *searching* and *fearless* focus to this project! It is a kind of inventory that you are taking of your grief and loss. It may help you get to the root of why you *may* have been self-medicating over time.

Once you have identified some of the *Sorrow*, *Anger* and *Guilt* that is weighing you down (that you may be *sagging* beneath), you need to consider what can lighten that load. Once again, we are only suggesting first-step kinds of things here, but they are still important.

There are some tasks you need to perform to lighten grief's load. Those who teach and counsel others in their grief, such as Dr. Wolfelt, will talk of many tasks and will give you many ways to do them. We will only mention a few of them here. But when you do them, you may find some easing of that weight.

They are—to *forgive*, to *be grateful*, to *celebrate* and to *let go*. Let's look at each.

Forgive—Let's look at forgiveness first; it is probably the hardest of the tasks! And let's consider what forgiveness is, and what it is not. Lots of us think of forgiveness as a thing that happens between people that restores a relationship to what it was before. We further think that when we forgive something, it is basically saying, "I am okay with what you did," as though the grief injury that happened doesn't matter or count for anything. Neither of these is accurate.

Forgiveness probably has many definitions, but the best we have heard is that of Lewis B. Smedes, a theologian, who said *forgiveness is a willingness to live with the scales unbalanced*. You never have to be "okay" with what happened! In many, if not all, instances, none of us should be "okay" with the hurts people inflict on each other. Forgiveness just means that you are not going to retaliate and cause further pain.

Many cultures, including ours, place a certain value on retaliation. But we think that this is another place where conventional wisdom gets it completely wrong. Forgiving (refusing to retaliate) is saying to the jerk who hurt you: “*I don’t want to get sucked into this awfulness! I don’t want to be connected to it in any way, shape, or form!*” Think how much suffering and pain happen because a cycle of retaliation continues. In any situation like this, you have more power than you think. Maybe you didn’t start it, but you can stop it! It takes a lot more strength to stop, to step away from a retaliatory chain of events than it does to get carried along by the tide of anger and the urge to get even. It’s like taking a sledgehammer to that chain and smashing it to bits. Refusing to retaliate halts evil, right in its path. It’s fierce. And tough. It’s audacious, and it puts you in control. Try it!

Forgiveness doesn’t mean that you won’t still feel pain. Traumatic grief injuries really are just that—*injuries*. And injuries can take a long time, maybe even a lifetime, to heal. Healing is a journey. Give it the time it deserves. If you want to forgive someone in your heart, but you just don’t feel like you have, or can, you likely have already forgiven them, as pastor and writer Flora Slosson Wuellner says, and what you are actually feeling is a wound, or in our terms, a traumatic grief injury.

As to the question of restoring relationships, the choice to forgive, and the choice to return to a *normal* relationship, are two different matters. This second choice isn’t about forgiveness, it is about reconciliation. Resuming a relationship where betrayal has happened, and where trust no longer exists, isn’t really possible, and it isn’t wise to jump into that, because the chances of being hurt again are high. That doesn’t mean that trust can’t ever be rebuilt, but if you actually even want to try to reconcile, proceed very carefully. And, we would add, getting professional guidance in this situation is the best policy. Remember, *Value* yourself!

Finally, please note that seeking legal justice for an illegal offense does not affect forgiveness one way or the other. Justice is important and letting people “off the hook” isn’t necessarily good for them, or for other potential victims that they may be free to continue to harm.

With all of this in mind, let’s begin by asking, “*Who is in the Anger section of your worksheet?*” Usually, the persons we are angry at are the ones whom we have not yet forgiven for something they did (or failed to do) to us or to someone we care about.

Or it may be ourselves we have not forgiven. This is a problem for many people. We hear people say: “*I know that _____ (other person, even God) forgives me, but I can’t forgive myself. How could I have done what I did?*” Guilt and self-anger combined can really weigh us down. Forgiveness is the only effective answer.

Perhaps we need to ask someone to forgive us!
Forgiveness, of others and our own selves, is hard work. Often, we need the help of others, or a *Higher Power* to do it.

Look back at your worksheet. Did you have anybody in *Anger* (others, yourself), or *Guilt* (yourself) that may need forgiving? Why not try it now? Or recognize that it needs to be done.

I think I need to forgive _____ and _____

I need to ask _____ and _____ to forgive me.
I think I need to forgive myself.

You might want to ask your Higher Power/God to help you on this. Up ahead are some prayers to help you.

First, let's take a quick look at the other three tasks.

Be Grateful—This next task is about having gratitude and giving thanks for what has happened in your life, focusing on where life has been good to you. Look back at your worksheet. Even in the things that you hoped for, but were less than expected, was there something to be thankful for there? What of those that diminished, or even that were lost altogether? Can you still find some things to be grateful for? Try naming a few.

I am grateful for _____, and _____
_____ and also for _____
_____.

Celebrate—To celebrate is to go beyond just being grateful, it is to acknowledge that something is *very* special and worthy of some unique honor. Again, look back at your worksheet, who or what qualifies to be placed in this category?

I celebrate _____ and _____
_____.

Letting Go—Some things just need to be accepted for what they are (or are not). We must learn to accept *what was* and *what was not* and to let go of our anger, guilt, fear, or any other emotional response that has taken root in our hearts and minds surrounding this circumstance or person.

Your worksheet can help you here, as well. What did you have to say about what has been angering you, or causing you guilt?

I need to let go of _____ and also _____.

If you were not able to do any of this, don't worry, we are going to take some time to learn how to better perform these tasks.

It may be a little much to expect you to just start reading this section, fill out a worksheet and then do these tasks—all right in a row. And yet, if you were somehow ready, that is exactly what *could* happen.

However, we have been saying that grief-work is a process and a journey. And it is. It takes time—a lifetime, if we want to be honest about it.

So, now we need to take time to answer the question: “*How?*” *How* do we complete these tasks? *How* do we forgive, be grateful, celebrate, and let go?

Before we look at another four things that will help you fulfill these four tasks, we want to say a few words about *perspective*, since so much of our experience of life has to do with our perspective—how we choose to look at life.

Chaplain Tony often starts a seminar by saying that there are two *extreme* views that you can take toward life. He could use the familiar “glass is half full or half empty” concept, but since he likes poetry and music so much, he suggests a different concept and example.

The English poet, Alfred Lord Tennyson, once wrote: “*It is better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all.*” That is a perspective that seems to come from someone who may have experienced trials, difficulties and losses, like all of us, but who appears to have learned to either forgive, be grateful, celebrate or let go (or all of these).

What do you think? Does the statement seem to you like a good approach to life? There are other poems and songs that seem to despair of hope and love, revealing a more skeptical or even cynical perspective on life (*What’s Love Got to do With It?* Tina Turner sang). This is the flip side of Tennyson’s perspective on life—sounding something like: “*It is better to have never loved at all, than to have had a little taste of it and then it’s gone.*”

This second perspective seems to indicate a person who can’t be satisfied (thankful, celebrative) about receiving anything less than the full measure of something. Which view is closest to how you view life? How about the people around you, where do they fall?

Well, now that we have detoured a little, to 19th century England and to the American music scene of the nineteen-eighties, let’s come back to the twenty-first century. We only detoured because we wanted you to think for a moment about *perspective*, and how important it is to our experience of life. Truth is, it will affect how you travel on in this grief-work we are heading into.

Now it is time to look at those four things we said would be helpful in *forgiving, being grateful, celebrating* and *letting go*. Through these, we offer you a few ways that you can start working more meaningfully and effectively toward lightening the load of whatever it is that may have you *sagging*. Here they are:

Support of Others—

It is easy to forget sometimes that we need the support of other people in our lives to help us through; that support may come in the form of sitting down with someone for a cup of coffee,

tea, or a cold beer, exchanging “*How are you doing?*” and answering honestly and openly, not just “*okay, how about you?*”

Getting together in a small group of people is a big step for many, but the benefits can be so great. When people who have a shared experience of something—loss of job, loss of loved one, loss of pet, loss of hair, or whatever—get together and talk, they can help each other through the pain. Do you have somebody, or a group of people, that you can talk to about your sorrow, anger, and guilt, and whatever else may be weighing you down? Give it some thought.

Prayer—

You may or may not be a religious or spiritually oriented person, and we are not trying to push anybody toward any religion or belief. However, we are among those who believe strongly that prayer can be a great benefit in lightening grief’s load—finding healing and peace.

We have included below a few prayers that you might use as they relate to the issues of *sorrow*, *anger*, and *guilt*. They are worded in a way that doesn’t reflect any one particular religious tradition. You, of course, can address the Creator/Higher Power/God in any way that best fits your experience spiritually; that is why we have left the intro to each prayer blank.

If you are someone who isn’t sure about there even *being* anyone on the other end of the line, so to speak, below is a “starter prayer.” If you say it in the quiet of your heart, and there *isn’t* anybody there to hear it, then you have done nothing more than just talked to yourself! No harm done. However, you just might find that *Someone* is there, and you might receive an answer in a way that makes it clear to you that your prayer was heard. What harm can come from it? Give it a try.

Here’s that “starter prayer” (followed by the other prayers).

To Whomever may be listening,

“If you are there, and can hear me, then you know already that I have not been a big believer in spiritual things, or much of a pray-er. But I need the kind of help now that it seems only a *Being* far greater than myself, or any other limited human being can offer. Help me to heal and to find a peace that I can’t seem to gain any other way. Thank you for listening. I wait for your response.”

Prayer for help with Sorrow:

“_____, you created us with emotions, with the ability to love and to also feel emotional pain. I have had some sorrowful things happen to me and I cannot seem to find true healing regarding them. I feel so weighed down. By your power and love, heal me inside and help me to find peace in my heart and mind. Show me what to do. Send help my way. Thank you, Amen.”

Prayer for help with Anger:

“_____, I have an anger and frustration in me that I cannot control. It rises up and takes hold of me before I know it. It is triggered by many different things. I know *some* things

that I am angry about, but I fear that there are hidden hurts and pains that are triggered without me being able to recognize them. Help me to work on my anger, to acknowledge it, and find help to get it under control. Help me to heal, to forgive and learn to let go. Amen.”

Prayer for help with Guilt:

“_____, I cannot seem to shake the feelings of guilt I have for certain things I *have* thought, said and done, as well as for *not* thinking and saying and doing what I feel I should have. I am troubled by all this and need your help. Heal my mind. Quiet my spirit. Forgive me for these things if they are real wrongs. Help me to seek forgiveness from others if I need to. Send someone to assist me. Thank you. Amen.”

These are just a few simple prayers that we put here because it is possible that all that we have been talking about has led you to a place of needing to seek help *right now*.

If you are a religious/spiritual person and are involved in some faith community, then you are in a wonderful position to get some help with praying from the spiritual leaders of that community. Please do so! Do not be afraid to let them know that you are in need of help. Chaplain Tony and Chaplain Pat have both served as a pastor/ pastoral staff, and it is the saddest thought that someone would feel that they could not tell us what is troubling them because they feel it might change the way we think about them. Get the help!

That leads right into the third kind of help:

Counsel—

Sometimes what we need, in addition to prayer, is good sound advice, counsel and even *therapy* of some sort. There is no shame in any of this. We know that some folks are often not too interested in going to some “shrink” (as they call a professional counselor/ therapist) to “*spill/share my guts with someone I don’t even know, FOR A FEE!*”

But good counsel is so beneficial.

Over the years, when Chaplain Tony has done pre-marital counseling for couples, (what he prefers to call: “*Relationship Enrichment*”) women and men, but mostly men, will often say; “*Why do we need counseling, we’re not in trouble, WE’RE GETTING MARRIED!*” The idea of enriching their relationship seems to be more acceptable and many end up really appreciating what they go over.

As was said earlier, it is a matter of perspective.

The *perspective* we are advocating here is one that thinks that getting insights from other people, especially those who have more experience in an area than we do, is a smart and wise thing to do. You don’t even have to start with sitting down with somebody in person.

There are many books and websites, etc., that can begin to give you the insights and help to take you beyond the first steps that have been given to you here.

As an example of what is available online and in books, we want to refer you to the website of the organization that Dr. Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D. directs. He is the director of “The Center for Loss and Life Transitions” in Fort Collins, Colorado.

The website has many free articles to look at surrounding grief and mourning. We suggest that you go there and explore, read some of the articles and consider even ordering a book that speaks to your specific need. It won’t take much time and it could really be a help to you. Here is the web address, give it a try – Centerforloss.com.

There are, of course, many other websites and resources you can go to and find help and insight. Any search on the internet for sorrow, anger and guilt, etc. will yield more information than you will ever be able to digest! We mention the “Center for Loss” site because we feel comfortable in directing you there. As in anything else, there are some perspectives out there in cyberspace concerning grief that might not be as helpful. Be careful. Be selective. Get someone to help you navigate all of this if you can, but just don’t be afraid to look for counsel and help. Help is out there, and it will make your life better. Why not?!

There is one more idea for helping you to perform the tasks of *forgiving*, *being grateful*, *being celebrative* and *letting go*. It is one that has been a significant part of Chaplain Tony’s life for well over thirty years, and for Chaplain Pat’s life as well. When Chaplain Tony was ready to start his grief-work in earnest, back in 2004, having this already in his life was a great help. Chaplain Pat has found it invaluable both for the insights it provides, and as a record for various situations, that she has referred to, even years later, so she didn’t have to rely on memory alone. We are, of course, talking about keeping a journal.

Let’s talk about that for a minute.

Journaling—

Chaplain Tony started keeping a journal of his life—his thoughts and experiences, back in 1983. He calls it a *prayer journal* because he ends every entry with a brief written prayer. The prayer is always about whatever it is he has written down, so he can write a prayer of thanks and celebration, or a prayer for help and forgiveness or any other need he may have at the time. Through the journal, Chaplain Tony believes he has been able to get more in touch with his thoughts and feelings, as well as to develop his spiritual life.

Again, a lot of you might hear *journaling* and say: “*I don’t want to keep a diary! I’m not going to sit down and write; ‘Dear Diary, Today I took a walk...’*”

Journaling is not the same as keeping a diary; or at least it doesn’t have to be. In fact, many men and women over time have kept journals or logs that helped them to both navigate their lives better and record important events.

Star Trek fans should remember Captain Kirk, who at the end of each episode/adventure thoughtfully summarized everything that happened by beginning, “*Captain’s Log, Star Date...*” Many people thought it was often one of the best parts of the show. Kirk would make insightful comments and tie it all together, and then they would be off to another adventure.

Our lives, *your* life, may seem a little less adventurous and much more boring than that of Captain Kirk and the crew of the *Starship Enterprise*, but sometimes we also seem to be going at warp speed, right? And don't we wish sometimes that someone could just beam us up and out of some difficult situations? If Kirk needed to record it and try to make sense of it all, maybe you should, too!

Journaling doesn't have to be a complicated process, taking up a lot of time. It can be a few minutes beginning, or ending, your day. Whether you record daily, or whenever it feels comfortable, it is meant to be for your benefit, not something to burden your life. So just grab a composition book, or something like it, and begin. (Or on your laptop, phone, or other electronic device!)

Your first entry could be about reading a grief book (this one!) that led you to consider working on the unhealed grief in your life! Why not?!

We started out by saying that the goal is to become as *Totally Healthy* as possible—emotionally, mentally, physically, relationally, and spiritually. We hope you see a little more clearly now how unhealed grief can hinder that kind of health, and we hope that a part of you is at least saying: “*Maybe this grief-work stuff is what I need? Maybe I need to become more of a healthy griever?*”

As the picture on the following page will indicate, it is important to go *slow* as you proceed on this journey. Slow is good when you are dealing with such important things as your emotions. But slow is still moving, and it is also important to keep moving.

The Journey of Healing Road



Understanding Emotional Responses to Grief

The *Journey of Healing Road* (found on the next page) is like the road of life itself. To live is to have grief in some way. While traveling life's road, we all experience disappointments, struggles, and losses in our lives, and we all respond to those experiences in our own unique way. While many emotional responses are listed along the road, we do not all experience every one of them, or not all at once, thankfully!

As you look at all of the responses that are listed along the road, understand that many of these are typical and to be expected, depending on the circumstance. Having one, two, or all of them does not make you "abnormal."

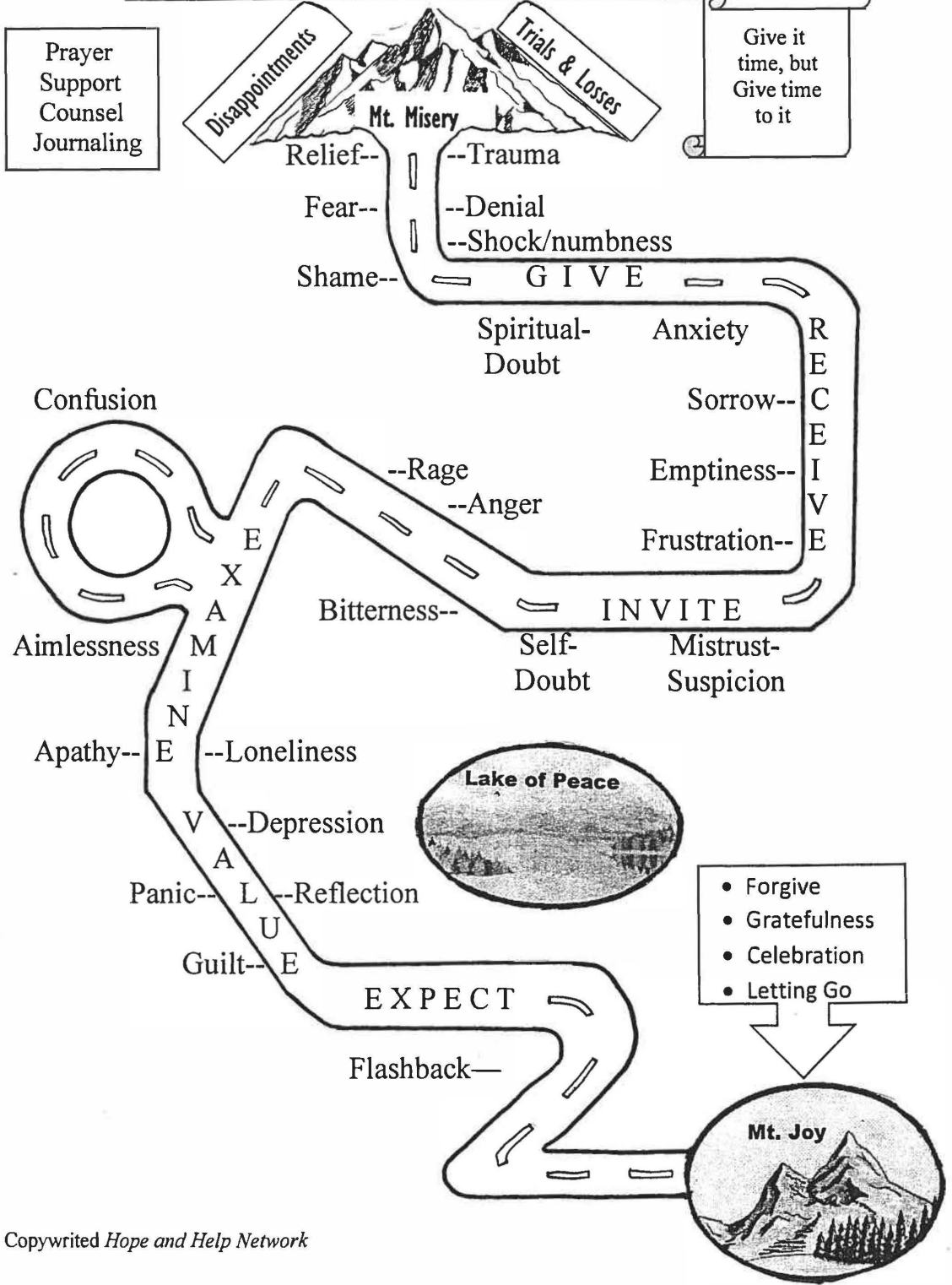
The concept we are working under is that you may *stop* at any number of places along the road, but when you *park* yourself there and, like a squatter, take up residence—that's dangerous. For example, "Denial," at first, may be a way to protect your mind and heart, just as "Shock- Numbness" does, but to stay too long in these places is not healthy. Along the same line, "Fear," "Anger," or "Guilt" may be necessary emotions, for a time, but can become *toxic* in your system if left un-checked (as Dr. Caroline Leaf describes it in her helpful book *Who Switched Off My Brain?*).

One way to use this tool is to do the following:

1. Go "down the road" and circle the emotional responses you are currently experiencing. Ask yourself, "*How long have I felt this way? Am I stuck here?*" (We need to note that often we stay *parked* in a place because it feels familiar or safe to us, instead of moving forward. There might even be an unhealthy satisfaction from holding on to, and staying trapped in, an emotion. For example, *BITTERNESS* could turn a person's attention away from healing because it keeps them focused on the hurt/pain done to them.)
2. Next, with each circled emotion in mind, if you are sensing that you are possibly, or definitely, stuck at that emotion, then go on (if you are comfortable with prayer) to the *Prayers for Help and Healing for the Emotional Responses to Life's Disappointments, Trials and Losses*. This is a way to do more serious "grief-work" right here and now.
3. Use what you have learned about yourself and your emotions in this self-examination as useful information, guideposts of a sort, to show you what you need to address. Talk about them with your trusted friend or support group, and/or a counselor. Try to understand how being stuck in these emotions has been holding you back. Perhaps you could journal about them. Is there anything you can learn from your grief experience as you move through these emotions?
4. Additional tools for healing can be found in Section 4. There is a lengthy list of resources and techniques that many people have successfully used to get their stress-response systems regulated.

As you can see, the Healthy Grieving tasks are built right into the *Journey of Healing Road*. As you look at the road, you can see the six words that are written in the middle of the road. These are the HEALTHY GRIEVING TASKS that you have been encouraged to consider for your healing process.

Journey of Healing Road



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Prayers for Help and Healing for the Emotional Responses to Life's Disappointments, Trials, and Losses

DENIAL

[_____]

“I know that I am having a hard time accepting what has happened. Every time it comes to my mind, I try to think of something different. Sometimes I can fool myself for a long time, but in the end, I realize that I must face it eventually. I have put it off for a while now. It is time to look at reality and see what can be done to get on in life. I need help to do this. Help me to handle all the emotions that will come when I open up. Keep me from being overwhelmed. Guide me to people who can help me face it all. Show me how to trust You and others. Heal me. Show me what to do NEXT.” [_____]

FEAR/ANXIETY

[_____]

“I am so fearful of life right now. I know that I should trust more, but it is hard not to fear after what happened. It seems to take hold of me before I realize what is happening. Sometimes a sense of dread hangs over me. Sometimes I know what I am fearful of, but often I am just full of anxiety and am not sure why. I need help to learn to live without this crippling fear. Show me how to be less anxious and fearful. Calm my deepest fears and emotions. Guide me to those who can help me through this time. Help me to be open to their involvement in my life. Help me to trust You. Guide me and heal me. Show me what to do NEXT.” [_____]

SHOCK/NUMBNESS

[_____]

“I am still finding it hard to believe that it happened. I do seem to be in a kind of shock, and my emotions seemed to have shut down. Some tell me this is a good thing, but I know that it can't last too long. I want to feel again, but I am afraid of what might happen when it all rushes in. I need help to recover, and to give myself time to let my mind and body absorb everything. Help me to get through this. Help me to take one day at a time and to trust that I can be restored.

Guide me to people who can help me understand what is happening to me and to show me how to heal. I need Your healing hand in my life. Heal me. Show me what to do NEXT.”

[_____]

SORROW

[_____]

“I feel so weighed down with sorrow and pain from what happened. My heart feels so heavy. It is hard to imagine ever feeling normal again, and everywhere I turn I am reminded of my hurt. Something always seems to trigger it. I know I need to be patient with myself and to give it time, but I also feel that I need some help to cope and to heal. I ask You to comfort and to heal me. Guide me to others who can assist in that healing. Not everyone understands. Direct me to those who do. Remove some of this heaviness. Help me to hope again and to realize that while life may never be the same, I *can* live on and find meaning in life. Help me to grow through this, not just to try to get beyond it. Heal me. Show me what to do NEXT.”

[_____]

FRUSTRATION

[_____]

“I feel so bound up inside, so tight and knotted. I can’t seem to relax for very long at all. I keep experiencing those feelings of frustration, and sometimes of helplessness. I seem to be always ready for a fight, becoming agitated at things I can normally handle. I can’t stop thinking about what happened and how things could have been different. I need help. I know that I have not handled my grief very well. Help me to look at everything carefully and find some kind of peace. I know that You can comfort and heal me. Lead me to others who can help in that process. Guide me to persons whom I can invite in to walk along with me. Make me whole. Show me what to do NEXT.” [_____]

EMPTINESS

[_____]

“There seems to be a hole right at the center of my heart. I feel empty and without hope of anything that can come along and change that. My grief is heavy and has left me without much feeling, and everything I try to do falls short of filling me. I know that I need some help, but I have not felt like reaching out to anybody, or responding to their offers of care and comfort. I need to change that. I am reaching out to You to help me to find hope and a sense of purpose and meaning again. Fill in the empty spaces. Lead me to people who can help me (or lead them to me.) I believe that Your love and the love of others can heal me. Guide me. Show me what to do NEXT.” [_____]

MISTRUST/SUSPICION

[_____]

“I know that because of what has happened I have become mistrusting of the motives and intentions of others. Sometimes it seems I have become mistrustful of life itself. I have become suspicious and doubting of other people’s sincerity. I know that it is affecting my relationships. I guess I am trying to guard against being disappointed and hurt again. I can see that this is not a healthy thing for me. Help me to face this mistrust and to examine where it is coming from; how deep it reaches into my heart and mind. Help me to find a way to be open to other people and to give them a chance. Show me how to fully trust You. Heal me. Show me what to do NEXT.”

[_____]

ANGER

[_____]

“I know that anger is not a bad thing when it is channeled in the right direction, and that it can even help to get things done, but I can’t seem to do that. My anger is settled in my mind—and in my stomach, it seems. I’m afraid it is in my heart, too. I do not want to be this way. I know that it is not healthy and will only lead to problems within me and between myself and others. However, I seem powerless to do much about it. Before I know it, it overtakes me. I have even been angry at You at times. Help me to get a handle on this anger. Show me how to channel it if I need to, or to let it melt away. I trust that You know what I need. Give me patience and self-control. Help me to forgive others whom I feel have disappointed or hurt me. Heal my anger toward myself. Replace my anger with peace. Heal me. Show me what to do NEXT.”

[_____]

RAGE

[_____]

“My anger has settled so deeply and strongly within me over what happened that it has become like a volcano, overflowing into my daily life. Others seem to be afraid of me at times. I know that this is not healthy, but I am powerless over it. Sometimes I feel like I will blow my top and never recover from the damage I may do to others or myself. Help me to settle down. Help me to examine the root causes of this rage. Teach me to truly forgive others and myself. Restore my emotions to a normal state. I trust that You understand me and can guide me. Heal me. Show me what to do NEXT.” [_____]

BITTERNESS

[_____]

“I can’t believe how bitter I feel over what happened. I seem to be unable to think about _____ without having very negative thoughts—even hostile thoughts and a desire to have something bad happen. I know that is not healthy and can only lead to problems, but I am powerless, it seems, to do anything about it. It is like weeds that have taken deep root within my heart and mind. Help me to face this bitterness and get help to have it uprooted. Guide me to others who can assist me in this area. Free me from the chains of bitterness. I do not have the key; I know that You do. Heal me. Show me what to do NEXT.” [_____]

AIMLESSNESS

[_____]

“My life seems to be going in circles lately. I find it hard to make decisions about my future. I know I should be making some plans and goals for the future, but I don’t have the energy or desire to do so. I know I can’t stay in this state, it is not healthy. Each time it seems I am about to get back on track, however, something triggers my emotions and I go spinning again. Help me to find meaning and purpose in life again. Restore my hope and my confidence. Lead me to others who can assist me in this endeavor. I need You to comfort me and to direct me. Guide me. Heal me. Show me what to do NEXT.” [_____]

CONFUSION

[_____]

“My mind and heart seem so mixed up right now. I can’t decide what to do about so many things. I can’t seem to think straight or feel confident about the decisions I have made. I know that I need to be patient with myself and to allow myself to heal from what has happened, but my confused state is affecting the lives of others also. Sometimes I wonder if my mind will ever work right again. I need help. Guide me to those who can help me to sort things out. You guide me and counsel me, I trust Your wisdom. Help me to think clearly and decisively. Heal my mind and emotions. Guard my heart. Make me whole. Show me what to do NEXT.”

[_____]

SHAME

[_____]

“I feel so worthless inside, like no one cares about me, or even should care. It is so painful. I feel this way all the time. I am distraught about it. I wish I could hide from the world, but even if I could, I know I can’t hide from myself, or my agonizing pain. I don’t know of any way for me, alone, to make myself feel better inside. But I’ve heard that You love everybody, and I am banking on that. If I need healing, please heal me. If there is something I need to do, give me the insight and courage to face that. Please help me to find someone who can accept me and help me to find my way to a better place, inside. Show me what to do NEXT.”

[_____]

LONELINESS

[_____]

“I feel so alone. I do not have anyone close to me now. Even when there are people around, I still feel alone. Sometimes I choose to be alone and feel comfortable that way, as if I desire to be alone, but I do not really like being alone. I just miss_____so much that no other company seems to fill the void. I know I need other people. Help me to find people to feel comfortable with and to feel like I belong. Let me feel Your presence with me. Guide me through this lonely time. Heal my heart and mind. Show me what to do NEXT.”

[_____]

APATHY

[_____]

“It feels like my mind and emotions have shut down sometimes. I have no desire to do anything or seem to care what happens to me, or what happens to others whom I care about. It is like my spirit or soul has gone to sleep. Nothing much arouses me at all. I know that this is not healthy. I need to get going somehow, but I seem powerless to do so. Help me to come alive again in my emotions. Teach me to care again about life. Awaken me from this emotional sleep. I trust that You can heal and restore me. Guide me to people who understand what I am going through and can help me. Show me what to do NEXT.” [_____]

SELF-DOUBT

[_____]

“The events that took place in my life have left me doubting myself. I have lost confidence in my abilities. It is affecting my life in many ways. I am insecure and hesitant, when I used to be confident and decisive. Others have tried to talk to me and encourage me, but I can’t seem to accept what they are saying. The doubt lingers. I need help to regain my sense of worth and confidence. Help me to stop beating myself up. Guide me to people who understand these things and can help me. Help me to be open to Your love and attention. Heal me in the deepest part of my being. Show me what to do NEXT.” [_____]

PANIC

[_____]

“The stress I have been living under is affecting me in a deeply physical way, and it is terrifying. It all comes on so suddenly, seemingly out of the blue. I know in my head that the symptoms of panic I feel are unnecessary and unhelpful, but tell that to my body! It just floods me with sensations of fear so overwhelming that I can’t function as I normally would. My nervous system feels like it’s on overload. I need help. Guide me to those who can help me. If I need medicine, help me to accept it. But I need to examine why I have such strong reactions. Lead me in this discovery. Free me and heal me. I know that You can make me whole. Show me what to do NEXT.” [_____]

DEPRESSION

[_____]

“I never understood how deeply depression can go into your mind, heart and very soul. What I am experiencing is so heavy and hard to shake. I do not know if this is psychological or purely chemical. I keep thinking the fog will lift and it will be all clear again, but it doesn’t seem to happen. It appears to be getting thicker. I need help. I know You can help me. I trust You to clear the fog. Guide me to those who can help me, and encourage me to be open to their help. I am being open to you now. It is about all I can do. Heal me. Show me what to do NEXT.”

[_____]

GUILT

[_____]

“I can’t get beyond feeling guilty and responsible for what happened. I keep thinking: ‘If only I had...’ I have asked forgiveness of others and of You, but I can’t forgive myself. Every time I think that I have, something triggers my memory and I feel the sting again. It weighs so heavily on my heart and mind and spirit. I need help. Help me to realize that mistakes happen and that I need to forgive myself. Help me to do that. I am not at peace and cannot seem to find that peace on my own. Guide me to others who can help me in this process. Help me to be open to them. Heal me. Make me whole. Show me what to do NEXT.”

[_____]

YEARNING

[_____]

“Deep within me I feel a desire to be doing something, or to be connecting with someone, or just life itself. I have not been very open to life since everything happened, but now I feel a yearning for something more. I can’t put my finger on it, however. Help me to understand what is happening within me. Lead me to others who can assist me in this quest. I know I still need healing. It feels good to be yearning for something, but I don’t want to be fooled by my emotions. Protect me. Show me what to do NEXT.”

[_____]

REGRET

[_____]

“I have so many things that trouble my heart and mind. I can’t seem to shake this feeling of regret—it is so heavy upon me. If only things could have been different. What could I or others have done differently? I can’t say. I keep replaying what happened and trying to change it, but reality always stays the same. I know this is not healthy, and it is affecting my life. I can’t change what happened. I need Your help and guidance. Lead me to others who can help me. Heal me. Show me what to do NEXT.” [_____]

From Surviving to Thriving: LIFE! *after* Grief

“*Survive to Thrive*” has become a popular phrase, and that is a good thing! It captures a great truth and meaningful goal for life. To merely survive something carries with it the sense of just getting through, or beyond it, without being destroyed by it. That, too, is good, and it is certainly better than not surviving. However, there can be so much more to life than just saying: “*Well, I’m just grateful to be alive,*” or “*just glad to have my sanity.*”

It is most certainly here a question of quality of life. And while it must be admitted that everyone has the right to decide what *quality of life* means to them, it is also true that many people live a life far below what they could potentially be living—and many of those persons will even openly admit that to themselves and others.

In the film *Braveheart*, the Scottish warrior William Wallace shares his thoughts on this subject. He says: “*every man (person) dies, but not every man (person) truly lives.*” What we are encouraging here is for the survivor of grief injury, in any form, and particularly traumatic grief injury, to seek to *truly live*; to go beyond just surviving to living a life that is drawing forth inner potential, and even adventure. Why not?

Why not thrive?

An early Church Father, Irenaeus, once said, “*The Glory of God is a fully alive human being.*” That idea of a full and abundant life is captured in our capitalizing of the word and placing an exclamation mark at the end of it—LIFE! Thus, we seek to distinguish it from an ordinary, just making it through, less-than-full-potential life. Many religious traditions, self-help, and motivational groups encourage the same thing.

Don’t get us wrong here, please. We are not turning this into an inspirational, motivational, “go for all the gusto you can” manual. We are not thinking about having anyone imitating survivalist Bear Grylls, who broke his back and *then* worked his way back to become the youngest person to climb Mt. Everest.

The major point we are trying to make is that the healing we have encouraged in this manual, and the commitment to being a healthy griever going forward, can be *transformative*, instead of just restorative. Growth, which is at the heart of transformation, is about coming to a new place in life (LIFE!), to a place you have never been before. And this is not *in spite of* what you have gone through, but *because of what you have gone through*. *Because* of what you have learned from your trial or ordeal. *Because* of what you can now pass on to others.

In short, you have a story to tell. Your story is important, it matters, even though you may not see that, yet. In truth, you may be just beginning your journey of healing and are not far enough along yet for your imagination to see beyond just working through this manual. That is

okay. Or maybe you are someone who is itching to get back into the flow of life, feeling that your grief-work has been preparing you for *something more* (for LIFE! ahead).

Wherever you are in your journey, we invite you to take a look at our journeys. On the following pages we have placed each of our TGIS (Traumatic Grief Injury Survivor) stories. They could just as easily be called TGIT (Traumatic Grief Injury Thriver) stories, since we each believe that our commitment to become healthy griever, and the healing and growth that has come to our lives because of that, has placed us on the thriving road.

“I am a Traumatic Grief Injury Survivor”

By Chaplain Tony Tilford, M.Div.

(A personal account of experiencing a traumatic event, the radical changes it can bring to one’s life, and what it means to survive it.)

On the last day of August 2017, my wife, Jean, and I boarded a plane to Denver, going to see our son and daughter-in-law’s new home. Jean had been battling cancer, diabetes, and heart issues for a while, but had been determined to take this trip.

Something unexpected happened mid-flight.

“I don’t feel so good,” she said to me as I was helping her back to her seat. We had just navigated using the tiny bathroom, so I assumed that she just needed to rest from that exhausting experience. But when we got back to her chair, she slumped down into it, her eyes getting wide and fixed forward, and then they closed as her head fell and she made a brief expulsion of air.

Then nothing.

I quietly motioned the stewardess over and we sought to get the oxygen mask on her, but by then she was non-responsive in every way. A call was then put out over the speaker system: *“Are there any medical personnel on board? Please come forward.”*

Like most of the people on board, I had heard this before, but only when watching a TV show or movie. This was reality. And I was right in the middle of it.

First, a nurse came forward, began taking Jean’s pulse in a few places, and then looked up at me very compassionately and said: *“I’m sorry, I cannot find a pulse.”* At that moment, both a doctor and another nurse arrived. The three of them and myself then eased Jean out of her chair and onto the plane’s floor.

Then began a forty-minute repetitious ordeal of CPR, followed by paddles, CPR, paddles...

I stood there watching, praying, quiet and helpless, hoping that at any moment she would make some sound or movement that indicated there was yet life in her. Near the end of the forty minutes, the stewardess whispered to me that the pilot had to follow protocol, and since Jean had not responded yet, and we were still far from Denver, he had to make an emergency landing at the nearest airport and then to have EMTs take her and me to a local emergency room.

This happened shortly, and swiftly, and I found myself in the lobby of a hospital in Omaha, Nebraska, waiting for the ER doctor to come out to tell me if they were able to do any better than those on the plane. As he walked over to me, I could tell from the look on his face that the answer to that question was “no.”

After having some time with her in the ER room, I then had to engage in probably the most difficult and heart-wrenching task I ever had—to make phone calls to my/our children to inform them that their mother was gone.

I, of course, was in a *state of shock* mode, and after completing numerous calls, to my

children and other family members, I sunk into the chair of the chapel and cried. But not for long. There were decisions to make and I had to make them.

I started with this experience because it was the first, and major, grief experience that I encountered over a six-month period which finally brought me to the realization that I had been traumatized. More specifically, as I will explain more later, I had *traumatic grief*.

But it would take a wild over-reaction on my part, at the end of those six months, to lead me to seek help, and to get the right *diagnosis*. In the meantime, there were a number of other grief-producing experiences that built up something inside of me.

I returned home from Jean's passing, and a five-day trip to Denver, only to find myself over the next four weeks at the bedside of three long-time parishioners/ friends of mine. Journeying with them and their loved ones at that critical time, and then either performing or participating in their funerals, was "what I did," as a friend, pastor, and hospice chaplain.

But I was unaware of the toll it was taking deep within me, so soon after my tragic loss.

After a very difficult and understandably sad Christmas, the new year began with yet more bad news. In fact, I was standing at the door of my daughter's room when she got the call that her post-surgery thyroid tests revealed a cancerous growth. And this, just four months after her mother had died following a two-and-a-half-year battle with cancer.

Needless to say, this was all very heavy.

Over the next two months, she had the rest of her thyroid removed, and underwent radioactive iodine treatment successfully.

It would be around this time that I had my *awakening* experience to the effects of trauma.

One Sunday afternoon, at the end of February, as I was with some people from my church, there occurred a misunderstanding about something that caused me some embarrassment. However, not only did I leave angry and hurt, but I somehow was triggered strongly to want to leave pastoring altogether. There was a flood of emotions that overwhelmed me.

My response was clearly an over-reaction to what took place, but I seemed powerless to turn back what I was feeling and wanting to say and do. In reality, I had been *emotionally hijacked*, but at the time I was not fully aware of what this meant, or how powerful a force it was.

Over the next few days, I looked up sites online about "burn-out." This was the only thing I could imagine was fueling what was going on inside me. All the losses, and the responsibilities of pastoral ministry, I assumed, had combined to finally push me over the edge—burned me out.

As it turned out, the sites I went to, and some tests I took, indicated that burn-out *might* in fact be behind my reactions. What should I do about it? Well, a few times in the past, when I was struggling in life, I contacted my former seminary professor, Peter, who was also a counselor. So, I sent off an email to him, describing all that had taken place over the last six months, and asked if I could come and talk with him.

As expected, his response was very compassionate, and from there we set a time to meet the next week. In addition, I called two leadership couples from the church and asked if we could have lunch together. There, I explained to them what was happening, and my concern about the burn-out, etc. They were extremely supportive.

On the day I was to meet Peter, I came a little early. He was with another counselee, but his wife, Carol, also a counselor, came out to say hello. I recounted for her the story about what happened on the plane, and afterwards, and then said to her: “*So, I came to Peter thinking I might have some trauma or something.*”

I will never in my life forget the look on her face as she said just two words: “*You think?*”, meaning, of course, that she felt it was clearly trauma. Just then, Peter came out, and then Carol said to him words that would radically change my life over the next few week/months. She said, “*Tell him about THE BOOK.*” (my emphasis added) “The book” as it turned out, was *The Body Keeps the Score*, by Bessel Van der Kolk, a leading trauma expert.

In our meeting, Peter spoke to me about *self-care* and the need for me to be very careful to get the emotional rest I needed. When I got “the book” the next week and started reading, it revealed to me exactly how right and wise Peter had been.

As it also turned out, I was going down to Virginia to spend some time with my sister-in-law, Kathy, and to fish and crab, weather permitting, with her boyfriend Chris.

On one of my mornings there, I had what I am calling, my “*Spiritual-Scientific Experience.*” The spiritual part of that came first, as I started my day reading a Max Lucado book, in which he referenced Jesus’ reading of Isaiah in the synagogue. The words “*I came to set the captives free,*” really grabbed hold of me. I sensed God telling me that I was going to be set free from all of this. I was captive to something, but would eventually be free of it.

My heart was thrilled.

But I was still left with the questions: *What is it that I need to be freed from? What exactly is wrong with me?* Amazingly, the answer came just a couple of hours later. I was on the couch in the living room reading *The Body Keeps the Score* when I came across the following words:

“The body responds to extreme experiences by secreting stress hormones [...] meant to give us strength and endurance to respond to extraordinary conditions. People who actively do something to deal with a disaster—rescuing a loved one or stranger, transporting people to a hospital [...] utilize their stress hormones for their proper purpose and therefore are at much lower risk of becoming traumatized.”

What Bessel said above was not entirely new to me, but what he said next about what happens to people who *cannot* or *do not do* something, opened up a whole new world of understanding about myself and my past. Here it is:

“Helplessness and immobilization keep people from utilizing their stress hormones [...]. When that happens, their hormones are still being pumped out, but the actions they’re supposed to fuel are thwarted. Eventually, the activation patterns that were meant to promote coping are turned back against the organism and now keep fueling inappropriate fight/flight and freeze responses.”

Here was the “scientific” part of my “*Spiritual-Scientific Experience.*” It made so much sense to me. It helped explain why I had been having such overwhelming desires to flee—take flight! To get out of all of the situations that caused frustration and helplessness.

Not only had there been the 40 minutes of helplessness of watching them work on my wife on the plane, and then the whole emergency landing and rush to the ER in the futile attempt to revive her, but also the series of deaths upon my arrival back home of close friends (and later my daughter's thyroid cancer). While I did not think of myself as "helpless" with my prayers and heart-felt sharing with them and their loved ones, my *body* was processing it all in a different way. Something was being triggered down deep that would erupt at the time of the church incident.

But there was more.

As I read the words "*helplessness and immobilization*," I had a series of short flashbacks. In one of them, I was a young teen watching my father in a rage and psychologically damaging my younger sister (cutting up her new clothes with scissors). In the present, I felt within me the anger and hate I had had years back at the scene, but also felt my fear I had to *do* anything. Fear that the scissors might find their way into me.

In another scene, I was brought to a few years ago when I held Jean in my arms on the floor, as she was convulsing. I'd called 911, but was not sure they would get there in time.

In these, and countless other situations in my life, I had been helpless to do something that changed the situation. I began to sense that I had been traumatized to some degree for a long time.

But this experience of being *overwhelmed* was different, more powerful than I had ever encountered. While I felt there was no real threat of my taking my life, there was a strong desire to be done with life, done with responsibilities, done with death, especially!

I would later learn that the term "hyper-aroused" described what Bessel meant by "*fueling inappropriate fight/flight or freeze responses*." It was like being in a constant state of emergency in your body. In short, (and not an expert analysis here), when we get into a stressful situation, the adrenal glands keep pouring out the stress hormones, activating the area in our brains that literally shuts off another part of the brain—the part that enables you to be rational and reasonable. This makes for not only *over-feeling* the fight, or flight, or freeze responses to everyday life situations, but makes possible those *emotional hi-jackings* I referred to earlier.

We often call these *emotional outbursts* or even *melt-downs*.

I can tell you that I had many of those hi-jackings over the next 18-month period, even after getting some understanding of them. And I hurt others, leaving me with much regret and sorrow. Why did I do it? What was happening?

In these hi-jackings, we find ourselves acting in unreasonable and irrational ways. And yet, we seem powerless to stop. It can be very damaging to relationships, because you are triggered to respond in what may be very hurtful and erratic ways, thinking you are defending yourself or wanting to *win* an argument or discussion, but always *over-reacting*, and nothing good ever comes of that.

It seems that the part of the brain that normally inhibits us from crossing lines in our responses gets altered, and instead we *lose our inhibitions*, and our control, of what we say. A line from the band Pink Floyd's *Dark Side of the Moon* album best describes how I began to feel when I was hi-jacked— "*There's someone in my head but it's not me.*"

Was there any hope of it ever changing?

Would this trauma-induced *hyper-aroused* state ever end? What needed to happen in my body? Actually, Bessel made that plain in the very next sentences that followed what I shared earlier:

“In order to return to proper functioning, this persistent emergency response must come to an end. The body needs to be restored to a baseline state of safety and relaxation from which it can mobilize to take action in response to real danger.”

Going back to talk with Peter again, he and I considered what Bessel said, and talked about a plan for “restoring that baseline.” This actually dove-tailed quite nicely with Peter’s encouragement of me to do *more self-care*. By this, he meant learning to say no, being careful to not get involved in too many lives and projects, and to seriously *rest*—all things I had never really learned how to do in a balanced way!

It was March still, and since it was really not practical for me to take a full sabbatical from my work/pastoring, we spoke of my both doing less/resting more emotionally, and physically, and setting up for some significant away times in the summer. It all seemed like a good plan until Friday night, April 6th. That was the night I got the call about my sister, Nancy, who along with Jean (and even long before Jean came into my life) had been my best friend for years. She had been sent to the hospital.

As it all unfolded that night and the next morning, I learned that she was discovered to have stage 4 cancer, and while she was still in the ER, the plan was to try to stabilize her there and then put her in a room upstairs. From there, conversations would begin about either surgery, or hospice. She might not have much longer to live.

I was, of course, shocked to hear this, but the true shock was just a few hours away.

Going down to visit her at the ER Saturday, I got there just when her heart had failed, and they were feverishly trying to revive her. The doctor strongly encouraged not continuing to try to revive her, saying it was not ultimately helpful. We called her husband, Tom, who agreed, reluctantly of course, and they stopped their heroic measures.

Here I was, in an emergency room, again, just six months removed from Omaha. Nancy, was alive, but non-responsive, and so I leaned down and spoke words of love into her ear and thanked her for being a great sister and friend. She would be my 5th sister, out of 6, to pass, and four of them between 2010 to 2018. What would my body do with this added pain, grief, and stress?

Peter and I met sooner than originally planned and we set up an *away* schedule that had me leaving for two weeks as soon as possible—early May. In the meantime, there would be comforting family, while arranging and performing Nancy’s funeral. There was no choice.

Yet I knew that after my time away I would need to make some difficult, but necessary decisions regarding my future. These would be choices for my health and well-being. As it turned out, I ended up going to a conference in May, where I heard Bessel speak in person. He stressed listening to your body—seeking to discover where there is tightness or discomfort. When you feel it, *stop, and breathe slowly* to calm your body. That practice has been invaluable to me!

I eventually made the decision to retire from full-time pastoral ministry, to release myself from the over-arching responsibilities that come with that position, and especially so since Jean was no longer there to be my co-partner in that.

Gradually, my desire to create came back. I started back on writing projects I had put aside, even being able to write some songs for guitar again. In general, I was feeling more and more energy, and a greater sense of calm.

During my research on trauma and grief, I came across a new book by Dr. Alan Wolfelt, by whom I had been greatly influenced in the past. Weighing in on the whole PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) debate, he strongly urged the changing of the idea of “disorder” and replacing it with the concept of “injury.” All grief-producing experiences, no matter how light or heavy, cause *injury* to the self in many different ways, whether physical, emotional, or mental, or otherwise.

In the light of this, Dr. Wolfelt believes we should reframe PTSD as *Traumatic Grief*. I am not an expert in that field, but his analysis and argument made sense to me. At the very least, I have certainly adopted the term for my own experience.

In addition, I became comfortable with owning the name *survivor*. I survived the dramatic-traumatic experience of losing my wife on a plane at 30,000 feet. I survived the next two and a half years (before writing this). The road was rough, and I made many regrettable mistakes, but I feel I am significantly healing from my *injury*—which had been life-long, not just from the plane incident to now.

So, as you have no doubt already figured out, this has all led me to assume the position of a TGIS. Traumatic Grief Injury Survivor. (And yes, it is certainly a play on TGIF—Thank God It’s Friday.)

In fact, as another little play on these letters, I also like to say: **T**hank **G**od **I** **S**urvived

As I look back over the journey through my traumatic grief experience, I can see how God’s promise to set me free in March 2018 did come true, but not immediately. During that journey of healing, I learned so many new things—about myself, about life, about God’s grace, mercy, and love.

The passage of Scripture that was so important in that experience in March, 2018, Isaiah 61, has become even more so for me. It has become not only comfort and hope, but part of my life’s mission as well. Here it is:

*“The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, the Lord has anointed me,
to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
to proclaim freedom for the captive, and release from darkness for the prisoners,
to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor and the day of vengeance of our God,
to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes,
the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair.” (NIV)*

So, what is my future to look like? More healing, I hope. More prayer, and rest, and listening to my body. More seeking to have self-regulation/self-control in the catching of any possible emotional hi-jackings. Most of all, I want to be a resource for helping people to find greater healing and health in their lives, to *not merely survive* their grief, traumatic or otherwise, but to *thrive* in life, to have LIFE!

“I am a Traumatic Grief Injury Survivor”

By Pat Zeller, M.Div., Certified Grief Educator

My traumatic grief injury story is one of betrayal, harassment and vicious retaliation. It doesn't differ significantly from most harassment stories, I guess, except that it was all at the hands of clergy, while I was in seminary. The originating incident occurred at my thumbs up/thumbs down Committee certification meeting by a pastor, who, unbeknownst to me, had had a traumatic grief injury himself, and hadn't yet dealt with the pain. As many of the female clergy would later tell me, *“His wife ran off with the organist, and now he hates all women.”*

Apparently, his traumatic grief injury triggered the Fight response in him, and he fought with every woman who crossed his path. He seemed to even fight with the very idea that women deserve respect.

In my particular case, a senior representative of my denomination was present at my Committee meeting. He saw the hostility and heard the demeaning remarks, some of them on the topic of fidelity in marriage and celibacy in singleness. He also knew that other candidates didn't face this kind of questioning. Afterwards he, and some others, encouraged me to write a letter, explaining how it felt to be treated that way, so that they could use it “anonymously” at a denominational harassment training session. At first, I said “No,” both because it was of little consequence to me, personally; but also, because it seemed too risky to say anything, and might come back to damage my moving forward to be ordained.

However, everyone denied that there would be blowback, and pushed me harder, saying my uncomfortable experience could be used for good, that I would be helping all the women who came after me. Eventually, I wrote the letter. It asked that with regard to those kinds of questions, all candidates be treated alike, and with respect. My pastor, a woman, wanted me to make it stronger. I declined, saying it would already be explosive. I took the letter to four other ordained clergy I knew, and they all thought I would be safe. Though it was to be “anonymous,” it sure seemed risky to me.

I mailed the letter to the senior representative as he asked me to, only when he had the letter in hand he asked if he could take it to my Committee and name me as its author. *“Won't I be slitting my own throat?”* I asked. *“No, not at all!”* was his confident reply. Assuming that he knew what was right, and because effectively he was my boss, and clearly wanted to do this, I reluctantly gave my permission.

On the day the letter was to be presented at a meeting, I got my kids off to school and called his office. I had a really bad feeling about the whole thing, so I was going to ask him not to use my letter. But his assistant told me everyone had arrived early for the meeting, so they had already begun.

The following Sunday, at a pancake breakfast at my church, I overheard someone who was at the meeting say to my pastor: *“Did you hear about the Committee meeting this week? World War III broke out!”* The upshot of it all was that my harasser, who was clearly not emotionally healthy, had a loud and ugly meltdown at the meeting and was ultimately forced

into a medical retirement. Though there were additional reasons for this action, he blamed me for it, and therefore, so did all his clergy friends.

Meanwhile, at seminary, I was getting a constant barrage of intimidating, gloom and doom remarks from a fellow student/pastor, who had a connection with certain Committee members, and had been given “confidential” information he should not have been given.

I knew already that this student/pastor could be a real troublemaker, having watched him undermine another woman’s ministry. He started to say things like: “*They’re not gonna ordain you!*” and “*They’re really gonna punish you!*” and “*All the Committee members are really angry with you!*” I defended the ethics of the other Committee members. I knew my road would be bumpy, but I had hope that eventually all would be well, or well enough, anyway.

But that hope was not to become my reality.

Although they changed their Committee process so that at least some of what happened to me couldn’t happen to another candidate, the anger toward me continued, and with the anger came retaliation. Another meeting was set up. The chair of the Committee told me it was to apologize to me. I told everyone that it was completely unnecessary, but they insisted. Ironically, the trouble-making student I mentioned told me that the real purpose of the meeting was to humiliate me and make me justify myself. I didn’t believe him at first, but sure enough, that’s where they went at the meeting, and I left it teary-eyed. The stress of it all was really beginning to be felt.

Meanwhile, things that should have happened, didn’t, and things that shouldn’t have happened, did. A conference-wide smear campaign ensued. My assigned mentor, a member of the Committee, stopped speaking to me, but felt free to speak about the situation to others. I requested a new mentor, which they slow-walked. I got a hail of passive-aggressive phone calls. I declined to bring any charges, yet all of this came crashing down on me—a mere candidate, *powerless* in this situation, who hadn’t wanted any of this addressed in the first place!

To save my sanity and my career, I changed seminaries, to begin to establish connections with another denomination, just in case. But lots of pastors from my first denomination told me that other denominations would be suspicious of me because I started in one place and ended up going to another. And as if all this wasn’t enough, students I regarded as friends at my previous seminary stopped speaking to me, even in private settings. I have no idea why. The hits just kept on coming, and the stress kept piling up.

Finally, I got a terse call from the Committee chair, telling me when and where my required next meeting with them would be. Since nothing had been resolved, I was feeling anxious. So I called the senior denomination representative (my “boss,” who had asked me to write the letter). I told him of the reports about their anger, and that I didn’t think that I could take another ugly meeting. He called back a few days later, having spoken to the Committee, to ask for an additional meeting, “*with people who are supportive of you, to apologize again and begin the healing of relationships.*” My heart was singing! This ugly business was finally all over with!

If only.

I went to that meeting, but there was no apology. Not even close... lots of gaslighting, insulting remarks, and more intimidation, but certainly no apology. It was ugly. I said next to nothing, being so blindsided that I couldn’t figure out where this was coming from, let alone why

it was coming at me. It was a bizarre, grotesque parody of what the meeting should have been. I was stunned.

Pastors and counselors, who *know* what happened at that meeting, have compared what happened to me with something akin to rape, saying, “*They lured you in, made you think it was a safe place. Then they overpowered you and shamed you.*” I left the meeting, devastated. Shortly after that meeting, I started having panic attacks and driving anxiety. I still deal with anxiety on a daily basis.

Looking back with greater understanding, I can see how the on-going, deeply betraying experience resulted in a Traumatic Grief Injury. Their treatment of me fits the definition of **mobbing**, or group bullying, as “a deliberate attempt to force a person out of their workplace by humiliation, general harassment, emotional abuse and /or terror.”

Staying in that denomination was clearly untenable, so I left, which meant, of course, leaving my wonderful church. My whole family left. I spoke with our Christian Ed director, to say goodbye, and filled her in on what had happened. She told her husband, who was a pastoral counselor, about my experience. He groaned and said I wouldn’t make it through without counseling, and gave me the name of a pastoral counselor who could help me.

Soon after, I started in counseling, but I also saw that, even with attending counseling for many months, I would need more counseling than I could afford. The driving anxiety continued. The pastoral counselor was concerned that I would continue to deal with many of the same issues that someone who had actually been raped would deal with: anxiety, trust issues, and health issues. I was determined to prove him wrong.

But he was right.

I continued at seminary, but I slow-walked everything having to do with the process toward ordination. My response to this 15-month-long traumatic ordeal was to Freeze. Though I kept it together on the outside (except, of course, for the driving anxiety), I was so stunned and so hurt and felt so betrayed, especially by that last meeting, that, really, I wanted nothing to do with any kind of process that would ever put me in front of another ordination committee again. My hopes and dreams of answering my call to ministry appeared to have been crushed.

Around this time, my husband got transferred and we moved to the Philly area, where I had grown up. Though moves are always stressful, I embraced it as a respite from all the awful harassment stuff. I naively believed that “time heals all wounds,” a statement that is *not true* for traumatic grief!

Still, I tried to move forward.

I transferred to my 3rd seminary, started an internship at a local retirement community, and also began taking care of my aging, and ill parents. Lots of errands, lots of appointments, lots of shopping and lots of emotional support were needed. I was the kid who lived closest to them (45 min away), so it fell to me, and I was glad to be there to do it, but caregiving is stressful, too. Still, better stress than the previous stress I was working so hard to avoid—but stress is stress, and not what my body needed. I developed health issues, and it took years to sort them out. I was exhausted, physically and emotionally.

Though I finished seminary (I transferred back to one in New York due to credit transfer issues), I kept declining when pastors would say to me, “*Come on, let’s get you ordained!*” I

knew I wasn't in any shape emotionally, or by now, physically, for pastoral work. My driving anxiety returned. We moved again. More counseling. Lots more anxiety issues. It became unbearably sad to attend worship, and I would find myself wiping away tears for much of the service. We moved yet again.

With the help of some good doctors, I got some of the physical issues under control. But I continued to *not* deal with the harassment stuff, burying it deep within me, for years and years. It took #MeToo to rip off whatever scab was there and force me to start grappling with those feelings I worked so hard to avoid. Then something happened to change everything. It started with an honest answer.

One day, Chaplain Tony Tilford, who knew nothing about any of this, texted me on a completely unrelated topic. Since we had not communicated for a while, he asked me how I was doing. And I responded the way I *always* did to that question—*"I am fine."* This time, however, was to be different.

After giving my inaccurate response, I sat down and cried . . . and I texted Tony back: *"No, I am not fine."* And then I told him my story. My honest answer started me on a very unexpected, but amazing journey. In healthy griever language, I was becoming open to *Receive*, even *Inviting* someone to journey with me. I was also *Valuing* myself.

Tony had just finished revising a Healthy Griever resource he had been working on for years. He offered to send it to me. I agreed, and it opened my eyes to what was going on, and not going on, in my life. So, I began to address the grief-work I had left unattended for so long, and to grieve the losses that sprang from this traumatic experience: professional, personal, psychological, physical, spiritual, answering my call, so many hopes and dreams, my family's losses, even economic losses.

I used the very worksheets and tools from the *Becoming a Healthy Griever for LIFE!* manual, closely *Examining* my grief injury.

There has been a lot to deal with, but actually dealing with it has made a huge difference in my life and my outlook. I still have more to do, but I feel like a tremendous weight and burden has been, and continues to be, lifted from me.

And more than that, when I shared with Tony how beneficial the Healthy Grieving materials were for me, I said *"I think I finally understand my traumatic grief injury, and I feel like I am unstuck and beginning to move forward."* Then I added, *"Now, I just need to figure out what to do with my career."* To that he had a life-changing reply.

"Pat, you are now someone who has been positively affected by the healthy grieving program. Why don't you come and work with Marian and me on the healthy grievers team with The Hope and Help Network?" He added to that, *"Not only do you have skills that you were trained in for ministry, but you are a Traumatic Grief Injury Survivor, who can come alongside of others."*

And so, I joined the team! As our team worked to revise and enhance the manual, I read more and more on the subject of grief injuries, both typical and traumatic. I became a Certified Grief Educator. This further study, and applying the healthy grieving tasks to my life, have helped so much. Though I still deal with anxiety daily, it has lessened. Doing my grief-work has caused me to become more and more alive. More whole. More purposeful. More *thriving* rather than just surviving. In short, to have more LIFE!

“I am a Traumatic Grief Injury Survivor”

By Marian Stroup
Certified Trauma Competent Professional

When I was encouraged to write the story of my being a traumatic grief injury survivor (TGIS), I was extremely hesitant at first. My life story is very personal to me, and I have only ever revealed it in bits and pieces, never with any lengthy explanations. Some of the reasoning for this was wrapped in shame. I did not feel it was a story worth telling. In fact, when people ask me about my childhood, I quickly answer it was a childhood that Charles Dickens would enjoy writing.

A few years ago, I started studying trauma and the effects of trauma on a person’s mind and body, how it affects your emotional, physical, and spiritual life. I was amazed how much of my life had been traumatic from conception to adulthood. I especially saw how much it affected my decisions and the direction my life took from early on.

When I started learning about *Healthy Grieving* and the importance of handling grief throughout your life, I was astonished how much grief I had buried into myself and had decided *not* to handle. What I now call my traumatic grief injury (TGI) had left me with a lot of *catch-up mourning* to do.

More importantly, as a person of faith now, I learned to see how much God had been with me when I thought I was alone. God never turned His back on me even when I turned my back on Him.

So, to prepare for writing my story, I started by making a list of my earliest memories. There were numerous traumatic memories starting at a very early age.

It all began with my being adopted as a baby. As many adoptees, I would later yearn to know about my birth mother. I wanted to look in a mirror and see myself through my birth mother. Many years ago, I decided to search out the story of my birth, of which I had only been given bits and pieces. To do this, I had to contact Catholic Social Services, which had been involved in my adoption years earlier. I was informed it would cost \$100.00 for them to reveal my story—money I did not have. This triggered rage in me, and I made such a big deal about having to pay for non-identifying information that the CSS relented and offered me the opportunity to hear my story at no charge.

When I went to the Director’s Office, I was told the story of my birth, but I was not allowed to write anything down or have someone in the room with me.

I learned my mother was approximately 24 years old when I was born. She had been working in a hospital, became involved with a married man and wound up pregnant. Thankfully, she decided to carry the child (me) to birth, but immediately gave me up for adoption. It was tough to hear that I would most likely never get to meet my birth mother; my birthday has always been a difficult time because I have longed to know her.

As it turned out, my adoptive mother suffered from mental illness.

The cause for her behavioral problems, it seems, derived from the fact she could not have children of her own. In fact, she had had 4 miscarriages, which almost killed her. This led to their adopting a baby boy, but for some reason she became obsessed with this boy and it was

decided that, to help her not to be so obsessed with him, they should adopt a girl, which was me. Unfortunately, it did not solve her issues surrounding the boy.

Nor did it help him. He developed his own trauma demons and grew into a sociopath. Neither one of my parents ever learned the damage he inflicted on me.

To complicate matters, and make them worse, when I was ten years old, my adoptive-father died while having experimental heart surgery. When faced with the prospect of being a cardiac invalid or risking having the heart surgery, he chose the surgery. After he passed, I became the glue to hold the family together. It was very hard on me. I never imagined things could get worse, but they did.

At the age of 15, my mother had a mental breakdown and tried to kill me with a knife, because I would not get her cigarettes. I called the police, and also my aunt (my adoptive father's sister), and asked her to come up and get me, please. My aunt and uncle did take me in, even though they had five adopted children already. Interestingly, they were never able to have children of their own either, so they had taken in and adopted my uncle's brother's four children when he and his wife had died. Then after that, they chose to adopt a girl on their own, too. So, I went to live with all of them.

It was very difficult living there.

The sad reality is that I never felt wanted as a child. In my mind, I knew that I was adopted to help with my mother's mental illness. She never really loved and cared for me. On top of that, her family made it clear to me when I was young, that because I was not a blood relative, I was not really part of the family.

My adopted father's family was nice to me, on the surface, but there was always the undercurrent of me not fitting in because I was not blood. As of this writing, I have not seen or spoken with my adoptive family for forty years.

As I reflect back on what happened, I see how many gaps there were in my support network, how many holes in my safety net. For example, never was counseling of any type offered to me. I grew up thinking I was unlovable, unwanted. Yet I can see now how I was desperately searching for meaning and understanding, for love. But as the old country song goes, I started "*looking for love in all the wrong places.*" I connected to the wrong things.

As often happens to abused and traumatized persons, I also connected to the wrong people, even a *series* of wrong people.

I ended up getting married at the age of 21. It seemed like it would last, that I finally found love and stability. We even had a son together, but after 13 ½ years, a woman from 20 years before in his past came back into his life and he decided *she* was the love of his life. He left me and our son to be with her. At the time, I became very angry at God, thinking He didn't love me, either.

I'd done everything right, I thought. I'd gone to church, gotten married in the church, stayed committed to the marriage the whole 13 ½ years. I supported this man through a failed business, a major illness, and was faithful. *I guess that doesn't matter to God*, I thought. Some people say they are through with love after an experience like this, but I still had such a desire to belong and be loved.

After my divorce, I became involved with another man and married shortly after my divorce was final. This was a difficult marriage in some respects, but in other times there were happy moments. It might have been something I could deal with, but after 2 ½ years he became ill with heart problems and died. Trauma again.

In fact, my second husband died, and just one week later to the hour and day, my first husband dropped dead at work. In one week, I had lost the two main men who had been in my life. My son had lost both fathers. He still struggles with grief, many years later. And me? Here

I was a widow (twice you could say) only in my late 30s, with a 13-year-old son to raise on my own. I *really* became angry at God then. I went on a destructive path that lasted a few years. My greatest regrets are the traumatic damage I caused my son, and the time wasted not turning to the Lord, whom I would eventually discover is the one true and faithful lover of my soul.

But not yet!

It was not until I had a horrible relationship with an abusive man, and finally broke from him, that I started to change. God had a plan I now know, but I still did not see it. I now know the Spirit of God stepped in to stop me from further destroying myself and hurting my son. I had lost my house through foreclosure, and my son and I had moved to an apartment in Bucks County. Working two jobs just to get by, I decided I did not want any more relationships with men, being tired of rescuing them from their problems.

Wouldn't you know it, it was then I met a man, Rande, who would become my 3rd husband.

Now I know you might be quietly thinking, *there she goes again!* But this time was different. We built our relationship on the solid foundation of our faith and our shared commitment to serve others.

We have both come so far. There were bumps, craters, twists, and turns along the route. But we never stopped loving and growing with each other and God. Now I know the trauma of my life was there to help prepare me to be the person I am today. I still have regrets, shame, and disappointment in myself at times. However, I have learned through studying trauma and healthy grieving to expect these things from time to time. And my study of the Bible teaches me how I need to surrender every day to the Lord, to walk in peace.

What a wonderful gift the Lord has given me. My experiences and journey of healing have allowed me to work with women suffering trauma and severe life trials, telling them about my journey. Eventually, a great dream of my life came true, when I got to be a Co-Founder of *The Hope and Help Network*—where we are committed to helping people deal with issues of financial strain (poverty), addictions, and despair (to avoid it or come back from it by becoming a healthy griever). All of these areas I personally struggled with, in one way or another. And as a recovering addict and vet, Rande is right there beside me.

Working as a part of the Healthy Grieving team has further shown me how important it is to learn about grief and traumatic grief injuries that throw our lives off course. I am a Traumatic Grief Injury Survivor, and desire everyone to become a healthy griever for LIFE!

Section 3—Additional Assessment Tools to Examine Your Grief

Am I a Healthy Griever?—A Check-up

Letting Grief Speak—Making a Written Statement of Present State of Grief

Life Challenges Survey

Discerning the Downward D's

A.C.E. Test for Possible Trauma from Childhood Experiences

Am I a Healthy Griever?—Self Evaluation

	Agree:	Very Much	Much	Not Much	Not at All							
G	1. When I have had disappointments and losses in the past I have given myself time to recover.	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
	2. I am generally patient with myself.	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
	3. I understand that people heal at a different pace.	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
	4. I have learned not to be pressured by people saying “just get over that” or “you should be beyond that.”	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
R	5. I have learned that helping others in their grief and sorrow has helped me to heal in mine.	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
	6. I have discovered the benefit of letting others come along side of me and support me in my grief.	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
	7. I am <i>not too</i> self-reliant and independent and have been able to receive offers of help from others.	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
	8. I am not afraid to ask for help and support and have done so in the past.	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
I	9. I believe it is important and helpful to ask a/my Higher Power (or God) to walk with me in my grief.	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
	10. I would be open to being involved in some kind of support group to help me heal.	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
E	11. I have spent time seeking to gain a better understanding of my inner thoughts and feelings.	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
	12. I have come to recognize many of the things that trigger my emotions.	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
V	13. I would say that I have a healthy self-love for myself and a positive view of myself.	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
	14. I recognize that feelings of <i>worthlessness</i> and <i>shame</i> are unhealthy and will hinder my healing.	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
E	15. I am aware that it is natural for persons who have suffered loss to be triggered by smells, songs, etc.	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
	16. I have learned that healing from grief/losses is a long Journey, requiring patience and not to be rushed.	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0

Letting Grief Speak—Putting Grief Experiences into Words

*“Give SORROW words, for GRIEF that does not speak, whispers
the o’er-fraught (heavy) heart and bids it break.”*

—Macduff to Malcolm in *Macbeth* by Shakespeare

Use the space below and take some time to write down what it is you are experiencing in your grief injury (injuries). Use words like: “I feel like...”. Try to use word pictures or an analogy— “I feel like a ship tossed at sea.” Most of all, just share honestly what you are feeling. Along with your words, or instead of them, you might draw a picture if that helps you to get in touch with your feelings.

Life Challenges Survey

This survey is intended to serve as a *snapshot* of your emotional/mental state at this time in your life. It is also intended to be used as a conversation starter, leading to more meaningful self-examination.
(Circle the number that best describes how *frequently* you experience the emotion/attitude in question.)

	<u>Most of</u> <u>the time</u>	<u>Often</u>	<u>Sometimes</u>	<u>Rarely</u> <u>ever</u>	<u>Never</u>						
<u>Pain/Suffering</u> <i>"I feel physical discomfort and feel like I am suffering."</i>	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
<u>Alienation/Loneliness</u> <i>"I feel alone and distant from other people..."</i>	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
<u>Anxiety/Fear</u> <i>"I am fearful and worried about things and my future..."</i>	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
<u>Guilt/Failure</u> <i>"I feel like I have failed, and Done too many wrong things..."</i>	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
<u>Anger/Frustration</u> <i>"I feel angry, upset and frustrated at people or life..."</i>	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
<u>Loss/Emptiness/Grief</u> <i>"I feel sorry and grieve over people and things I have lost..."</i>	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
<u>Despair/Hopelessness</u> <i>"I feel like I have little or no hope for my future..."</i>	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
<u>Confusion/Aimlessness</u> <i>"I feel confused and without direction in my life..."</i>	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
<u>Low Self-Worth/Shame</u> <i>"I feel bad about myself and my worth as a person..."</i>	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0

(Material adapted from workshop by Brenda Weaver and Veronica Carey)

Life Challenges Survey Follow-Up

What do the results of your Life Challenges Survey tell you about the state of your health—emotionally, mentally, physically, relationally, and spiritually? While there is no “score” that can be added up that would “categorize” you, or in any way “diagnose” you, it is clear that if you have any high numbers there may well be some deep issues that could use some help and healing.

You may want to share your results with another person for some feedback—doing the Healthy Grieving task of *Inviting* someone to journey with you. Do they see what you see? Are you being too self-critical, or not honest enough with yourself? Have you been hiding too much of what you have been feeling?

Discerning the Downward D's (Slippery Slope of Sadness)

Side A

Using *Psalms* and *Proverbs* to give us the language of the heart and mind to understand our condition and what we are feeling.

Disappointment

"I wasn't expecting that to happen, but I have to deal with it. I have to keep hope alive."

"Why are you so DOWNCAST, O my soul, why so DISTURBED within me..." Psalm 42:5

Discouragement

"I can't seem to get a break; it is tough to stay hopeful!"

"How long must I wrestle with my thoughts..." Ps 13: 2

"I am lonely and afflicted, the troubles of my heart have multiplied." Ps 25:16

Depression

"I feel hopeless, unable to see any end in sight. My mind seems so cloudy."

"I lie awake and have become like a bird alone on a roof." Ps 102:7

"My thoughts trouble me and I am DISTRAUGHT." Ps 55:2

"My heart is wounded within me." Ps 109:22

"My eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and my body with grief, I have become like broken pottery." Ps 31: 9

Despair

"My GUILT has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear." Ps 38:4

"All is lost. What is there to live for, what hope is there?"

"...trouble is near and there is no one to help." Ps 22:11

"I am confined and cannot escape...darkness is my closest friend." Ps 88:8, 18

TT 2/15/14

Death

Learning to Climb the High Road of Hope, Help and Healing

Side B

Using *Psalms* and *Proverbs* as the language of the heart and mind to seek God's help in finding rescue, relief, restoration, rest, refreshment and renewal.

"Be at REST once more, O my soul, for the Lord has been good to you." Ps 116:7

Disappointment

"I wasn't expecting that to happen, but I have to deal with it. I have to keep hope alive."

"Why are you so downcast, O my soul, why so disturbed within me, PUT YOUR HOPE IN GOD..." Ps 42:5

Discouragement

"I can't seem to get a break; it is tough to stay hopeful!"

"Hear my prayer, O Lord, let my cry for help come to you." Ps 102:1

Depression

"I feel hopeless, unable to see any end in sight. My mind seems so cloudy."

"Your word is a lamp for my feet, and a light for my path." Ps 119:105

"He restores my soul" Ps 23: 4

"Unless the Lord had given me HELP, I would soon have dwelt in the silence of death." Ps 94:17

"The Path of life leads upward for the wise, to keep him from going to the grave." Proverbs 16:24

TT 2/15/14

"God is our REFUGE and strength, an ever-present HELP in times of trouble." Psalm 46:1

"CAST YOUR CARES on the Lord, and he will sustain you." Ps 55:22

"BE STILL before the Lord and wait patiently for Him." Ps 37:7

"GUIDE me... my HOPE is in you all day long." Ps 25:4

"TRUST in Him at all times, O people, pour out your hearts to Him, for God is our refuge." Ps 62:8

"When I said 'my foot is slipping', your LOVE, O Lord, SUPPORTED ME." Ps 94:18

"Give me RELIEF from my distress, be merciful to me and hear my prayer." Ps 4:1

"In the day of trouble I will CALL TO YOU and you will answer me." Ps 86:7

"Find rest O my soul in God alone, my HOPE comes from Him." Ps 62:5

"Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." Ps 103:2

"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and RENEW a steadfast spirit within me." Ps 51:10

"All is lost. What is there to live for, what hope is there?"

"The Lord is close to the broken-hearted" Ps 34:18

Death

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE)

We've included the questions from the ACE Study, developed by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), because they describe some of the kinds of behaviors and events that children sometimes experience. As a list of possibilities, it is by no means complete. There are many other difficult circumstances that kids often face. Perhaps you know that only too well. Parental favoritism and scapegoating, emotional abandonment, parental narcissism, sibling emotional and physical abuse, and bullying are a few more of the troubling personal circumstances that are often felt as traumatic grief injuries, and we haven't even touched on the unfair societal forces and pressures that often impact children. We think it is important to consider the possibility that something in your childhood might be affecting you because we agree with therapist Jasmin Lee Cori, who said, in her book, *Healing from Trauma*, "If you try to short-circuit the grief, the grief will find a way to short-circuit you."

Looking at this list is a way for you to take a look at your past, perhaps to shed some light where you've never really wanted or chosen to look before. Or perhaps this list provides some affirmation that you, or someone close to you, hit some rough patches as a child. If there are any descriptions on this page that ring a bell for you, please DON'T DESPAIR! First of all, remember, when you think of those times, that *none* of it was your fault, and you deserved better. You still do. *Value* yourself, and *Invite* someone – a professional counselor or therapist, or a pastor with counseling training, might be the best choice here – to help you on your journey toward healing. You likely couldn't do anything about these TGI experiences as a child, but you can address them now. There are people with training who can help you process those experiences. Take that important step on your Journey of Healing and reach out for help and support. You are so worth it!

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Questionnaire

While you were growing up, during your first 18 years of life:

1. Did a parent or other adult in the household **often** ...
swear at you, insult you, put you down, or humiliate you?

Or

Act in a way that made you afraid that you might be physically hurt?

Yes No

2. Did a parent or other adult in the household

often push, grab, slap, or throw
something at you?

Or

Ever hit you so hard that you had marks or were injured?

Yes No

3. Did an adult or person at least 5 years older than you **ever**...
touch or fondle you or have you touch their body in a sexual way?

Or

Try to or actually have oral, anal, or vaginal sex with you?

Yes No

4. Did you **often** feel that ...
no one in your family loved you or thought you were important or special?

Or

Your family didn't look out for each other, feel close to each other, or support each other?

Yes No

5. Did you **often** feel that ...
you didn't have enough to eat, had to wear dirty clothes, and had no one to protect you?

Or

Your parents were too drunk or high to take care of you or take you to the doctor if you
needed it?

Yes No

6. Were your parents **ever** separated or divorced?

Yes No

7. Was your mother or stepmother:

often pushed, grabbed, slapped, or had something thrown at her?

Or

sometimes or often kicked, bitten, hit with a fist, or hit with something hard?

Or

ever repeatedly hit over at least a few minutes or threatened with a gun or knife?

Yes No

8. Did you live with anyone who was a problem drinker or alcoholic or who used street
drugs?

Yes No

(continued on next page.)

9. Was a household member depressed or mentally ill or did a household member attempt suicide?

Yes No

10. Did a household member go to prison?

Yes No

Section 4—Resources and Tools for Healing

Healing for Traumatic Grief from
a Christian/Biblical Perspective

Additional Practices, Therapies, and Tools for Healing

Suggestions for Finding Professional Help
for Grief-Injuries

Healing for Traumatic Grief from a Christian/Biblical Perspective: A Special Focus on the Heart

We have talked much about changing our perspective on grief and loss, in particular, to recognize that it comes in many ways, from disappointments, trials, and death. We have also said that *injury* is another word that can be used to describe what happens to us, emotionally, mentally or otherwise. Included in that *otherwise* is injury to us *spiritually*, which we describe here as an injury to our *hearts*. As people of faith, we believe that any injury to our hearts is also a *spiritual injury*.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, and in many others, the heart is used as a way to describe the seat of emotions and the center of our life. Wise old Solomon wrote, nearly 3,000 years ago, “***Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.***” (Prov 4:23)

All grief injuries affect the heart in some way, but traumatic grief injury is greater and reaches deeper into our hearts and minds. So, let’s talk about the spiritual effects on our heart when dealing with traumatic grief. To begin with, traumatic grief often causes a profound sense of emptiness – of feeling dead inside. TGI can also generate powerful fears because it assaults our sense of security.

As humans, we naturally yearn for love, acceptance, and value. Also, naturally, we seek to meet these needs through other people. When they fail us, and they will fail us, the emotions of anger, sadness, emptiness, and depression will often come out. We may then seek to kill these uncomfortable feelings with drugs, alcohol, or destructive relationships. God tells us in Jeremiah 17:5, “***Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart departs from the Lord.***”

At some point, maybe we felt it was our fault the trauma experience happened. As we work to bury the feelings of grief, we can find ourselves stuck in the mud pit of guilt, sorrow, and pain. We then believe no one wants to hear about our pain. However, God both wants to and is ready to hear. Psalm 34:18, “***The Lord is near to those who have a broken heart...***”

Some of the challenges we incur when we start to deal with our traumatic grief are the roadblocks we place when trying to build a protective barrier around our hearts. We use the emotions of denial, avoidance, fear, anger, guilt, and shame, but these only block our hearts from God being able to heal us. When we avoid our pain in these ways, we miss the opportunity to trust God with our hearts. We are left solely depending on ourselves to heal.

However, when we recognize and acknowledge these as unhealthy emotions when they persist over the long-term, we can begin to work uncovering the thoughts and beliefs that are driving these negative emotions. (The various worksheets in this manual—in the *SAG* and *Journey of Healing Road* sections — are given for you to use as tools to uncover and address

these emotions.)

It is important to be mindful of our physical health, as well as our feelings, when dealing with a past traumatic episode. We need to have our coping tools ready, which include this manual and our Bibles, to work through the grief and loss as we rewrite our story. Through building a relationship with God, we will be helped to navigate these troubled waters.

The major issue here is whether we are going to allow the traumatic grief that occurred in our lives to control our hearts and minds throughout our lives. How we respond to trauma and the loss of security, innocence, and control determines what happens in our hearts.

To recover from the losses caused by traumatic grief we must be ready to change the narrative of our life story. A decided heart must choose what is the most important part of our story – *what happened to us, or how we respond to the loss/es?* Choosing our response to what happened to us can enlarge our capacity for God to work in our hearts. In what may seem like a paradox, we discover that in yielding our lives to God, we recover them as never before. Jesus once said: ***“For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.”*** (Matthew 16:25 KJV)

We need to understand that it is the Lord who can affect real and lasting change in our hearts and lives, as we surrender more of ourselves. To recover from trauma and loss, we must seek the vision of the greater role God has planned for us. Jesus tells us in John 15:5, ***“...without Me you can do nothing.”*** This journey of the recovery of our hearts comes through acknowledging the sovereignty of, and putting our trust in, God.

At this point, you may be saying: *“I can understand how my heart can be affected, so how can I find God’s healing? What can I do in a practical way?”*

One effective way is through utilizing the spiritual disciplines of silence and solitude, enabling us to become close to ourselves and the Lord. Many times, when experiencing a traumatic grief episode, tears well up and we are afraid to let go of the grief. However, when practicing silence and solitude, we can give these overwhelming feelings of grief to the Lord. The Lord walks with us, as David reminds us in Psalm 16:11, ***“You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”***

Here is an EXERCISE: Do this in solitude when you are not constrained by time. Sit with God, not looking for answers but simply listening.

- Close your eyes – slow your breathing.
- Ask the Lord what He wants to bring to your mind.
- Think about a loss that has been weighing on your heart.
- How does your heart feel right now?
- How does your body feel right now?
- Notice the messages going through your mind.
- Are there judgments about the loss going through your mind?
- Do you feel you are connecting with your thoughts?

- Do you sense God's presence? If not, what do you think is hindering it?

Another practical practice is connecting with Scripture. This personalizes our search for a relationship with God. It helps to create a heart of intimacy and connection. As people who have experienced traumatic grief, we need to reflect on the fact that the Lord wants to comfort those who mourn. Matthew 5:4; ***“Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.”*** Scripture helps us to put words to our anguish and our grief, giving God the opportunity to speak into our pain.

Many have discovered that it is in the trenches of life where we find God. God uses loss, pain, and brokenness to expose our need for the only thing that will ultimately satisfy, and that is Jesus. Jesus reminds us in 2 Corinthians 12:9, ***“My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.”*** And David tells God in Psalm 73:25-26, ***“Whom have I in heaven but You? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You. My flesh and my heart fail; But God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”***

While this has been a brief discussion on how we need to address the emotions which have controlled us for so long, you are encouraged to start here and delve further into reviving your heart and building, or rebuilding, the relationship with the one Power above all.

Additional Practices, Therapies, and Tools for Healing

There are many approaches a person can use to address the TGI experiences in their lives. We've mentioned several previously, namely, counseling, journaling, prayer, and the support of others. All of these have helped us in our healing journeys. There are also many other modalities that have been helpful to people as they deal with their pain and grief. We list some of them here, both to give you a sense of the scope of options you have, and to encourage you to explore any that sound interesting/useful to you in your situation. We would like to note that this is *not* an exhaustive list of all the choices that are available to you. Furthermore, research is ongoing, and new forms of therapy are often suggested. If you seek counseling, and your trained, credentialed counselor prefers a modality you are not familiar with, keep an open mind, do some research as to its effectiveness, and, if it sounds safe and potentially useful to you, give it the time and attention it deserves.

You can explore many of the options below online, or in books from the library, if you so choose, and become more informed as to what they entail. You might note that there is often an overlap between some of these methods/techniques. Also, many of these forms of therapy work well together, amplifying their helpfulness. We list each of these, not as an endorsement, and in no particular order, to make you aware of the many methods people have successfully used to address their TGI experiences. You could try some of these on your own, with minimal explanation (for example, breath work). Others require a trained therapist to assist and support you.

Mindfulness

Meditation

Breath work

Exercise

Visualization

Guided imagery

Rhythmic movement, other dance therapies

Music therapies

Art therapies

Acupressure, and other complementary therapies, such as massage and Reiki

Talk therapy for individuals, which exists in various forms

Support groups

ACT (Acceptance and Commitment Therapy)

EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing)

Thought Field Therapy (TFT)
Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT)
Neurobiofeedback
Wholistic Hybrid EFT/EMDR (WHEE)
Imagery Rehearsal Therapy
Visual Kinesthetic Dissociation (VKD)
Various animal/pet bond therapies (horses, dogs, cats)
Psychomotor therapy

Additionally, any of the books or websites listed in the Bibliography would be good sources for useful information. Below is a list of other resources, perhaps not specifically quoted in this manual, but helpful in shaping our understanding of grief, or trauma, or how to proceed to deal with them. Some of the books below are also listed in the Bibliography, but they are so foundational to our understanding of TGIs, or healing from them, that we have listed them here, too.

Healing from Trauma, by Jasmin Lee Cori, MS, LPC. Written by a trauma survivor, who focuses on “understanding your symptoms and reclaiming your life.”

Constructive Wallowing, by Tina Gilbertson. This book focuses on helping people to actually *feel* their feelings, an unfamiliar experience for those of us who’ve been trained to suppress them.

Acupressure for Emotional Healing, by Michael Reed Gach, PhD., and Beth Ann Henning, Dipl., A.B.T.

The Transformation, by James S. Gordon, MD. This is a helpful, hopeful book. Dr. Gordon is the founder and director of The Center for Mind-Body Medicine, which has a great website: cmbm.org Look around online, and especially under the Self-care link, found by scrolling down on the website, to get some specific ideas of how various techniques can help you on your journey of healing.

Unattended Sorrow, by Stephen Levine.

Invisible Heroes, by Belleruth Naparstek, LISW, BCD. Ms. Naparstek does a lot of work in the area of guided imagery. This book offers a ton of information to help understand and heal from trauma.

Rewire Your Anxious Brain, by Catherine M. Pittman, PhD and Elizabeth M. Karle, MLIS. If you struggle with anxiety, this book provides helpful, easy to understand explanations, and tips and exercises to get your neurons firing in ways that will help minimize anxiety.

Break Free: Acceptance and Commitment Therapy in 3 Steps by Tanya J. Peterson, MS, NCC. Though not specifically for grief, this is a great workbook that focuses on getting unstuck and moving forward in life.

The Body Keeps the Score, Bessel Van Der Kolk, MD. This valuable, approachable book explains the brain science of trauma, and integrates that knowledge with research to develop and explain treatments for people who have experienced trauma.

Understanding Your Grief: Ten Essential Touchstones for Finding Hope and Healing Your Heart, Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD, C.T. Dr. Wolfelt has written many books on the topic of grief, and they are all helpful.

Suggestions on Finding Professional Help for Grief Injuries

If you are thinking about inviting a therapist to assist you in your journey of healing, but don't know of any, here are a few things to keep in mind as you search for one. First, any professionals already in your life might be a good place to find a recommendation. (And you don't have to go into detail, when asking, as to why you would like such a recommendation, unless you want to.) So, your doctor, a social worker, or perhaps your pastor, rabbi, or imam, might know of some good therapists.

Or, perhaps, you have a friend or family member who has a therapist. If you don't want to go to the same therapist, ask them to ask their therapist (or call yourself) for a referral list. Therapists make referrals all the time, so this is not an unusual request. Also, there are plenty of listings online for various types of therapists. For example, PsychologyToday.com has an extensive list by locality, which offers information, written by the therapist, that includes their education and experience, fees and insurance accepted, the types of challenges they help with, and their general approach to doing therapy.

All of this can help you to look for someone who might *click* with you. As an added bonus, Psychology Today verifies that the people who list on their site actually have the credentials they claim to have. This is something that the phone company does not do when they list people in the phone book, so try to get additional information if you go the phone book route. Other sources for recommendations include websites that focus on a particular challenge like trauma, or professional organization websites, like the American Psychological Association, or The American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists, which lists therapists by location, specialty, and accreditation. Also, your health insurance website might have a list of suggested providers.

You may notice that there are different types of titles on a provider list website such as: psychologist, licensed social worker, licensed counselor, to name a few. The differences in the educational paths that they took are not too important to your outcome as a client. What matters is their expertise and interest in your particular need – for example, trauma, or grief and trauma. A person with any of the above titles can help you address your concerns, but if your concern is trauma, make sure they have real experience in that area.

Below are six suggested interview questions to ask a prospective therapist:

1. Can you tell me about your education and training? When did you start working as a counselor/therapist/social worker/psychologist? (Use the relevant job title.) Did your training include being in therapy yourself?
2. Are you licensed, or certified, and if so, by which organization(s)? Do you belong to any professional organizations?
3. What are your particular areas of interest/specialization?

4. Do you have personal experience with trauma? (Or, with grief? Or whatever the challenge you, the therapy seeker, are grappling with.)
5. If the counselor you are interviewing doesn't have any experience with your particular need, can they recommend someone who does?
6. Can you tell me about your fees? (And, if your budget is tight, "Do you have sliding scale options?")

There are many similar lists to be found online, and some of those suggest more than these basic questions. If the idea of more questions appeals to you, check some of those lists out. Lastly, but by no means the least important thing we suggest, is for you to pray for help in finding the right person.

Appendix

Quick Reference Guide of Terms and Abbreviations

Bibliography and Suggested Readings

Quick Reference Guide for Terms and Abbreviations

ACE – Adverse Childhood Experiences Study: Developed by the Centers for Disease Control to understand the negative effects of childhood problematic events.

Catch-Up Mourning – A term used by Dr. Alan Wolfelt to describe the task of giving attention to any grief you may have carried from past losses in your life.

Fight – Flight – Freeze – The automatic responses to stress that occur in everyone when experiencing stress and/or harm.

Grief Injury—Current terminology for the effects of significant loss of any type in an individual.

Grief-Work—Putting the time and effort into dealing with significant losses, past and present.

G.R.I.E.V.E. – Refers to the six tasks of a Healthy Griever:

Give to yourself.

Receive from others.

Invite others to journey with you.

Examine your life.

Value yourself.

Expect you will have good days and bad.

PTSD – Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome – see explanation of Traumatic Grief.

SAG – Sorrow – Anger – Guilt: Three of the dominant emotional responses to a grief injury.

Stress-Response System – All the bodily reactions activated when experiencing stress.

Traumatic Grief –Termed developed by Dr. Alan Wolfelt to more accurately describe **PTSD** and its effects on individuals who have had more difficult (traumatic) grief experiences.

TGI – Traumatic Grief Injury

TGIS – Traumatic Grief Injury Survivor

TGIT – Traumatic Grief Injury Thrive

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