

R. GLENN KELLY'S

THE
GRIEFCASE

A silhouette of a man walking away on a path at night, carrying a briefcase, with streetlights illuminating the scene.

A MAN'S GUIDE
TO HEALING AND
MOVING FORWARD IN GRIEF

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THE GRIEFCASE

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DEDICATION

The incredible gift of being so close to another is experiencing the beauty of *unconditional love*. With their unfortunate passing, the majesty of that love remains in our hearts and will eventually urge each of us to seek happiness within the new normal.

It is hard to imagine any level of happiness following the loss of someone loved so deeply. However, without happiness, life would have no meaning, and love knows that. For the majority of those who have lost someone so dear, happiness can only be achieved by unselfishly helping others.

This book is dedicated to those men and women who have founded, work for, or volunteer in the many grief and bereavement support organizations across the United States, as well as around the globe.

These non-profit organizations are staffed with incredible people who have experienced traumatic loss themselves. As they move forward in their grief journey, they now find their own level of happiness in reaching out a hand and welcoming any bereaved soul who would have need for it.

INTRODUCTION

If reading this, like me you are probably now in a fellowship you certainly did not want to join. Yet, here we are, brother. Just please know from the start, **you are not alone**. My intent is to assist other men who have experienced the tragic loss of someone near and dear by offering direction down the path towards the **New Normal**.

What is the new normal? First, know I would never lie or tell half-truths to any soul who has suffered the passing of a loved one just to make him feel better. Your loved one is gone and there simply, undeniably is no way to bring them back. For many of us, we enjoyed a wonderful and normal life before the loss. That life cannot be brought back now, so together we *must* work towards a new normal where memories no longer debilitate us but instead bring a smile.

My own initiation into this fellowship began in the year 2003 when my mother passed. One evening while watching television, she complained of a chill, and before my father could return with a blanket, she was gone. Then came the slow and agonizing death

of cancer when it took my father just a few short years later.

I certainly mourned them both but shoved much of my grief deep inside after each loss. Although they loved me dearly, on top of my manly instincts to appear strong, I held to some deep regret issues that included not visiting often in their later years. With each of my parents, when the pain of grief came, it was always accompanied by that sharp sting of regret, which I eased by tucking all the agonizing emotions back inside.

Tragically, two years after my father passed, I would lose my teenage son and only child to heart failure. I refused to grieve his loss for some time afterward, not only because of my male programming but because pushing it back inside had worked so well with the grief of my parents. Without acknowledging the pain, I was able to return to my life and function at the same levels I had before. To me, it seemed the natural way for a man to respond to loss.

This was my son, however, and his spirit and love within me was too strong. The anguishing need to grieve my son's loss would come, and with it also the

unresolved grief I carried for my parents. I was emotionally in trouble and knew I needed help. Admittedly, I had overcome some of my male programmings and began to grieve, but there was still that ego-controlled part of me that knew I would not seek professional help.

I would turn to books, though. I sought out ones that focused specifically on grieving men, yet found almost nothing. So, I struck out on my own to research emotions, which I knew were the very foundation of grief. I would begin with emotions in general, and then turn to clinical research and published papers on men, then women, followed by why each sex process emotions so differently.

I was feverish in my pursuits and grateful for my discoveries, as it certainly put me on my path towards moving forward. My findings revealed so much which should have seemed obvious before, but I admit to standing so close to the trees that I could not see the forest.

I would consume numerous articles that discussed how as young sons we were programmed to be men, and how our very DNA is actually prewired with many of our male behavioral traits. Those revelations,

however, would not be my biggest takeaway. Instead, **emotion** itself would become one of my most valued discoveries.

Through my studies, it would become obvious that emotion is actually one of the human senses, along with sight, touch, taste, hearing, and smell. While we pay little to no attention to it, all the data taken in by those five senses is processed and resolved in some way. Yet, as men, we take in data from emotional stimulation and hold it inside against its will. My findings led me to understand just how incredibly destructive that can actually be.

As part of my own journey towards the new normal, I would eventually write and publish the book, “Sometimes I Cry in the Shower: A Grieving Father’s Journey to Wholeness and Healing.” After the release, I would leave corporate America and dedicate my life to the advocacy of male grief support, and I could not have chosen a more rewarding path in my life.

As I stated earlier, you are never alone in your loss. After my book went public, I would become involved in numerous national grief and bereavement

support organizations that, of course, I did not know even existed before my tragedy

Within these groups, I would meet some of the most compassionate and kind souls, all of whom instantly became lifelong friends. When I walked into my very first grief support conference, I honestly expected a solemn event. Instead, I walked into a room holding hundreds of smiling, laughing, and joyous souls. These groups are truly something anyone going through a loss should seek out.

A large part of my male grief advocacy is to be a conduit to those support groups. Please use the links provided at the end of this book to research valuable information for those in your area. They truly want only to reach out a hand and healing heart to you. Having experienced heartrending loss themselves, they recognize the pathway to moving forward involves helping others.

I also wrote earlier that I knew I would not seek professional help in my grief. That was me. I knew myself well enough to realize my ego was not going to allow that. Just as we all grieve differently, though, no two of us are exactly alike. I understand I paint with a broad brush when stating that most men will avoid

mental health professionals, but you must agree that is generally true.

While I tend to focus my grief support and advocacy on men, I am also aware that not every man is going to fit into the stereotypical precept. There will always be those that express their emotions in customary “feminine” ways, just as there will be women who express theirs in the more traditional “male” pattern. Yet, overall generalities still comfortably prevail for each sex.

If you are, in fact, comfortable and desirable of professional help, I unequivocally implore you to seek it out. However, please do not just open a directory and pick one out blindly. Maybe you would feel more at ease with someone who has experienced deep loss themselves. If so, they are out there. Seek them out.

Look into the study courses and certifications held specifically by each professional on the subject of grief and bereavement. You would be surprised to find out how many seek supplemental studies in grief, as the topic is often only a brief pass over or not covered at all during formal education.

Please know that I am not going to pull any punches in this book. That is not why you are here. You are reading this book because you have lost someone you love deeply and are not looking to read how life will just be okay. Only you can make yourself okay, and to do that you will need to move forward through the grief. Moving forward is living a full life again, but does not mean living without the love and memories of the one who is now gone.

No one ever fully recovers from the death of someone so deeply loved. However, together we can discover the pathway that winds along our journey to the new normal and a life filled with hope, peace, and purpose. May we each find just that.

CHAPTER ONE ~ THE BIG QUESTION OF WHY

Love and death are the two great hinges on which all human sympathies turn.

~ B. R. Hayden

Before we get to the Griefcase, I have to bring up a proverbial elephant in the room. **Why did our loved one have to die?** What an incredibly difficult and sensitive question for those of us who have lost someone. Their death seems to be so unfair and has no reason.

Somewhere in your soul, you know there just has to be something to explain it, right? Yet, it is so very hard to get your hands around it because there really can be no explanation or conventional understanding. It should be no surprise that as a man you have an *intrinsic need* to find reason and understanding when bad things happen. It is in your very genetic coding.

The next few words are ones I want to put out there so there are no misconceptions: **I believe in God.**

This is not a religious book, per se, but I hope you will tolerate a little bit of Bible thumping early on. I am not overly concerned, however. According to a Pew Research Center poll conducted of 230 countries around the world, 5.8 of the world's almost 7.0 billion global inhabitants believe in God too. So, although my ego would be somewhat crushed, I will understand if approximately 2.0 billion people simply stop reading right now. At least, eight out of ten will keep going.

Regardless, in God is where you can always find some comfort in your loss. Whether He is referred to as Yahweh, Elohim, Shàngdì, or one of so many other names, they all come back to the same; **The Creator**. You and I are each a child of that Creator and have our own separate and individual plan for the time spent here on earth.

Some of our more "enlightened" friends believe they have found their calling and are at peace, but many more are still unsure exactly what their divine plan truly is. One day, and I hope long from now, I will find out whether I was correct about my own purpose but feel as if I might be headed down the right path.

Tragically, I lost my son and only child. Believe me, I miss him with a searing heat that could melt the sun. However, I realize now that he and God had a very intimate and personal plan for his life here on earth. Each of our lost loved ones did too. They are gone now, however, and we are left without someone who made our daily life so wonderful to live.

How can you even begin to make sense of that? You cannot, really, since again the plans of others were laid out specifically for them. Nevertheless, you certainly *can* take great comfort in knowing that when God was designing His divine plan specifically for that someone you love so much, He pointed down from Heaven and said, **“There! Right there is someone worthy of you spending time with on earth.”** That alone attests to the love that God has for you.

Therefore, yes, recognize that your lost loved one had an individual relationship with God and let that fill your heart with great comfort. You were specifically chosen to be a part of your loved one’s life. Further, recognize and hold to the fact that you also have a purpose and divine plan as well. It was designed

intimately and lovingly only *for you* by the Creator. You are still here, too. That little fact testifies that you are not done with life and are still living out your plan.

Even when you eventually come to terms with that, you will still ask *why* from time to time. You have a strong desire deep inside to have some understanding of why you lost someone loved so dearly. Realize you will never know the answer while here on earth, but that will not stop the question from coming. Knowing that your lost loved one had an intimate plan with God, however, certainly goes a long way to keeping that question from consuming your every thought, as it may be doing right now.

Before I could come to some level of peace with not knowing *why* my son had to go, I actually had to overcome another elephant, but this one in my own mind: *Why can I not grieve his death?* Discovering that answer would not be simple either.

If you were to consider life questions that are frequently avoided, one of them certainly has to do with male grief. Why do we have such a difficult time dealing with painful emotions, even when related to

the loss of someone very dear to us? If grief itself seems to be a sensitive topic in society, male grief is even more so.

Men do feel the same pain as any woman in loss, and that pain certainly affects men just as deeply. Nonetheless, we men have a tendency to consciously and subconsciously convince ourselves that emotions will get in the way of responsibilities. We also feel that displaying a softer side will allow others to see us as unmanly and weak.

If you are concerned that this book advocates breaking down and crying in front of others, do not be. Like most men, you may have an innate and programmed tendency not to. If so, that is going to be what you have to work with, then. If you can already express your emotions in front of others, then I absolutely applaud you. I, on the other hand, grew up as part of the majority.

While growing from boyhood to a young adult, there were strong influences which conditioned me to keep a constant handle on my masculinity. As with most males, the compulsion to keep a check on the

weaker emotions was handed down to me in a legacy-like manner by my elders. Because of that, there was no way I would ever grieve in front of others.

Unfortunately, I would not grieve in front of myself, either. I simply refused to acknowledge the pain, and, therefore, ignored the emotions. After the traumatic loss of my son, however, I would eventually move to a positive point in my journey where I could thankfully grieve, and grieving became a welcome part of my healing.

That does not mean I fundamentally changed who I was and began to weep and sob openly in front of others. I had to do something, though. I recognized that those pent up emotions were becoming corrosive to my self-esteem, and were going to come out one way or another.

It was up to me how that was going to take place. I could either control that flow of painful emotions, or I could let them explode. If they did explode, I somehow knew not only would they harm me further, but also damage relationships with family, friends, and others in my life.

I would get a little help with that control when suddenly one morning the spirit of my late son came to me while I showered for work. Through unspoken words, he lovingly scolded me for not honoring his memory and for keeping my love for him hidden inside. He let me know that his love was the legacy left for me, and he could continue to live, but only if I would honor his memory.

The dam of emotions burst that morning in the shower and the grief exploded. I cried loudly and in uncontrollable ways for the first time since he left me. I begged for his forgiveness for not being the protector I had always promised, and I yelled at God angrily for taking my child.

There in the shower, my journey towards wholeness and healing began. As I continued to use my daily *cleansing* escape for release, I became aware I was actually moving forward. Now, years down the road, I still occasionally cry in the shower as I share love and memories with the spirit of my son. I leave the shower still longing for him, of course, but not allowing the pain to overwhelm a productive future.

So take heart. In the pages to follow you will become aware that physically expressing your emotions *is* of the utmost importance. Yet, doing so in front of an audience is not a necessity. Find your shower if needed, grieve your loss openly and move forward to your new normal.

CHAPTER TWO ~ RECEIVING YOUR GRIEFCASE

Grief can't be shared. Everyone carries it alone.

His own burden in his own way.

~ Anne Morrow Lindbergh

Let us get on with it then. You, my brother, are carrying a **Griefcase** now, and you probably know the very second you latched on to it. You certainly did not ask for one, did not want one, and like me, probably never thought about having one either. Absolutely no one does. Yet, once you have it, no matter how heavy and burdensome it seems, at first, the Griefcase should be considered as one of the most important tools in moving forward towards a “new normal” in your future.

My Griefcase was handed to me by someone I did not know before that moment, and somewhere in my shock and confusion, I was not really sure what it was when I took hold of it. All I knew was that without warning, I was carrying some crippling new weight, and my mind reeled over the confusion of being forced to take it. Somehow, I was also aware that I would

carry this new Griefcase with me for the rest of my life. Little did I know then it would actually become much heavier over the days and months to come.

So, who has a Griefcase? Anyone who has experienced the traumatic death of someone they love deeply and dearly. The deeper the love, the heavier the Griefcase. What is a Griefcase specifically? It is not really a physical object, but it is very real. In short, the Griefcase is the actual word **Grief** itself.

In our society, the word *grief* is used so often and so casually that it has become the default description of all the painful emotions felt after the passing of a loved one. Yet, grief itself is not a human feeling. It is simply an easy placeholder for emotions such as *anger, guilt, anguish, fear, despair, confusion* and so many more.

While it is never recommended to do so, if you were to ask someone who is recent in their loss how they feel at the moment, they might respond by saying they feel *sad, scared, or lonely*. Since no two people ever process their deep feelings of loss in the same way, another newly bereaved soul might respond to

the same question by saying they *feel anger, confusion, or guilt*. They will not necessarily experience the same emotions at the same time, nor at equal intensities.

It would be very rare, however, to hear any griever come back to the question of how they are feeling by saying, “I feel *grief*.” Again, they will not, simply because grief is not a feeling. It is a descriptor, or a word used to index the multitude of feelings or emotions one might feel after a loss.

Going back again to our two bereaved souls, if you were to ask how either felt at some other time, you would most likely get a different answer than the first. The emotions within grief are many individual feelings that come and go in articulating waves with no prescribed timetable. Yet, each can be just as deeply painful and disconcerting as the other.

So, where does the concept of the **Griefcase** come from? If you will allow an analogy for a mental image, consider Taylor, a good man with a nice job. He has someone in his life he loves deeply, and his days just breeze by somewhat normally. One evening

he arrives home to find the house empty, which is not altogether unusual, but not what he was expecting.

Feeling oddly uneasy, Taylor walks to the kitchen and notices a rather non-descript briefcase lying flat on the kitchen counter. The only thing not plain, really, is the odd, silver chain that juts from the side and ends with a single handcuff. Ignoring that for the moment, he finds a note on top done in unfamiliar handwriting. The note reads:

Taylor,

This case now belongs to you.

Secure the handcuff to your wrist

and then open the case for more.

Ignoring the cuff, Taylor immediately tries to open the briefcase, but sliding the square buttons at either end has no effect on releasing the clasps. He finds no combination lock, so he tries again, but the clasps remain in place. Taylor picks up the handcuff, examines it, and although he can see no keyhole to unlock it, feels an odd compulsion to follow the written instructions and ratchets the cuff around his wrist.

Just as soon as the cuff is secured, the clasps of the briefcase suddenly pop open on their own. Now bound to the case, Taylor opens the lid and inside finds an assortment of empty manila folders lying neatly on the bottom. He picks them up and fans through them with his thumb. They appear brand new and empty, with no markings on the tabs.

When he flips to the last folder, he eyes a single sheet of paper inside. He removes the folder, places the remaining ones back inside the case, and pulls out the sheet. Looking at it, he reads,

Taylor,

This is your Griefcase. It will be yours for the rest of your life. It will be with you always and go everywhere you go.

What you find inside will be confusing and heavy at first. Use the Griefcase to help you process what it holds. If you do, you will be able to lighten the burden and move forward in your life with peace and purpose.

Remember, I am always here, and I love you.

~ God

Just as Taylor finishes reading, he is surprised to see letters slowly materializing on the folder's tab. He watches closely as the letters become focused, and spell out the word, "Shock." Before he can even begin to wonder, though, his phone startles him with a ring. Answering, he is abruptly informed by the caller, a perfect stranger, that the one person Taylor loves most in life has just been killed in a tragic accident.

Numb and stunned, Taylor puts the phone down on the counter and looks down into the Griefcase where he notices that all the manila folders are suddenly strewn about the bottom. Even more, once empty only moments ago, all the folders now seem to be overflowing with assortments of paper.

Taylor reaches into the Griefcase and takes hold of the top folder, noting its thickness while trying to push protruding papers back inside. He then becomes aware of letters materializing slowly on the folder's tab. When they become clear, he can see that the letters spell out the word, "Disbelief."

Taylor looks back down into the Griefcase again and is able to see several of the folder tabs as they lie

disorganized and facing in several directions inside. He begins to see that letters are now actually flickering in and out on the visible tabs. They flash quickly like blinking lights, but with some effort, Taylor is able to make out letters, at first, and then words, such as *Sorrow, Anger, Shame, Fear, and Guilt.*

Taylor glances back at the folder of Disbelief in his hand, and says aloud to himself, “You’re right. This is some kind of mistake.” He tosses the folder back into the Griefcase, closes and latches the lid and turns to walk to the couch where he can just sit and think for a moment.

Just as Taylor takes his first step, the chain attached to the cuff on his wrist goes taut and stops him in his tracks. He raises his wrist to examine the cuff, and struggle as he might, cannot remove it. Resigned he cannot rid himself of the burden, he takes the Griefcase by the handle, carries the hefty weight over to the couch and after sitting, places it flat on his lap. Taylor sighs deeply when he reopens the Griefcase, somehow now aware he will have to deal with each folder inside.

In this analogy, Taylor has lost someone he loves dearly. With that loss, he will not only experience emotions, but many will be ones he has never felt before. The folders represent all those emotions, and as often the case in early bereavement, come completely full and disorganized. Nothing seems to make sense, and disbelief and/or confusion come quickly.

Even more difficult is that the folders do not present themselves just one at a time. While each emotion will require great effort and resolve just to begin to grasp, grief emotions are normally not very kind. They will frequently come two, three, or more at a time, and each will scream for your immediate attention.

Nor do emotions present themselves in any particular order of importance, either. One moment it could be the painful but innocent feelings of *longing* for a lost loved one, and the next moment it is joined by the dark emotion of intense *anger*. Very soon, the folder of *regret* appears and wants attention while you are still frantically leafing through the first two.

It is in this chaos of unfamiliar and random emotions that the griever experiences a great amount of trouble in beginning the journey of moving forward. However, you are here now because your foundational self-worth tells you it is time to do so. You are a child of God and He has every desire for you to experience a full, productive and worthwhile life. It is imperative, then, that you get your hands around those emotions as quickly as possible.

To do this, you can do what men generally do and take advantage of the tools at hand. What tools, you ask? Well, “grief” is the commonly used and accepted word which defines, contains or carries all the emotions after a traumatic loss. You can, therefore, take advantage of that carrier and visualize it as a typical briefcase. Since you are dealing with grief, the simple renaming to “Griefcase” seems perfect.

Then, picture the messy, confusing yet powerful emotions that come after the loss of a loved one. Like documents abruptly tossed into manila folders, in order to make sense and move forward, each has to be individually organized and processed. What could

a man do with folders that require constant attention and must go everywhere he goes for the rest of his life? A wise man might just carry them in his Griefcase.

Used correctly, the Griefcase will allow you to better organize and process each emotional folder. It will also help you to become aware that each emotion is truly a separate entity. In doing so, even when agonizing emotions come two or more at a time, they can be organized, separated and handled more effectively.

With organization within the Griefcase, for example, you can experience and work through the pains of *regret* without allowing elements from the *loneliness* folder to spill over. If that, unfortunately, does occur, the two combining emotions might actually activate your *anger* folder, and send you moving backward instead of forward in your journey.

Addressed in an organized manner, you will be able to remove the majority of the folder contents, but never the folder itself. Even if you could get rid of a folder, there are those you would never give up. For me, the emotions of *loneliness* and *longing* for my

child are folders I would not dare let go. I will never lose the desire to have my child back, but I will not allow it to rule my life.

While you will keep each folder, the end goal is to remove the destructive garbage inside and leave behind only an outline of sorts. Imagine only a single sheet of paper remaining in each folder which serves as your memory of that emotion. It may seem difficult to believe now, but eventually, you will use the recall of those feelings, including *anger*, *guilt*, and *fear* to create a heart so compassionate towards others that it will amaze even you.

Why did I bring in the handcuff visual with the Griefcase analogy? Again, because the emotions of grief after the loss of a loved one will be with you until you leave this earth. Those emotions, carried within the Griefcase, will go everywhere you go and cannot be set aside, even for a moment. It will indeed be a part of your new normal. Right now, it is a very heavy and burdensome case, influencing every aspect of your life. Take heart, though. Although you will carry it

always, it can be lightened significantly and no longer be the huge anchor it starts out to be.

There are other reasons why the Griefcase must stay with you forever. For one, there is a good chance that not all of your emotional folders were delivered at the time of your loss. You may have many initial emotions early in grief and as you process those, others will take advantage of the openings and occupy your thoughts. Confusion, anger, and guilt are just a few of those that can be overwhelming and delay the arrival of others, such as loneliness. However, loneliness will come when it finds the gap.

It is also common for some elements of previously processed grief to present or become heavy again well down the road. These might be brought back by such events as a birthday, anniversary or the holidays, and will probably return year after year. Be aware that each time the emotions come back, they may carry a potentially different reaction.

Other emotions may resurface if you return to an earlier vacation spot which you shared before with your lost loved one. Sporting events, family

gatherings, and even music you enjoyed and listened to together can reopen a folder, or even create a new one. No two people grieve the same, though, so it is impossible to tell specifically what emotions these events would bring to you. When this happens, and it will use the Griefcase to help you deal with it effectively.

That is the Griefcase and the concept that turns it into a proficient tool for the male griever. Before you can even begin to use the Griefcase, however, a major issue must be dealt with first. It was a very difficult problem early in my loss, and I am sure it now affects other men, in the same way, it did me. In fact, I am so sure that I have devoted the entire next chapter to the issue.

As a segue to that chapter, I turn back to Taylor where we left him on the couch, almost blankly staring down into his new Griefcase. Before his very eyes, the top folder suddenly became incredibly thick, and three large letters slowly appeared on the tab. Unlike the others, these three letters did not disappear, and boldly spelled out the word, “**EGO.**”

CHAPTER THREE ~ THE “FALSE-YOU” IN THE GRIEFCASE

Forget the self and you will fear nothing, in whatever level or awareness you find yourself to be.

~ Carlos Castaneda

You get the Griefcase analogy. The word grief, which I openly admit to using frequently myself, is not an emotion or a feeling at all. The word actually comes from the Latin word *gravare*, which means *to make heavy*. For our purposes, however, grief is the commonly used and accepted *carrier* word for all the emotions experienced after the death of a loved one.

As in the analogy with Taylor, each manila folder, or file found in your Griefcase represents an individual and painful emotion that came with your loss. To start moving towards a new normal, you can visualize yourself separating, sorting, and organizing each.

You are already reading the phrase *move forward* quite often. That is because the one thing that *will* happen, *must* happen, is that you will move forward.

You have no choice in that fact. How you move forward is up to you, however.

Your Griefcase, filled with painful emotions comes to you heavy and confusing. Those folders inside will never completely go away, which is why it is said that you will hold to your Griefcase for the rest of your life, even if you have resolved the emotion to what you believe is its fullest.

Each unbearable emotion you once felt so deeply will always leave a tender scar on your soul. When touched later in your life, believe it or not, the sensation will actually bring a smile. Any tears shed will be tears of joyful memories versus the debilitating sense of anguishing pain.

To get to that new normal in your life, you must begin to work through the Griefcase. To really do that in the best way, you should first deal with a potentially impeding part of you that came long before your loss.

Ego - the Gatekeeper

Before we even think about what to do with the Griefcase, there is a way to lighten some of the weight almost immediately. If you recall, the top manila folder

in Taylor’s stack was labeled **EGO**. This may turn out to be the heaviest folder early in a man’s grief, although you might ask if ego actually is an emotion.

No. By definition, ego is not an emotion. Trust me, however, it truly is the number one folder to be handled. Ego may not be classified as an emotion, but in men, it is unquestionably the *gatekeeper* to our feelings. Ego, never a positive trait, comes down to the simple definition of *your own perceived impression of what **others** think of you*. Regardless of how you feel about yourself, ego wants to know if other people think you are good? Do other people think you are strong, smart, and trustworthy? Are you seen as someone who is counted on in bad times?

I have had the honor of speaking publically quite often, which is known to be one of, if not the largest fears for most people. In a recent clinical study solely on male phobias, public speaking was actually not the top phobia. Instead, men reported their greatest fear was being discovered for *not* being the man they portray themselves to be before others. Will someone find out you cannot live up to everything you present

yourself to be? Will they find out you get frightened or feel weak at times? It is easy to see where ego plays here.

Ego vs. Self-Worth and Self-Esteem

Do not confuse ego with either **self-worth** or **self-esteem**. While these two are close in definition, self-worth is your *foundational* awareness that inside you are a good person. Self-worth is who you really are when everything else is stripped away. You began developing this as a child and it should not change as an adult. Self-esteem is a little more fluid, as it relates to how you feel about yourself *at this moment*. Unlike self-worth, self-esteem is normally based on recent failures or accomplishments, which could actually change any minute.

Self-worth and self-esteem may live predominantly in the subconscious, but occasionally come out in conscious thought. Ego, however, lives almost exclusively in conscious thought but wants to take the place of self-esteem inside our minds. That way, it can act on our behalf without control.

Self-worth and self-esteem are powerful in their own right, but can be easily blocked out and overshadowed by ego. Ego wants others to think of you in great ways, even if not true. Like lies we tell aloud if repeated to yourself enough, they eventually become false-truths in your subconscious. Also like lies told in life, each is usually followed by bigger and bigger lies until one day the truth becomes obvious, the whole thing falls apart and takes self-esteem with it.

I have come to refer to the ego as **Edging God Out** and hope you will allow me to use stages of my life as an example of what ego can do. As a child, I was raised with the knowledge that I was my father’s son. He was a good and compassionate man and a hard, honest worker. I was a child of God also, and early in my adult life used the self-worth imparted by those two major influences to live a life of service to my country and to my community.

I would enter the corporate world almost two decades ago when I opted for money over service to others. Even though brought in at a senior level from

the start, I felt a need to make sure everyone knew who I was by wearing my past as Marine and cop on my sleeve. When you are in those fields the titles do not exactly single you out. In corporate America, however, it made me someone others looked up to.

Looking back, I came into my new career with my self-worth intact, as it could never be taken away. I did not have self-esteem, though, as I was entering a new world with no immediate accomplishments to stand on. I did have the pride of who I had been, however, and people looked up to me as someone who could do anything. Understand, though, I was intimidated, anxious, and frankly concerned that someone would find out that I was not a true superstar in my new profession.

I would adapt and become pretty good at being an executive leader over the years. Sadly, I would not equate my success to my self-worth but instead began to believe I was the superman everyone thought I was. I was living on my ego, always propped up by what others thought of me, regardless of it being from the past.

These were lies, though. I was no longer a Jarhead or a cop. I was just me. Many times early on, I wanted to jump up and down and announce that fact but never did. It was intoxicating in a way. Everyone seemed to love me, and many acted as if they wanted to be me just for who I had been in my past. To them, I was the guy they could always count on to be brave, strong and take care of everything.

Soon, ego edged God right out of my heart. I began telling myself those lies over and over, which eventually clouded my foundational self-worth and actually took over my self-esteem. My ego led me to honestly believe I was the rock who could never be broken, no matter what life threw at me.

That ego worked well when my mother passed, followed a few years later by my father. There was unconditional love between us, but I had taken it for granted they would always be around, so visits were not as frequent as they could have been. I would be the rock after each was gone and not only tell others their deaths were just a natural part of life but convince myself of that as well.

None of that was true, of course. My mom thought the world of me and would have loved me if I had been a serial killer. My father was the man I always wanted to make proud. I loved him as deeply as I loved my mother. So, the pain for both losses was very deep and anguishing, but again, I was the rock and held it in. It was made somewhat easier by living so many miles away from my parents, meaning they physical were not a part of my daily routines.

That meant that after the services were over I eventually returned home where my day-to-day life went on pretty much as it had before. Without constant reminders, I was able to block out the grief and keep the rock image going.

It would be a whole new ball game when my son passed away. I remain amazed at the power of my ego then to hold back the emotions of grief for as long afterward as it did. Not only did I share an amazing unconditional love with this child, but he was also deeply interwoven in almost every aspect, thought, and deed in my life.

The ego, however, told me that others expected me to be strong. They needed me to be strong. On top of that, I had bought into the lies and therefore even I expected me to be strong. When my son passed, there were services to arrange and others around me who would need a strong shoulder to cry on. I had to be the man I thought everyone perceived me to be.

I avoided moving forward after the loss of my child because I wrongfully thought others needed to look to me for strength, not only at home but on my quick return to work as well. Everyone was aware of my loss, of course, and I wrongly reasoned that I could not show them a chink in the armor. Surely, the rock they looked up to could take on even the incredible tragedy of losing a child and move on.

Return to Self-Worth

In my first book, *Sometimes I Cry in the Shower*, I wrote about an event that took place about six months after the death of my child. I described how in the shower one morning the very spirit of my son came to me and in unspoken words told me how disappointed

he was that I was not honoring his love and the legacy he left behind for me.

Whether you believe I had an actual visit by my child or not, that event was the realization of my own self-worth. Before that moment, my ego had become my self-esteem, and more so, blocked out the incredible light of who I really was inside. The false-self kept the emotions held inside so I would not appear weak or unmanly to others, including myself.

Emotions, especially the painful ones, are not meant to be held inside, thank goodness. They are meant to be expressed or else will collaborate with ego to kill self-esteem and hide self-worth. As men, we are already masters of holding back the daily emotions most of the time. Hold back the painful emotions of loss and your true self, while still there, becomes almost unrecognizable.

For over six months, my Ego had actually won out over the love I had for my child. How very, very sad was that? How long would I have gone and how much damage would be done had I not been able to look

deep inside beyond ego to my true self? There can be no greater praise for the power of unconditional love.

If you are truly here to find ways to move forward beyond the debilitating pains of grief, you may have to deal first with the ego. Take that Ego file out of the Griefcase and open it up. Pull out all of those unorganized papers inside and use the unconditional love for your lost loved one to shred them now, or toss them in the recycle bin. Take a black magic marker, strike out the word EGO on the tab, and beside that write in, "Self-Worth."

Living with Ego

Very few of us will ever be able to empty the Ego folder entirely. For me, there is still so far to go on my path towards healing, but feel I have come a long way already. Even with that, I am also very aware I will probably never be without some level of male ego.

If I ever do take ego completely out of my life you might find me on some mountaintop draped in only a robe and spouting sage proverbs. I do not anticipate that for me in this lifetime, but do not feel too badly about that. After all, I know of many supposed

“enlightened” souls who I respect very much, but even in them, I do not see a wardrobe change in their near future.

Like many other negative traits in our lives, sometimes the best offense is to *recognize* simply that the ego is present. That does not mean accepting it, just acknowledging its potential for influence and act accordingly. As ego takes over self-esteem, it tries to set up shop in your subconscious. Through acknowledging and recognition, you are no longer an unwilling and unaware slave to the ego as it attempts to act on your behalf. When it does, you can begin taking actions against it and force it back to the conscious mind.

When it came to the folders of emotional pain within my own Griefcase, ego stopped me entirely from even looking at them for quite some time. Not only did this damage me inside, but it delayed my start down the path to a new normal and did not honor someone who loved me unconditionally.

If you are truly prepared to begin your journey in moving forward to your new normal, use unconditional

THE "FALSE YOU" IN THE GRIEFCASE

love to pull all those papers from inside your EGO folder immediately.

CHAPTER FOUR ~ THE “MAN” IN THE GRIEFCASE

Nobody's perfect. We're all just one step up from the beasts
and one step down from the angels.

~ Jeannette Walls

With ego under a level of understanding, and maybe some sense of control, you could hope that dealing with the emotional folders within the Griefcase would lighten just a bit. However, when it comes to men dealing with emotions, ego actually has a quiet partnership with something as old as man himself; *evolution*.

With evolution, I am not referring to human life beginning as a single-celled ameba which crawled from the primordial ooze to climb a tree and eventually walk on two legs. Instead, I refer to the traits of man as they evolved out of the necessity to survive over centuries of harsh life.

Beyond visualizing the clubbing of mastodons, however, I am also referring to our more recent influences. When you came into this world as a

newborn, you were placed into the hands of people who would shape your initial characteristics, and good bad or indifferent, influenced who you personally evolved into today.

Why is understanding your evolution so important in moving forward towards your new normal? There are some of those learned and inherited traits that simply no longer prove a positive in your life now. Some even prove to be negatives and can actually do you harm. The latter two are of particular interest.

After the loss of my son, months would go by before I would begin to face my pain. Even then, I felt strong urges and natural instincts to hold grief at bay. Thankfully, those instincts were not strong enough to keep down someone who had experienced unconditional love. That was the real me. The true me.

Just as you are now, I acknowledged my male ego and accepted it to be part of who I am. So too did I recognize the programming I had unwillingly received in the womb and in my upbringing. I might not be able to shake the ones I consider harmful to my current life, but I yanked them from my subconscious where they

acted on my behalf without even asking. So, join me in an understanding of why you are the man you are in the next section.

Nature vs. Nurture

Almost 150 years ago, an English scientist named Francis Galton coined the phrase *Nature versus Nurture*. In the study of psychology, this has been the longest running debate of all time, virtually splitting the field. Nature vs. Nurture refers to whether the traits and tendencies of humans are obtained through our DNA (nature), or through life experiences and our environment (nurture).

In 2004, a proverbial white flag was tossed in the air and the evolutionist psychologists and cultural psychologists mutually agreed that both nature and nurture play a role in individual human traits. Of course, the argument continues as to how much each plays its part, but I will leave that to those who enjoy conferences in obscure European capitals.

Here, we are concerned with the subject of grief, and differences in which males and females process and express emotions. To do that, we will first start in

the brain. This will include the female mind, so hold on guys. It might get tricky.

Male vs. Female Brain

First, we must look at modern man and woman. When there is talk about the differences in the two sexes, there are always those who speak of *exceptions*. We are all aware that just as there are no two people who grieve the same, nor are two men or two women who are exactly alike.

There are always exceptions to any established generalization, but those exceptions do not mean the generalization is wrong. There are many men who are shorter than the average woman, and many women taller than the average man. However, the generalization that man, on average, is taller than woman holds true.

In the same sense, not all men have a strong male brain, and not all women have a strong female brain. The majority of men, nevertheless, exhibit behaviors recognized as male brained, while the majority of women exhibit female brained behaviors. So, while

one size does not fit all, you can be confident in the general depictions of your brothers and sisters.

We will look at Ladies first, then. It is the polite thing to do. Women are largely *empathizers* and tend to use *mentalist* thinking in daily life. An empathizer has the general instinct to recognize another person's emotions and thoughts, and to respond to them with an appropriate emotion. The reason for these intuitive behaviors is to understand or predict behavior and to connect emotionally.

We men are generally *systemizers* and use mechanical thinking in daily life. We have an urge to analyze, explore, and construct in our environments. We want to know how things work, what the rules are, and what led to certain outcomes. The reason for these intuitive behaviors is to predict and/or understand outcomes or even to invent a new way to get the desired outcome.

First, it is in our Genes

Why do men and women possess these generalized traits? Since the days of Adam and Eve, humankind has had to adapt and adjust to survive the challenges

they faced, often on a moment by moment basis in rougher times. Many of those adjustments proved positive over generations, became part of genetic coding and remain with us today.

This is no different than the natural instincts of the many weaker nocturnal mammals who learned to forage at night when predators are asleep. Nor is it any different than the lizard developing camouflage, or the oddly long necked giraffe, who adjusted over centuries to reach the ever-rising tree tops on the savannahs of Africa.

Beginning with our reign on earth, females developed and evolved stronger empathizing and mentalistic skills mainly out of social necessity. In child rearing, she needed to be able to anticipate the needs of a newborn infant who could not speak. Without this ability, the population would not survive, nor would her popularity in the village or tribe.

As was the norm, and before childbirth, a young woman would be given to marriage and soon live amongst relative strangers. The need to question others or scan faces helped her recognize dangers or

changing moods. The need to anticipate often unspoken expectations from her new “relatives” made life and survival much easier as well.

Throughout those early days and beyond, males would develop basic systemizing and mechanistic skills. Man would be the hunter of food that many times was capable of eating him as well. The invention of weapons certainly helped with survival. The hunt itself brought heavy fear, anxiety and other emotions that had to be squelched for the hunt to be successful. It also meant long periods of solitude where stalking, concealment, and absolute silence were mandatory.

With his larger size and greater strength, males often participated in the physical defense of his people against other groups, and even in establishing or maintaining a hierarchy within his own. The need to maintain dwellings for the protection against the elements necessitated the creation of tools and sound construction methodologies. Systemizing and mechanizing became a part of life.

While I could continue with so many more examples, it is already easy to see how genetics plays

a contributing role in how men process and express emotions differently than women. Those early skills slowly developed into valued traits deemed necessary for human survival, and over time skipped the need for parental demonstration by taking a shortcut into our very DNA.

Carrying those traits forward to modern times, we can recognize many ages old behavioral traits. When grieving the death of a loved one, silent urges will push the empathetic woman into talking about the loss, and to assess the feelings of others around her. Natural instincts tell her that when emotions are high, even when not her own, they need to be evaluated and acted upon.

When we as men face a loss, we feel the need to self-contain the painful emotions. We tend to be stoic and express little or no outward feelings. We will deal with the loss by focusing on more goal-oriented activities that involve thinking, doing and solving.

Rather than endlessly talking about or crying over the loss, we may throw ourselves into tasks, which give us a sense of accomplishment and control. I can

attest to that last one, and cannot tell you how many woodworking projects I completed immediately after my son passed. I understand it now, as it gave me something I could accomplish, and the outcome was completely under my control.

My count of projects includes a large outdoor pergola and accompanying oak bench for a prayer garden dedicated to my son. Then there is the wooden plaque engraved with his name planted next to his favorite green at our local golf course. Add in a steamer trunk styled coffee table, a full wall-to-wall bookshelf & entertainment center, and you begin to get the picture. There was much more, though. Had I not eventually grieved and moved towards healing, I probably would have furnished my entire house in DIY woodworking projects by now.

We have only covered a small part of nature at this point. Regardless of the great psychological debates of our time, we do know that DNA was not alone in shaping who we are. For that other influence, we look to our own fathers, as well as other male role models

we shared time with as we grew. They had a great deal to do with nurturing us into who we are today.

Growing up Male

The role of the father in raising a son has changed dramatically over the past few centuries. Early on, the birth of a son, or many sons, was a necessity to help the father hunt food, raise crops, tend to livestock, and defend the family. This was hard, brutal, and oftentimes dangerous work, which required the father to condition the young boy as he grew.

The father was on-hand at all times, and many of his lessons beyond shoeing a horse or mending a plow were by unspoken example. From sunup to sundown, the father was focused on work for the survival of his family. He was honest, but tough, showed caution but not fear, and took pride in his family’s moral standings. For a boy approaching manhood, success in his future meant emulating the life lessons taught by his father.

Isolated farms would become villages over time, and villages become towns, and cities. In the twentieth century, fathers would leave the home each day to

work in plants and offices. The value of a man would soon be judged by the amount of his income, house, and car. At the same time, the male offspring was left to be raised predominantly by the mother.

In the past few generations, sons would still get hands-on training from fathers in such talents as hunting, fishing, and maybe working with hands. These skills were recreational in nature, however, and were no longer passed on for survival or vocation. Mentorship of the father primarily became something expressed in words, not examples witnessed while constantly existing side by side like the days of old.

Organized sports would become popular nearing adolescence, and male coaches would become another role model. Only the “best” could be on the team, and his “men” had to be fearless and tough. Any disappointments were met with threats of being kicked off the team for not being able to hang with the big boys.

Soon, a young teenage boy would notice the attractive young girls roaming the hallways of the school. However, he would also become aware that

those girls were mostly interested in the “manly” boys who hung with the in-crowd, maybe dominated the sports fields, but could always handle themselves with their fists. Unfortunately, many times entering such a circle required confrontations and displays of toughness, whether they were genuinely possessed or not. The girls were worth it, though.

Along with being manly and tough, coolness was certainly called for as well. Role models for teens would soon begin to include movie stars and sports celebrities, the coolest of which showed only strong, stoic, non-emotional personas. Think James Dean or Clint Eastwood. In sports, admired heroes were usually the biggest and baddest men on the field. If not, it was someone who calmly picked apart his opponent as if he had ice in his veins.

If only it ended there. For most aging male teens comes college, the military, or straight into private employment. Regardless of choice, in any new environment, a young man will probably continue to seek role models. To him, it quickly becomes apparent that the toughest and most heartless normally get the

promotions. These are the guys that profess to follow those like Sun Tzu' and his Art of War. They would never be making a decision based on emotions. Emotions are a weakness and can only throw a man off his game. If that was not the young man before, he had better learn quickly in order to be accepted and move up in business.

Personally, I grew up very much like the previous paragraphs and confident that many men reading this did as well. As negative as I make it seem, my upbringing has always been very special to me and I would not change a single thing. It was arguably a benefit when I struck out as a young adult, leading me down an honorable path towards serving others.

Yet, that stage of my life and many of those traits are no longer needed. Actually, some can even prove to be harmful now. In fact, the same thing goes for some of those traits we received from ancestors through our DNA.

Those traits I refer to are the ones that keep us from expressing our emotions, especially as it concerns grieving our loss. One may hold in his

feelings because his gut tells him it is just the right thing to do. Another may do the same because he does not want to appear weak in front of others. Yet, still another may do so because he just cannot face the pain. All, however, are the result of traits we received whether through nature or through nurture.

Emotions, however, need to come out. Guilt and anger are just two examples of some very damaging emotions, and in almost every instance are falsely felt. Left inside, they will change a man in ugly ways. Even loneliness and longing, if not expressed, can turn bitter and ugly.

Deprogramming Nature and Nurture

As said before, you would not be here unless ready to begin moving forward. Doing so means being able to get beyond some very strong traits which may tell you to hold it your emotions. Can those instinctual and inherited traits be overcome? Yes, they can, but it will take time and dedication to do so.

Marine Corps Boot Camp is three months of some of the most intense psychological reconditioning any person could go through. Forget the physical

reconditioning. The overwhelming goal of the Corps and the Drill Instructors overseeing the training was to create killing machines with an instant and unquestionable response to any and all orders given.

I graduated from boot camp in the early 1980s and understood the concept before I enlisted. I would honorably serve and continue to train under that unquestionable response creed for four intense years of my life. As anyone else who has served in the military, I would leave with an enormous amount of those forced traits deeply ingrained in every part of me.

It is obvious that some of the traits instilled through a military life might be incredibly positive in the civilian world. Being a killing machine and responding to orders without thought, though. Many of those traits proved to be a negative at a time I no longer needed them, and in some cases, could have eventually been harmful.

It would take quite some time to de-program those traits I recognized as negative or potentially harmful from my training. I am not special, however. I am only

one of millions who have trained, served, fought, and returned to civilian life. Easing some behaviors was not simple and took time, and began only after I recognized and acknowledged those traits. Then it took concentrated and repeated efforts to move beyond my comfort zone.

You are ready to move forward now, though, and some of those emotions you might be holding inside can be incredibly destructive. Over time, they will begin to harm you, so time is not really a luxury here. You need to do the same thing you have done with your **ego**. Right now, those traits brought to you through both nature and nurture are residing in your subconscious and driving your life without any input from your conscious mind.

That means that just as your heart beats without you actively thinking of it, and your lungs breath in the air without asking, so do your inherent traits act on your behalf, good or bad. The traits we are after right now are the instinctual ones that tell you to hold in your emotions, whether this brings up images of your father, the bully on the playground or that cute

cheerleader who would only date the quarterback in school.

Expressing your emotions does not mean you have to do so in front of others, by the way. It took some time after my loss, but I eventually recognized how the inherent traits of holding in emotions was damaging me. It began first with a loving push from the memory and spirit of my late son when one morning in the shower I unexpectedly let my emotions come out unrestrained.

Afterward, I thought for the first time I could begin to move forward if somehow I could overcome the instincts to inhibit *all* of my emotions, regardless of when and where they surfaced. I would continually return to the shower and my son's spirit purposely to expel some pretty vile and nasty feelings. At the same time, I began to study, learn and understand my urges to hold my emotions inside.

Even in identifying and acknowledging the hindering traits, they were not just a light switch to be flipped on and off. Every impulse was powerful and said I still could not, would not, openly express my

emotions in front of others. I could, however, continue to take my pain to the shower. There in the water and noise, I could let go without concern that others might judge me as weak. In my isolated solitude, there was no one to think me unmanly, or wonder how I could ever support their pain when I could not even control my own.

Slowly over the days, weeks and months to come, the deep anguish began to subside and I became aware that I was making progress towards moving forward. I had not overcome the urge to keep my feelings in check in front of others, but now I no longer needed to keep them hidden from myself. Without question, I attribute that to the unconditional love I had for my child.

It was no small victory. I had actually reconditioned myself to release my pent up emotions, if only to me, but that alone was huge and a step forward. Did I still consider my need to hold back grief in front of others to be a negative? Absolutely I did. Yet, it was far too early in my pain to try to fight myself for change, so I

opted instead to work with what I had in letting my emotions go privately.

Like me, you must make a concerted effort to recognize and acknowledge the traits from nature and nurture that keep you from moving forward. You may or may not be able to get rid of them right now, but that is understandable. That could be preferable right now as well.

Fundamental change to our behavior is an incredibly taxing ordeal, and even more so for someone early in a grief journey. Yet, if you can identify and acknowledge them now, they can certainly be something addressed over a longer period of time. Right now, knowing they exist is just going to have to be enough.

However, the urge to hold in the pain from yourself must be addressed immediately. This one is going to be much easier, though. Use the power of the unconditional love for the one you lost. That is your light switch. Unconditional love never dies, is stronger than any emotion you could ever possess, and will overcome all. You must do this immediately and at a

minimum. Holding the anguishing emotions inside will cause some very dark and nasty sentiments to move back into your subconscious where they will freely act on your behalf.

Left alone in the darkness of your mind, those pains will certainly hinder your grief and, therefore, hinder moving forward towards your new normal. If only in the shower, or in the car, or wherever you can be alone, bring them out into the light. Then, you can begin to use the Griefcase without the additional weight and burden brought on by nature and nurture.

CHAPTER FIVE ~ GRIEFCASE USER'S MANUAL

Give sorrow words; the grief that does not speak knits up the
o-er wrought heart and bids it break.

~ William Shakespeare

Why is the analogy of the Griefcase so useful? Because we can visualize it as a tool, and men like tools. As read earlier, we are systemizers, organizers and want the tools needed to get us to the outcome we desire, even if we have to invent something new.

Then let us invent the **Griefcase**. It is the perfect visual image of grief itself. If grief is going to be the commonly used word that contains all the emotions felt with the loss of a loved one, then we should use it as our carrier.

Further, if the emotions of grief are going to be with you for the rest of your time here on earth, you can hold them in something you are used to toting around: a Griefcase. Like a true briefcase, it can be used to not only hold items but efficiently organize and work through them as well.

Opening Your Griefcase

Think now of sitting at a table and placing your Griefcase down in front of you. You slide the small, square buttons on either end to release the clasps and open the lid. Looking inside, you see your stack of manila folders that represent your grief emotions. They are each thick, heavy and in obvious disarray, as papers hang out at both ends.

You look across into the open lid. There you see the standard pocket that spans the entire width and normally used to hold and secure assorted files or documents. A thin leather strip hangs down from the top, snaps on the pocket front, and holds any contents snugly.

Inside the pocket, you see that a lone folder is already there. It appears thick and full of so many sheets of paper. On the upper tab of the folder, you can see two words: **Unconditional Love**.

You reach forward, undo the snap, and take hold of the folder. It is so very full of papers, but unlike the other folders, these seem neat and well organized

inside. You immediately know this folder holds the undying memories of your loved one who passed.

Just holding the folder makes you feel a little more at peace. It actually urges you to begin working through the others in the bottom. With a will to begin, you try to set the Unconditional Love folder aside for the time being, but find you cannot release it from your grip.

You attempt to lay it on top of the other folders inside the Griefcase, but again, your hand remains clamped. With curiosity, you reach across and slide the folder back down into the pocket where you found it and are somehow not surprised when your fingers can release it. Regardless, with your new urge to move forward, you put wonder aside for the time.

Reaching back into the Griefcase you grab the next two folders, one marked **Ego**, and the other marked **Nature/Nurture**. They both seem crammed to capacity, but you are not sure how to get started with them. You then spy the next folder on the stack, labeled **Confusion**. Of course, you realize, any

attempts of organization should probably get started with that one.

Without conscious thought, you attempt to lay the other two folders aside on the table, but when your fingers will not release their grip, you remember what happened just a moment ago with Unconditional Love. Experimenting, you lay the folders back on the stack inside the Griefcase and are not surprised when you can let go of them. Apparently, folders cannot be left outside the Griefcase, you surmise.

Maybe you can move the folders out of the way for now by putting them in the back pocket along with Unconditional Love. You reach across the case, undo the snap, and watch as the pocket falls slightly forward. As soon as you pick up the two folders to move them back, however, you witness the pocket instantly pull back up tightly against the folder already there.

Attempts to pull the pocket out and away with your fingers will not work, either. You even forcefully try to wedge the Ego folder in between the pocket flap and Unconditional Love, but no amount of effort works.

Mystified, you set the folders back on the stack and as soon as you remove your hands, you are awed when the pocket flap falls forward again.

Using your index finger, you hook it on the pocket, pull against it, and cautiously peek inside. There you spy another handwritten note. Removing it, you read:

No folder shall be placed in this pocket unless resolved to the fullest extent possible.

Management reserves the right to remove any and all folders should additional difficulties arise at a future time.

p.s. Refer to the Unconditional Love folder whenever things seem too overwhelming.

Now you seem to have some general understanding of how the Griefcase works. Ready to move forward, you go back to the Confusion folder and take it in your hand.

Organizing your Folders

The folder of Confusion, like every other one that lies in chaos at the bottom of your case, will be stuffed with disorganized papers. These papers represent the mass of erroneous, untrue, and redundant thoughts that accompany emotions after the death of a loved one.

Erroneous thoughts are knee-jerk responses based on how you reacted to other deeply emotional events in your past. You may begin to act subconsciously based simply on recall, even if not currently appropriate in loss. *Untrue thoughts* are those that are basely false and unfounded. These are most prevalent when there are many unknowns that caused the death of a loved one. *Redundant thoughts* are those that exist in other grief emotions already, yet early in grief are so overwhelming they repeat in each.

How are emotional folders filled with these types of unnecessary thoughts? Refer back to the discussion of the subconscious. Recall how it controls your ego, as well as your traits from nature and nurture. The subconscious is the source.

The subconscious is innocently attempting to act on your behalf, although without your conscious control or approval. There is no malice, though. It is simply trying to give you all the information it assumes could be needed in a traumatic event. Unfortunately, even without ill-will, sometimes the subconscious is absolutely not always helpful in bereavement.

While we will all grieve differently and not experience the same emotions, it is safe to assume that *Confusion*, at least early on, is common in most of us. Make no mistake, confusion can go on for some time, too, but we will start by looking at how you can begin to lighten that folder. Later, you can begin to use the same methodology as you move forward through each emotion.

When you open the folder and scan over the very first piece of paper, everything you read on it indicates it obviously belongs in the *Loneliness* folder. You find that folder, open it, and immediately see the very same document inside already. Not sure what to do, you attempt to just add the duplicate to the folder, but your fingers will not release the sheet from your hand.

Looking back at the paper in your hand, you notice all the print has disappeared, leaving the page completely blank. Unsure what will happen, you crumple the paper in your hand and pensively toss it on the tabletop outside the Griefcase, surprised but grateful that it left your hand.

Back to the Confusion folder, you scan over the next paper and determine it seems to have a lot to do with guilt. You find the *Guilt* folder, search through it, and do not find a matching document. You stop for a second to wonder if you should try to resolve this guilt issue in your hand. However, what you read there seems somewhat clouded by confusion, so instead, you allow it to slip easily from your hand into the correct folder for now.

The next page you pull from the Confusion folder reads of words which you decide should go in the *Anger* folder. Yet, while reading, you are able to determine easily that there is no reason at all to feel anger for what it refers to. In fact, you can see no reason to feel any emotion for the issue at all. The instant you acknowledge this in your mind, you

witness the page go blank and with a tiny level of satisfaction, ball it up and toss it to the table.

Continuing in the Confusion folder, eventually, you come to the last piece of paper. Over time, you have removed all the others, each one relocated to the proper folder or discarded entirely. This last page reads like it is only an outline of what the folder once held, so you attempt to ball it up and get rid of it as well. You are not really surprised, however, to find you cannot crumple the paper, nor will your fingers release it to the tabletop outside the Griefcase.

You understand immediately, though, and simply place it back in the empty Confusion folder. Closing it, you become aware that suddenly you feel a little stronger now. You have such a long way to go, but still you can take solace in knowing you are at least moving forward.

With that thought, you also realize you can begin to work with the other folders without the cloud of Confusion over your head. Then, the very moment that thought goes through your mind you hear a snapping sound. Looking into the Griefcase, you

notice that the pocket in the back has fallen forward, and you know what to do. You take the Confusion folder, place it inside the pocket behind Unconditional Love, and re-secure the snap.

As emotional folders are resolved to their fullest possible, they can be moved to the back pocket of the Griefcase. Not all emotions in grief can be completely resolved, though. Some may never be empty and placed in the back pocket with unconditional love.

Do not let that stop you from moving forward through the grief work. Every folder can become lighter and better organized. Along the way, you will remove the erroneous, untrue, and redundant thoughts, making even the yet to be resolved folders less of a burden on every aspect of your life.

Remember, however, the folders of emotions that come with the tragic loss of someone you loved so dearly will never go away. Once experienced, they will become a part of who you are. It will also be who you will become in your new normal.

Working through the Griefcase is not going to be easy, though, regardless of how simple it was

explained here. In reality, the folders, or emotions, will not wait until you decide you have time to tend to them. They will not be gracious enough to let you tackle them one at a time, either. Emotions will come in waves, and early in grief, they will seem unending and unrelenting. They will not care where you are, what you are doing or why you are doing it. When they come, use your Griefcase to help handle the emotions.

When you are well down your path to healing, the waves will come farther apart, and in less intensity. Do not forget your Griefcase work during these times. Take your breaks and find peace when you can, but the Griefcase is always with you. Anytime you can work to lighten it further you will rid yourself of unresolved grief.

Just be aware that working with the Griefcase in the gaps will probably bring waves itself. It can certainly be difficult to willingly do something you know may bring pain. Being cognizant that the waves may come, however, can be half the battle. Prepare yourself for it and realize it is all a positive part of moving forward towards your new normal.

There is just no way anyone can walk through your particular Griefcase with you. No two people ever grieve alike, nor may they experience the same emotions. One may have anger while another does not. Even if both have anger in grief, the intensity of that anger will certainly be at differing amounts.

Eventually, the majority of emotions, or folders, will find their way to share space with Unconditional Love in the back pocket of the Griefcase. When that happens, you will find room inside to backfill it with some wonderful aspects of a lighter heart. Start now and soon you will have plenty of space to pack joy, peace, and purpose. Maybe some flip-flops and suntan lotions too.

CHAPTER SIX ~ A GRIEFCASE OF COMMON SENSES

You do not see the river of mourning
because it lacks one tear of your own.

~ Antonio Porchia

Continuing to work through the emotional folders in the Griefcase is paramount to moving forward towards your new normal. Obviously, it is not going to be easy, as there will be times when the anguish seems to be overwhelming. There will be times when it just feels easier to hold it all inside. You want to move forward, though, and you came here looking for the Griefcase to help you do that.

One of the most important reasons for not repressing or holding in your grief is that it will absolutely do great harm to you. Not only might it negatively change your perspectives on life, but it can affect your health as well. For those reasons, it is imperative to look at how emotions impact you.

The Basic Emotions

Scientific research tells us humans have four basic emotions. Those are happy, sad, afraid/surprised and angry/disgusted. I do not want to argue with the great minds of science, but I call hogwash! Decisions in our lives are made only by determining if something will make us happy or sad. Fear, surprise, anger, and disgust all fall under either happy or sad.

In everything you heard after your loss, and throughout this book, you have found nothing but talk of the many, many painful emotions of grief, such as guilt, despair, loneliness, and regret. Now, here I am trying to tell you that there are really only two.

Just keep in mind that happy and sad are the primary emotions. All others fit into one of those two categories. The painful emotions we speak about in grief are so intense, however, they always need to be broken out to stand on their own. Each subordinate emotion can be incredibly caustic and damaging to the griever if left unresolved.

The Emotions within Grief

When it comes to grief, the basic emotion of sadness is filled with so many other subordinate feelings, like longing, and anguish, not to mention the fear, anger, surprise and disgust thought to be one of the basics. You did not choose these feelings, and if given the opportunity, never would have.

It is actually human nature to be happy. For centuries, we have continually strived to create a better life because of the desire to be just that, as no one wants to languish in a life of sadness and misery. Even our Founding Fathers gave us the right to pursue happiness in the Declaration of Independence. It is in our very nature, and in every choice between that and sadness, you will always choose to be happy.

Having sadness come to you in grief, then, is against your will, and not in your human nature. Therefore, it really is no different than a virus being introduced to your body. The sadness of grief is a foreign invader in your very being. If not tended to, it will sicken your heart and mind over time, making the

possibility of healing to a full and productive life more difficult.

The reason behind the increased difficulty is that when the painful emotions are held back over time, they begin to become who you are. Just as we spoke of the ego and our male traits in nature and nurture, repressed emotions in grief will find a way into your subconscious. Why would they go there? Because you have gone day after day learning to cope with the pain and it is becoming a normal, yet negative part of your personality.

If you hold those powerful emotions of grief inward and do not make a conscious effort to work through them, where else would they go? They become the “instinctual” part of your personality, and like the other traits which might reside there, act autonomously on your behalf in negative and destructive ways.

The Natural Flow of Emotions

Every human is made up from the natural surroundings of our planet. Our flesh and organs are made of the same atoms as trees, marsh grass, and the deer who drinks from the stream. There is a natural

flow to life on all levels and as humans, we are subject to that as well. To retard that natural flow can have incredibly harmful effects.

Consider the three base substances you take into your own body to survive. The food, water, and air once taken in will flow back out eventually. I am not talking about the waste in the restroom or carbon dioxide from your lungs. It flows back out in the form of energy when required. It powers our bodies and thoughts. In fact, the average adult has as much energy stored in fat as a one-ton battery.

That waste that I referred to is the almost immediate outward flow of what the body recognizes it cannot store. What goes in, must flow back out one way or another. Try plugging up your lungs or stopping up your intestines and just see what happens.

You know by now I like analogies. Imagine a picturesque brook that one day begins winding through the woods on your property, driven by rainfall seeking the easy flow to the ocean. The steady trickle of water soon becomes a stream, which allows the

growth of inviting flora and fauna to develop along the banks.

As time goes by, though, a young beaver discovers the stream and doing what beavers do, begins to build a dam. It is not a big one at first since your little beaver really just needs a place to avoid a few issues that make him uncomfortable. Some water still flows beyond the dam, too, so it is hard to notice any impact beyond the partial blockage. Behind the dam, however, the water begins to back up, and overflow the banks.

That is pretty close to what men do as we mature. We begin to build a dam across our stream of emotions, using it as a place to avoid issues that make us feel uncomfortable. You have to agree that we build ours somewhere around our heart, which is our most obvious place of vulnerability. After all, our hearts are where others might get a glimpse of any emotions we feel might give us the appearance of being weak or unmanly.

At the dam, however, it does not take long before the restricted flow of water begins to submerge and

destroy the natural environment there. In reality, this is your self-esteem, confidence, relationships with friends, family, and more. All of this was once part of a thriving persona that is now being slowly choked out.

Stagnant water begins to turn dark and murky with vegetation rot while the industrious little beaver continues to build the dam larger and larger. He sees scarier things come to live in the darker waters and wants to enlarge his defenses.

The water flowing outside the dam begins to turn to a muddy slur, which soon becomes obvious to the people downstream. Many of those are family and friends and had come to enjoy what was once a wonderful brook flowing through their life.

One day a storm comes, just as it did when you experienced the loss of your loved one. Those powerful, torrid flood waters rush downstream looking for their natural flow to the ocean but instead meet the blockage. Your dam will hold the emotional waters, at first, but this causes even more back-flooding. Any remaining landscape, your compassion, is now in danger of being wiped out.

Not only will you be dealing with the flooding rainwaters that came with your grief, but the normal emotions that come with daily life as well. The dam is going to give, one way or another. If your dam gives way on its own, it will explode, and those muddy, debris-filled waters will rage outward without your control.

Those rampant waters will have little mercy on anything that gets in the way. If that happens, you will not only have the damage inside, behind the dam but now you are going to damage life downstream as well. This includes any remaining friendships, passions and the potential for a joyous life. All the while you can do nothing more than stand by and watch.

You need to use the methods in your Griefcase to begin slowly, methodically, tearing down your dam immediately, piece by piece. Get to it before it explodes and control the demolition. Make sure you remove the debris and cast it aside so that it does not flow downstream where it could harm others. They are certainly looking forward to seeing a beautiful stream flowing by once again.

Health Issues of Grief and Unresolved Grief

Going through the emotions of grief, even with the methods used in the Griefcase, can be physically exhausting. While you are absolutely doing the right thing by facing it, expect times of restlessness and insomnia, which will lead to a lack of REM sleep and dreams.

Lack of appetite can be common as well, causing a loss of weight, energy, and nutrition needed to properly function. Even though you are headed in the right direction, pay attention to the needs of your body and mind. You have a big task ahead and will need your strength.

The bigger caution, however, is about unresolved grief. The journey to your new normal will be long, and understand now that there will be emotions that you will still be working on when you leave this world. Yet, to let them go unattended will absolutely have a huge impact on your mind, body, and soul.

We have already discussed how holding the emotions of grief inside will damage your self-esteem, relationships with others, and a purposeful desire for

life ahead. Unresolved grief will attack your health, as well. Studies show that people who hold in grief are at a higher risk for hypertension, heart disease, and substance abuse.

It might sound a little like something you would hear from well-wishers after your loss, but take care of yourself. It is more than just a passing thought. Being strong inside and out will be of great service as you move forward on your journey.

Choices

As a business leader of many years, I frequently preached to my staff that they always had a choice between happy and sad. I would explain how nothing bad ever happened in life where we did not create the opportunity ourselves, and, therefore, chose whatever bad thing came upon us.

That sounded motivational at the time but was before the death of my child. Now I recognize there will always be happy or sad choices made outside of my control. I certainly did not ask for the tragic loss of my child.

Yet, even in our tragic losses, we remain in control of the choices for ourselves from that point forward. For you, absolutely no one can away your option as to whether you will seek some level of happiness in moving forward, or whether you remain in the cloud of unresolved grief.

Grief can be heavy, alright, and at first, it can often seem difficult to see any rays of sunlight. When influenced by so much confusion and pain, some might actually opt to remain in the sadness. That is not human nature, however. To continue in sadness means there is a virus inside, and an ongoing battle to rid yourself of a foreign body.

If, however, someone chooses to live with the dark, murky grief backed up inside his mind, body, and soul, the emotions will find their way to the subconscious. There, those rotting emotions will become personal traits that act without asking. It is not who you are, or you would not be here, which clearly means you have made the natural and correct choice.

Use the Griefcase and keep the emotions out where you can control them.

CHAPTER SEVEN ~ THREE PERILS IN THE GRIEFCASE

To spare oneself from grief at all cost can be achieved only at the price of total detachment, which excludes the ability to experience happiness.

-- Erich Fromm

Within each Griefcase, there are three emotional reactions to the loss of a loved one that can present themselves almost immediately. Dangerous on their own, if they combine with other early feelings found in grief, they can be overwhelmingly destructive. These three emotions are *Despair*, *Guilt* and, *Anger*.

Despair

Given the potential for physical harm to the griever, we must take on despair first. Despair is defined simply as the *complete loss of hope*. It is normally when one has gone through a succession of actions or considerations which lead to the perceived conclusion that nothing can be done to improve a dire situation.

Despair, or the perception that all hope is lost, can sometimes lead a person to believe there is no reason for going on with life. For those grieving the loss of a loved one, life before was “normal.” It went on day by day with the loved one right there. Afterward, the awareness that life, as it was, would never be the same can be traumatic.

It is further complicated when the newly bereaved consider the future. Especially with a wife, or even a child, normal involves relying upon and planning for a life in which that loved one would always play a major role. Not only is the future a conscious concept, but so confident is the heart in that future, it relies on and acts upon it subconsciously as well.

Suddenly, that loved one is taken, along with a daily life filled with immediate love, affections, companionship, support, and so much more that was mutual shared. The future, which the bereaved trusted would always include loving and being loved by the departed, was gone too.

The misperception that love is gone and the future is no longer there can be disparaging on its own. Now, blend in shock, insecurity, fear, anger, and probably confusion, it can be understandable to have passing thoughts of despair. Understandable, but not acceptable, mind you.

In this case, passing thoughts of ending it all because of despair should not be left alone. Like all other emotions, if it is ignored, it will eventually find its way to your subconscious where actions might be taken on your behalf, yet without your control.

If despair does reside in your subconscious, then it becomes self-perpetuating and speeds up a path to harm. With despair acting on your behalf, every bit of light or hope that might come your way is snuffed out before you have an opportunity to consider it with conscious thought.

Although not so much due to despair, there is another urge that could lead the newly bereaved to consider taking his own life. Initial thoughts of “joining” a lost loved one may pass through your mind early on.

Many men have stated they simply could not imagine living without the one they love.

Often those loved deeply are interwoven into every fabric of your life. When they leave, so does the physical connection of seeing and interacting with them each day. The thought of openly giving and receiving that unconditional love seems to be gone too. It is not, however, as unconditional love never goes away.

As you move forward, especially early in grief, the thought of joining your loved one might actually be a passing thought, but let it be just that. Let it pass and be aware that you will see your loved one again. For you, it may be a long while, but take joy in knowing that for the one you lost, it will only be the blink of an eye.

I am convinced that you are here to begin the path to your new normal, but it will not be easy. Despair may often try to get in your way. Remember, you do not want it hiding in the darkness of your mind. There will be times in the future when things seem more

difficult than anything you have ever faced and it may seem hard to go on.

You will go on, though. You have your own plan with the Creator and life is about living, regardless of the hardships. That unconditional love you experience with the one you lost will never go away. While it may be hard to believe now, that love and the memories you shared will give you even more strength in the future.

Turn to the methods within the Griefcase to mitigate any despair. Look to the many Grief and Bereavement Support groups listed in the Resources section of this book. Reach out to them for support. If you want to witness others who have been down your path but now live a meaningful life filled with joy, you will find them there.

If you do find that the despair is overwhelming and thoughts of suicide remain persistent in your mind, please put this book down and contact mental health professionals immediately.

Your life is worth living. You have felt love. Let love keep you moving towards hope, peace and purpose.

Guilt

Guilt can be a very invasive and negative emotion in grief, and can actually keep us from the task of facing the other emotions in loss. With the passing of a loved one, more often than not it is false-guilt. It is usually just self-blame for an action, lack of action, or even words which one feels led up to, or allowed, the death of a loved one.

From the very beginning of this book, we talked about the question, **why**? This is the question we may never really have an answer to, but it does not diminish the search for one. That powerful question which begs at our souls to be answered begins at the very moment we lose someone.

Regardless of the spiritual answer, there are times when the physical cause of loss is not known right away, and this does not sit well with men. One of your inherent traits is to find a reason for an unknown and unwanted outcome. On a DNA level, you are generally systemizing, mechanizing, and want to understand so you can keep it from happening again.

Unfortunately, that means that when the cause of death remains unknown and the silent urge inside screams for reason, you must find something to blame. The mind will tell you there must be a starting point to understanding and rationalizing the cause, and when nothing else can be pointed to, you may falsely point to yourself.

Even when the cause of loss *is* known, or even determined later, many men will go back before the death and establish self-guilt. Something you said, or did, or did not do before it happened is to blame. You do this because you allowed something out of your control to have an unwanted outcome. That can be enough for claiming fault in a grieving mind.

Assigning self-blame or guilt means that you can begin to understand why the loss occurred, even if only in some small way. Additionally, your inherent traits urge you to take action when something occurs, and assigning blame to yourself allows for immediate action, even if that means wrongfully punishing yourself.

Not to get too far away from grief, take just a moment to consider the definition of “guilt” in criminal law. In order for a court of law to find someone guilty of an accused crime, there had to be intent to commit the criminal act. The accused had to willfully and purposely know he was committing a crime when he carried it out.

Malice has to be present for a conviction in criminal acts as well. Malice is the intention and desire to do ill-will, usually against another. You rarely find malice in the death of a loved one. What you find instead is that whatever you did or did not do, said or did not say, had no malice or direct cause in the passing. Think about it. Would you ever do anything to harm someone you love so deeply? Your answer is, of course, no.

Guilt probably already has been a part of your grief as you entered your journey towards your new normal. As you work through shock and confusion, make sure you recognize your natural traits for taking actions, and ensure your need does not lead you down a path of falsely blaming yourself.

I again say turn back to unconditional love and remind yourself there is nothing you could have ever done to wish or cause the passing of your loved one. The guilt is false and therefore erroneously keeping you from addressing the other emotions in the Griefcase.

The Other False Guilt

We are not done with guilt just yet. There is another false-guilt which is really a mislabeled emotion. It is actually “*regret*,” but when extremely intense, is often referred to by many as guilt. It is an emotion comprised of earlier actions or words, done or undone, between you and your lost loved one.

These actions or words were well before your loved one passed, and are normally unresolved relationship issues. However, they could be so emotionally painful or sensitive that they keep you from moving forward in grief.

To give a quick example, I will use the passing of my own mother. I certainly love my mother unconditionally, but in the latter part of her life, I was just not around as much as I could have been. While I

had the opportunity to visit often, I simply took it for granted that my mother would always be there. I am sure I am not the only son to do that.

Regardless, from the very moment she passed, the intense *guilt* of not spending more time with my mother lived in my heart and remained for a long time after she was gone. That guilt had nothing to do with her passing away, yet it played a large role in keeping me from dealing with the grief that would surround any man who lost a mother.

Long after her funeral, I would think of my mother often, but feeling the painful sting of guilt would cause me to shake her from my mind altogether. As a result, dealing with her loss was held back because I simply did not want to face the regretful thoughts. It attacked my ego and hurt me emotionally.

How many other examples could be given? Maybe a father passed away and it has been years since he was told how much he was loved? Maybe a son unexpectedly passed away while at college, yet during the last phone conversation he was only chastised for poor grades?

These are sorrowful examples, of course, but you could easily think of a dozen more in just moments if asked. However, remember this instead; all of those examples are actually mislabeled as guilt. Guilt is something that has a direct cause and is done with malice. Instead, these and all the other examples are actually the emotions of regret or even shame.

The two are very similar but do have differences. Shame is defined as a painful feeling of humiliation caused by the self-awareness of wrong or foolish behavior. Regret is defined as feeling disappointed over something that has happened or been done, especially in a lost or missed opportunity.

If there is any positive to regret and shame, it is in knowing they are actually intended to help you develop emotionally. The mind urges you to feel regret or shame in inappropriate actions in order to seek an understanding of how you should have acted. Without these two emotions, you might consider rude, offensive or disrespectful actions committed today to be normal and acceptable behavior in the future.

Bottom line, shame and regret attack your ego. If you have **Edged God Out**, both will attack your self-esteem also. When grieving, regret or shame may be painful and you may want to stop it by completely shutting down the thoughts which brought the pain on. Unfortunately, the only way to do that may be by shutting down the grief altogether. Not just parts of the grief, but all of it in entirety.

Shutting out the grief, even for a moment, means closing the Griefcase, as well. That keeps it heavy and no less a burden than it was earlier. It also means that you never learn the intended purpose for the emotions of regret and shame, so you live in a nasty, repeating circle

Remove guilt from your vocabulary, open your Griefcase, and face regret and shame head on. You will absolutely have to do this in order to move forward in your journey towards the new normal.

Anger

Let me start by saying that anger is normal after a loss. There, I said it. Not only that, it would be strange if you were not angry, regardless of how your loved one

passed away. It is a powerful part of human emotions, male or female, and you have lost someone you love dearly. Anger was undoubtedly in your Griefcase when you got it.

I absolutely agree there may be very valid reasons for anger, as well. While the vast majority of our loved ones pass from natural causes, there are those who may not. Carelessness of another may cause a tragic death, or a senseless criminal act results in a homicide.

First and foremost, however, you cannot allow your anger to physically hurt yourself or others. You never want to let it come to that. If wrongs must be righted, you will do no good to yourself or others if you are incapacitated in a hospital bed, or worse yet, jail.

Second, you cannot allow anger to block out the need to face your grief. Anger can be a very powerful emotion. Allowing it to occupy all of your thoughts can be emotionally inviting. When simultaneously hit with several painful grief emotions, it will be easy to convince yourself that all your thoughts need to be focused on anger.

It cannot be said enough that in early grief, emotions do not come just one at a time. You might be hit with many all at once in what seems like a never-ending barrage of intense feelings. This is often what evokes confusion in grief and you might wrongly turn to anger as a tool to push confusion away.

If the passing of your loved one was the result of an action that justifies your anger, you must find a way to channel it away from physical or mental harm to yourself or others. Find someone who will let you get angry. As a grief support advocate for men, this is part of what I do. I invite bereaved men to channel their anger through me.

You might also do the age old practice of hitting the gym and taking it out on the heavy bag. Go out to the workshop and build something, or destroy something no longer needed. Breaking things purposely can be incredibly therapeutic, as long as you do not hurt anything or anyone else, yourself included.

If less physical actions will help, think of a role model in your past with an even disposition and

imagine yourself in his shoes. Go for a walk in woods or a drive to no place in particular. Consider taking up meditation and focus on your emotions. Do not judge them, though. Just label them positive or negative.

Anger is understandable and expected in grief. Do not let it stop you from your journey of moving forward.

False Anger

There is an old saying in business about perception being reality. If the client believes your product is bad, it is bad, and the responsibility to change that perception lies only with you, not the client. When it comes to grief, not everything that appear to be reality amid all the initial confusion of loss is going to be correct. However, in grief, this leaves you to be both the client and the salesman. Perception changes are all up to you.

There is no denying that aggression is a male trait taken straight from the centuries of DNA encoding, and unfortunately, anger is a major component in that aggression. Not all males, but many, just have a more natural tendency to express outbursts of anger.

Yes, woman get angry as well, and to ask a man, far too easily. Yet, women tend to express their anger more in unspoken moodiness, facial expressions, folded arms, or cornering her man on the couch to “talk it out.” Some females can certainly be verbally expressive, but the trait is generally greater in males.

Therefore, you have to admit that when facing grief, you are already coming to the table with a hair trigger for expressing anger verbally. Getting hit with the multiple confusing and agonizing punches of grief, anger can come out as a natural defense mechanism to stopping the pain, if only for the moment.

There seems so much to be angry about too. There might actually be anger for the one who died. How dare they leave you to go on alone? You might feel intense anger at yourself for a myriad of false-guilt. Maybe the anger is towards medical personnel who treated and tried to save the dying loved one, or even the doctors that attempted to cure a terminal ailment.

Regardless, confusion will be an overwhelming emotion early in grief, and may cloud your judgment

along the way. Things may appear at first to be something worth evoking your anger, but I caution you to be patient early on. The majority of men reading this may possibly be a little removed from early grief, but this does not mean that all the confusion has cleared.

Every day after a loss can bring new information, new emotions and new pains. The three emotions of despair, guilt, and anger in this chapter can have a major negative impact on healing. Face them every time they come and refuse to allow them to close your Griefcase. You need it open in order to move forward in the journey towards your new normal.

CHAPTER EIGHT ~ YOUR INVISIBLE GRIEFCASE

I see people, as they approach me, trying to make up their minds whether they'll 'say something about it' or not.

I hate if they do, and if they don't.

~ C.S. Lewis, *A Grief Observed*

While no one ever has to be alone while grieving, you alone will carry the understanding of how deep grief lies within your heart. As you move forward through the journey towards your new normal, be aware that you alone are the only one who can see the Griefcase you carry.

If there is anything I would like you to take away from this chapter, it is a concept within these opening paragraphs. Since my own loss, I have heard so many comments of how unthoughtful or insensitive the words from others can be towards the bereaved. I ask that you give people a break, though, as those you come in contact with throughout your grief are generally good hearted souls.

Most people are simply uncomfortable with grief, as well as the thought of death. Some have not experienced the deep pains of losing someone so close, and few have had even casual training on how to interact and support the bereaved. Let us try not to judge them by actions, but instead by intentions.

I have to assume that you are not recent in your loss and here to move forward towards your new normal. However, in the next sections, I may discuss some issues that arise almost immediately after a loss and you might wonder why.

The reason I bring these early issues up is out of a belief that part of your own healing may one day lead you to help others. This may include someone who seeks your help as soon as a passing takes place. If your read of these issues and relate them to your own early experiences, you may be more confident in helping your newly bereaved friend.

Mourning

Grief is somewhat taboo in society now, and in a fast paced world it seems we are supposed to just bury our dead and get on with life. This appears evident in

the fact that we have put aside many of the rites and ceremonies when mourning the loss of a loved one.

Instead of offering a whole list of rites, such as the wearing of black, I ask only that you watch the next funeral procession you pass on the highway. Do we even stop out of respect anymore? I have witnessed disrespect expressed in horn blasts, cut-ins, and middle finger salutes during many funeral escorts.

Ceremonies seem now to be somewhat limited to a Viewing, followed by a Memorial Service, the Interment, and wrapped up with a quick gathering afterward to feed those who attended. After that, poof! Most attendees scatter back to everyday life where the loss no longer has a pressing impact on them.

You probably experienced this yourself during the services when surrounded by incredible amounts of love and support for a few days after the loss. Then suddenly, it seemed to disappear like a wisp of smoke and the support was gone.

Again, this is not a lack of respect or indignation on the part of friends and extended family. Instead, it is the direction our society has led us. No one comes

only from the next farmhouse or village any longer. Those days are long gone. Attendees may now travel from across the country or around the globe, and need to return to their own lives and responsibilities as soon as possible.

It is you and me that belong to a club that no one wants to join. We do not get to go back to normal life.

Immediately After the Loss

Against your will, you were given a Griefcase, and, of course, the first folder you picked up was probably Shock. Then came Confusion and maybe Anger, but you had not really begun to process them yet. There was not time since your male traits kicked in to let you know arrangements had to be made for the funeral services.

That little gem allowed you to close the Griefcase for a while and carry it around as you did your manly duties. As a man, you generally have the responsibility to take care of the preparations and assure everything possible is done to honor your lost loved one.

While I do not mean to speak of it so dryly, if the loss is a wife or a child, not only will you naturally

assume those duties, but there is a good chance others may expect you to. If it is, unfortunately, one of your own parents, or your brother or sister, you may or may not take the lead, but you certainly will jump in there and take any coordinating role you can get your hands on.

Regardless, beginning from that very day of loss you are not only going to be interacting with immediate family, but also friends, co-workers, and even some people you probably did not know before. Each of these wonderful folks will feel some level of genuine sadness for you, but only a few of them have ever experienced carrying their own Griefcase.

As you meet them before, during or after the services, keep in mind they are there for you. Yet, they do not understand how good it makes you feel just to know they are there in support. If they did, they would do little more. Instead, good manners bid most to be polite by verbally addressing others at social gatherings, and right or wrong, they will normally feel obliged to speak.

To those who have not lost a loved one, it may seem strange to hear that words do not actually need to be spoken to a griever. Again, just the appearance of others when your heart is so heavy can be incredibly honoring and supportive in itself. I have attended many other funerals over the years and in two of those I recall not approaching the bereaved at all.

In each case, the griever was constantly surrounded by family, a gang of other well-wishers, or was involved in carrying out responsibilities. While I made sure there was eye contact and gestures of regard to the griever, I simply paid respects to the dearly departed and left when it seemed appropriate.

Both of these separate bereaved were strong acquaintances I knew well but usually did not see frequently. One was a client, and the other a member of a mutual civic club, so months would normally go by between contact.

I would run into both of these men months after their respective losses. Upon seeing each, I respectfully voiced my condolences and mentioned

my reluctance to approach earlier. Each man responded in the same way, basically saying that just knowing I was there meant much more than any words I could have said.

Those funeral services took place before my own loss, so it was not until then that I would come to understand just what those men meant. I do wonder now about all the other services I attended over the years. How many things did I say that could have been considered insensitive? If I did, I know in my heart any words to the griever were well intended.

Good hearted, wonderful people who are uncomfortable but polite like I was before my loss will probably approach even long after and say some of the following to a griever:

- ~ *She in a better place now*
- ~ *He had a long life*
- ~ *At least he is out of pain*
- ~ *I know exactly how you feel*
- ~ *It was God's will*
- ~ *God needed an angel*
- ~ *It was just her time*

To be honest, you may have heard any or all these phrases from well-wishers, but during the funeral services I would bet you did not even register them. Your mind was not focusing on what was or was not socially acceptable at the moment. Even if you did register some, remember that nothing was said out of malice. People really do mean well.

As time goes by in your grief journey, your mind may actually become a little more sensitive to some of these phrases. You will begin to hear them more often and have a little more time to process them mentally.

Do not let them get to you any more than you allowed earlier. Time does not change the intent of the thought, nor does it increase anyone's awareness of what words are right or wrong to the griever.

There are, however, some phrases occasionally said to the bereaved that are incredibly insensitive. For these, please feel free to respond to the well-wisher with your choice of pithy replies. They include:

- ~Time heals all wounds
- ~You can have another child
- ~You can always remarry
- ~Look for the good in this
- ~Glad you have other kids
- ~You will get over this

~Whole life is ahead of you ~You should get a pet
~AND...**At least you will save tons on college tuition**

Interactions After the Loss

Once the services are over, loving but extended family members, as well as close friends, will return to their lives. That means you are no longer surrounded by only those who are intimately familiar with what you are going through.

This also means that as you return to the outside world, you will come in contact with your more casual friends who may not yet be aware of your loss.

You are still relatively new in your grief journey at this point and regardless of whether you are using the Griefcase and processing your loss, or still holding it back, you are a male. Your grief will be more internal and nothing on your exterior is going to tell anyone you are in pain.

Although you will not be walking around with a sign that says *use caution*, your mind may tell you different. One thing commonly relayed by those who are grieving, and almost irrespective of where they are on

their journey, is that their pain inside is so great that they believe others just somehow have to know.

It is more wishful thinking, however, as subconsciously you are aware that almost everything you need to do or even think about is going to be an effort to deal with mentally. Sadly, there is no unspoken sign or signal that alerts others to cut you some slack, even for just a little while.

When out and about, decisions will have to be made when you meet others in passing. After the initial exchange of pleasantries, should you tell them of your loss? There is no rulebook for who you tell and who you do not. There are no social guidelines and no right or wrong. It all comes down to you and how you are moving forward at the time.

You may run into friends who you initially did not notify of the loss because you were not close at the time. Do you tell them now? You might wonder if they will find out through a mutual friend later and be offended. Again, it is your choice. It is your grief. If you do not want to, do not let it bother you.

If you do decide to tell others of your loss, be prepared for a complete change of character in whoever it is you are talking to. No matter what face you both initially put forward, his or her demeanor will understandably change to one of sympathy. There will be apologies and condolences, which will surely be followed each time by the question of “what happened?”

Be cautious. In just a short period of time, you could actually find yourself repeating details of the loss over and over again in any one day. This could be incredibly taxing as you will be reliving the death every time you talk of it.

Therefore, telling others will be up to you and you only. If you are emotionally at your limits, save it for the next time you to cross paths. You do not need any excuses when it comes to grieving someone you lost, and your emotional energy needs to be spent moving forward, not standing still or going backward.

No matter who you come in contact with after your loss, remember that they may or may not be comfortable. Regardless of their response, consider it

to be well meaning. There is no one out there who would want to slow down your journey in moving forward towards your new normal.

CHAPTER NINE ~ THE GRIEFCASE OF OTHERS

Grief can be a burden, but also an anchor. You get used to the weight, how it holds you in place.

~ Sarah Dessen

It would be a rare occasion if you were the only one to carry a Griefcase after the loss of a loved one. A traumatic loss will certainly impact immediate family members, but also extended family and possibly close friends as well. Each will have their own Griefcase, and just like you, no one else can carry it for them. However, it can certainly help with their journey when you are aware of this.

There could be any combination of others that bereave the loss of someone loved mutually. The horrific loss of a child will be felt by both mother *and* father, as well as any brothers or sisters in the family. The loss of a spouse will be shared by any children in the marriage, and probably extend to the late spouse's parents and siblings.

You need to be expressly aware that others will carry their own Griefcase, and your actions and interactions will affect how they move forward as well.

Loss of a Child

Everyone can agree that it is simply not the natural order of life for a parent to outlive a child. One of the very primal functions of almost every living creature on earth is to reproduce in order to continue the species. As humans, we will seek a mate, reproduce, and at some point well into the future, hopefully, pass away with age and leave our offspring to carry on the same cycle.

Psychological research shows the birth of a child to be the greatest act of masculinity for men and femininity for women. If a traumatic child loss occurs, it can strip away the fundamental identity of both parents. Therefore, while you are lugging around a heavy Griefcase, always be aware that the child's mother carries one too.

Failure to recognize this can bring even greater pain after the loss. It is a sad fact that when a husband and wife need each other the most, their differences

in the normal and natural grief mannerisms of each can innocently push them apart.

It is not unusual to erroneously hear that approximately eighty percent of the couples who lose a child will divorce as a result of that loss. While that figure might not be hard to imagine, it is simply not true, however. Empirical data actually shows the number is realistically only around sixteen percent, and many times the loss of a child is not even given as the primary factor for dissolving the marriage.

That realistic figure tells you that thankfully the strong and loving bond between you and your wife will do much to hold the marriage together after a traumatic loss. Still, the majority of the reduced divorce rate could undoubtedly be avoided. To do so, there must be mutual understandings and compassion for the differing way men and women express emotions.

From the very onset of loss, you must first assume that your relationship will remain strong, regardless of the differences in the way you each move through grief.

Expect shock and intense grief for at least two weeks after the loss, where your understanding will be incredibly important. Afterward, you and the mother will experience several months of strong grieving before you even begin a steadier process of moving forward to the new normal. That does not mean that grief is gone, as you both will, of course, express some level of the loss emotions indefinitely.

It is important that you let the woman in your life know exactly what you are feeling. She generally expresses her emotions openly, of course, and even if you are processing yours, will be doing so more internally than her. If that is true, she may mistake your natural inward tendencies as a lack of feelings for your child. She needs to know that is the farthest from the truth.

On the other hand, if you are indeed holding the grief back entirely, tell her that as well. Be honest with both of you. You need to move forward and she, as your partner, can be very instrumental in helping you begin.

You should also share what you have learned here about the differences in the way men and women express emotions, especially in grief. The diversity is not limited to just immediately beyond the loss, either.

Some of the points to emphasize are:

Male Traits:

- ~ Instinctively try to hold back grief entirely
- ~ Subconsciously feel personally/socially inadequate
- ~ Delay grief due to guilt or other factors
- ~ Delay grief in order to support others
- ~ Grieve more inwardly when it does come
- ~ Attempt to control any outward show of emotion
- ~ Immerse in work or physical activity

Female Traits:

- ~ Show emotions more externally
- ~ Exhibit lengthy periods of openly crying
- ~ Look to others to measure emotions
- ~ Talk a great deal about the loss
- ~ Become more active in organizations and groups

With these obvious differences in the expression of emotional tendencies between men and women, a

man may have difficulties in understanding the outward crying and constant demonstrations of pain from the woman. The woman may feel resentment for the husband being less tortured, or even alienated for being the only one to speak aloud of the loss.

Oftentimes, these animosities go undiscussed, as one may not want to “attack” the other personally early in the loss. Yet, I think you know by now what becomes of unresolved feelings. They only grow in intensity and will come out later in more uncontrolled and harmful manners.

Just remember that neither of you is grieving inappropriately. Open discussions with her about your feelings will go a long way toward moving forward. Understand her, also, and support her with as much honest communication as possible. Your relationship will actually become much stronger this way when challenged by such a tragedy. Look to the long term.

Loss of a Wife or Significant Other

Often in a strong relationship, a man may not be aware of just how much his wife contributes to his daily needs, emotionally and around the home. With the

loss of his best friend and partner, a man must not only deal with the deep emotional crush of being without her but except the sole responsibility of running the household as well. If there are children, whether living in the household or on their own, they will also have a Griefcase.

Minor children especially will need help with their grief and that role will fall to you. However, you may be heavily involved in early preparations and maybe even overwhelmed by grief yourself. If that is the case, support from friends and relatives will be essential.

It is important that children be able to discuss the loss. As hard as it will be, you should always give them the facts surrounding the passing, including your own feelings. Listen to what the children have to say and be prepared to hear and discuss things over and over again.

When discussing the loss with your children, you should always correct any falsities they may have, and never tell your own half-truths just to spare their pain. Like your own, a child's grief will last the rest of their life and may resurface at any time in the future. In

adulthood, the uncovered truth of even a little white lie heard as a child can cause new grief issues to flare up.

Since there are varying age groups of children, there are many generalities to consider. Surprisingly, one of those is that children can be more down to earth about death than adults sometimes. Regardless, you and only you should sit down with them quietly, preferably at home, and discuss the loss as soon as possible.

Be aware that a child's grief will also be accompanied by anxieties and fears. They may be trying to process some of the following thoughts:

- ~ Does everyone die who gets sick or hurt?
- ~ Did Mommy die because of something I did?
- ~ Will you die now too, Daddy?
- ~ Am I going to die now?
- ~ Who will look after me now that Mommy is gone?

Be prepared to answer these questions and more as openly and honestly as possible. While they may not openly demonstrate it, children need to feel safe and secure. Someone close, especially a parent being

taken away suddenly can be devastating to a child's sense of security.

If the children want to attend the funeral services, you can let them. Kids as young as two and a half understand the idea of saying goodbye. If they have questions, answer them. They may be concerned about what is going on with Mommy and is she being cared for properly.

Know that even up to the age of two children will recognize the absence of a mother when she is suddenly gone. Between the ages of two and three, the child will constantly expect the mother to reappear at any time. From three to five, they will get accustomed to the absence but still be convinced that someday Mommy is coming back.

Throughout childhood, the death of a mother can set a child apart from other kids at school, bringing on additional stress. Keep in mind that certain times of the year, such as birthdays, Mother's Day and Christmas, may be especially sensitive times for the children. Be sure any child care providers or teachers are told of the loss and the dates to be more watchful.

Use caution during the younger years not to give the impression that Mommy was “taken” by God to live in Heaven. This could make the child feel false anger and blame towards God for causing the death and lead to long-term spiritual issues later in life.

As children reach preadolescence and beyond, most will have some rational concept of death. If you observe negative behavior related to the loss, talk about it with the child. Make sure you never allow grief to be an excuse for adverse behavior.

With teenagers, the loss of a mother can add problems to those already heaped upon any adolescent. Do not be surprised to find they are seeking guidance from friends outside the home. This is not a judgment on you.

Be more observant for behavioral issues such as drug and alcohol use. These are often presented to teens in normal peer pressure settings and a strong home life allows them to make the right choice. This may not be so easy in grief when a teen’s self-esteem is low.

Throughout childhood be sure everyone knows it is always okay to talk about the mother and her loss. Remember, children have their own Griefcase to carry and while you are dealing with yours, you will still need to help them arrange and lighten theirs.

Grown children who are living outside the home will also have a Griefcase. Daughters, regardless of age, will generally grieve openly and also be monitoring your emotions. Be prepared to face some of the misperceived grief issues discussed earlier in this chapter. Sit down with your daughter and tell her exactly how you feel and how you are grieving.

A son reacting to a mother's passing may do so in exactly the same manner as you. As with the daughter, you might lighten his Griefcase by sitting down and explaining what you are feeling inside. Do not be surprised if he is attempting to hold in his grief. Whether he is or not, please share this book with him. He is dealing with the same nature and nurture issues as his father, after all, and has lost someone very dear to him.

Loss of an Extended Family Member

There are so many combinations of possible loss within the extended family that it would be difficult to cover them all here. The one common denominator is that each one of the survivors, including you, will be carrying their own Griefcase. How great that burdens each will depend on the connection and amount of love felt for the passing family member.

Your wife may lose a parent, or a brother or sister. While you may have warm feelings, and some level of love, your wife will be far more devastated, of course. She will need your support and may expect you to feel the pain as deeply as she does.

You may lose someone on your side of the family and while your wife may express a great deal of grief, this may not be entirely for the deceased. Instead, the majority of her pain will be for you and the other family members. She is an empathizer and her Griefcase will be filled more with the pain for others.

Again, you could throw in so many variations of relationships and closeness, but it really just comes

down to you being cognizant that others will carry a Griefcase and you must be respectful of that.

Be aware that others may not be as understanding of your male traits as you are and wonder why you do not openly grieve at the level they think is appropriate. Even extended family members, regardless of what side, may expect you to show signs of grief.

You might tell extended family members how you do care for the deceased and how the loss affects you. Then, at some point in the future, you can also tell of the self-awareness you discovered in the Griefcase. Feel free to explain how it helped you with moving forward toward your new normal, and perhaps how they can do the same with theirs.

CHAPTER TEN ~ TAKING YOUR GRIEFCASE TO WORK

There is no grief like the grief that does not speak.
~ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

No matter what personal devastation may come in life, the world continues to turn. You and I, Griefcase in hand, are part of that too. For so many of us, that means returning to work, although many times way too soon for our own good. Our inherent male traits tell us we must be responsible, do the right thing, and take care of others, even while trying to get our hearts around the loss of a loved one.

While no less comforting, we will probably live a long life with our best friend by our side, as the majority of spouse loss hits us somewhat late in our lives. Studies show, however, that the sad loss of a parent or the devastating loss of a child generally takes place during the age when we are at the peak of our professions.

You will return to the office, job site, factory floor or classroom desk after your loss, and it may seem

incredibly difficult at first. Your male traits, though, will remind you of your responsibility either to surviving family members or even to the company you work for, regardless of whether you are a leader or front line employee.

Returning to Work

“When you come to work, leave your home life at the door.” We hear that all the time, but nothing could be farther from the truth. Even before your loss, you went to work each day carrying with you all the emotions, motivations and demotivations that were taking place in your personal life. It is only human nature. Now, however, you have the ultimate burden of lugging the Griefcase along with you.

The first thing you have to do is *be easy on yourself*. You have a lot on your mind and a Griefcase in your hand. Expect to be more distracted and less productive for some time to come. As you begin to move forward through your grief, you still need to be aware that your mind and your reflexes may not respond so quickly.

If you are feeling fatigued, overwhelmed, or unfocused, let your boss know that you need a little time before completing the task at hand. Do not resume anything until you are sure you can do it safely and with total competency in your abilities.

Once you have returned to work you will want to get together with leadership members and let them know how you are doing, even if you *are* the boss. Tasks have to be completed, but some can be dangerous or have sensitive consequences. All the updates you can give will allow others to move resources around as needed.

Before you return to work, however, you should have your boss or appropriate member discuss your loss with co-workers. Some may have attended the services and know everything, while others are aware but know very little, and still others know nothing at all.

For many of us, we spend more awake time with co-workers than we do with those at home. Close relationships, although they may not be social outside the workplace, are often established, and many of those people care for you very much.

On your return, you may find yourself telling the story of your loss over and over again to those who want to console you. As we discussed before, this can be emotionally draining. Do not go beyond your current comfort level.

Be very cautious with your ego, as well as those inherent male traits inside. They will invariably attempt to pop out around those who look to you for leadership. Those instincts will tell you to appear strong, unshakable, and someone who bounces back from adversity quickly. Just remind your ego that the loss of a loved one is much more than any difficulty found in the workplace.

As with our earlier discussion about well-wishers, be understanding with those at work. Many will be unsure how to interact with you on your return and may act awkwardly and/or uncomfortably. Those co-workers absolutely want to be supportive, especially when considered a team member with you. Yet, they may feel uncertain how to approach, and then if they do, what to say. If they do say the *wrong* thing, just remember it is not said in malice.

Some co-workers may say nothing at all. On top of general concerns about feeling awkward, they are not comfortable with mortality in general. When they consider your loss, it mentally puts them right in your shoes and brings thoughts of what it would be like to lose someone of their own.

If they had actually lost a loved one in the past, a co-worker may have some unresolved grief issues of their own. Facing you may bring back incredible pain which they are not willing or prepared to deal with. While we hate to consider anyone stuck in grief, your immediate return is not the time to address it with them.

It would actually be rare for someone who had lost anyone close and then progressively moved forward through grief themselves to shy away from you. Their compassionate heart might lead them to respect your space, but not to avoid you altogether. They have been through the fire and felt the pain.

As you move forward through your grief journey, you must keep in mind that many at work will be well ahead of you. As a matter of fact, it will seem that in

just a short period of time your loss is all but forgotten to them.

Those at work, including management and peers, do not go home with you at the end of the day. They do not live the new life you unwillingly live now. They do not experience the unwanted change in what was once normal for you. For them, nothing at home or at work will be different than their previous day's version of normal.

Eventually, since they are not directly affected by it, your loss will fade in their minds. So will the idea that you could still be experiencing the incredible pain. It is not their fault, actually. After all, you are moving forward through the grief, processing the emotions and from all observations, appear to be fully functional again and doing well.

On the plus side, this means you are entering a phase where you can actually manage life for periods of time without the Griefcase getting in your way. You are finding that for a few hours a day the emotions of loss do not weave themselves into your every thought.

What others around you cannot see, however, is that you are never without the Griefcase and the painful emotions inside that come in waves. When those waves come they demand your immediate attention regardless of where you are or what you are doing.

Those that have never experienced a traumatic loss simply do not understand that. To them, you had the loss, felt the pain, moved on and got back to the guy you were. When you have those times when the waves come, do not be surprised if some, including bosses, wonder why you cannot “get over” it.

You need to let the leaders at work know that grief does not just go away. Tactfully inform them that there may be times in the future when you request some considerations. These may include an occasional day off, time to take a break for a walk, or just a few minutes of quiet privacy.

These considerations will actually increase your value to the business, not the opposite as an insensitive leader might presume. Quite frankly, if there is no understanding for this, you should consider

seeking another employer. Your grief is going to continue in waves, and will for some time into the future. The height of those emotional waves and their power may decrease over time, but they will still come nonetheless, and you do not want them impacting others on the job in a harmful way.

While you might be concerned with the judgments of your employer and co-workers, please be more concerned with thoughts of a healing, healthy future for yourself.

Bereavement Leave

Take as much time off from work as you possibly can. I can be no more direct than that. Unfortunately, that is not the same as saying take as much time off work as you need.

The cold, hard fact is that the majority of us work in a world of commerce, or the buying and selling of goods and services for profit. Profit is the key word there. No one starts a business to take a loss, and in today's world, success is measured in positive revenue.

Whether you are the business owner, business leader or a front line employee, revenue is generally obtained through productivity. Productivity means people at work doing their assigned jobs. Persons away from their assigned job obviously reduce how much work can be produced in their absence.

It all sounds so cold, but keep in mind you are probably not the only one on the payroll. There are others that work there too, and productivity and profit have a huge impact on them. One person away from work may seem unnoticeable, but in reality, can often have a rippling effect to co-workers and customers.

We might question the negative impact when considering that almost every company out there provides some manner of paid time off. People miss work regularly for such things as vacations and holidays but keep in mind those absent days are normally anticipated and planned for. Bereavement leave can never be anticipated.

Surprisingly, in the United States, the Department of Labor currently does not mandate leave of any type, except for what is covered under the Family Medical

Leave Act. Paid vacations, holidays, sick time and even meal breaks are all at the discretion of the employer. Most companies do provide some paid bereavement leave, but that will vary from employer to employer. Currently around the U.S., the average is three paid days off from work even for immediate family members.

Some companies will allow you to use accrued vacation days on top of paid bereavement leave. Others might pay the first three and then let you take a reasonable number of unpaid days off. It simply varies from business to business and how much an absent employee impacts productivity.

When it comes to flexibility, do not be surprised if your company decides to stand firm on bereavement leave policies. Unfortunately, we live in a litigious world, and allowing one employee to have an exception, but not another could have legal ramifications. In order to avoid the possibility, employers ensure that everyone strictly follows the prescribed policies, regardless of the circumstance.

The bottom line, though, is you need to ensure you are mentally prepared to return to work. Take all the time allowable by your employer, whether paid or unpaid if you can. Many of us work in environments where our quality of work impacts others. If you are not fully prepared, then get together with the appropriate people at your company and attempt to negotiate some resolution to give you the time you need.

Company Involvement in Grief

Some of the more progressive businesses are beginning to understand how working with bereaved employees can actually increase morale and the bottom line profits.

In a study completed by the Grief Recovery Institute Educational Foundation of Sherman Oaks, California, it was determined that businesses in the United States lose an average of \$71 Billion annually due to grief related effects. That is Billion with a B.

The data they pulled was not subjective. The U.S. Government's vital statistics database maintained by the Center for Disease Control (CDC) was used to

compile the above monetary data, utilizing information that is open to the public.

The impacts of productivity were in the areas of:

Lack of concentration (leading to workplace accidents and higher Worker's Comp ratings) ~ Absenteeism ~ Decreased productivity ~ Lack of creativity ~ Reduced morale and motivation ~ Conflict of subordinate-manager interests ~ Cost of hiring and training new employees ~ Disruption to customers, suppliers, and business partners ~ Emotional outbursts of angry workers ~ High counseling costs ~ High employee turnover ~ Impeded memory ~ Unpredictable mood swings and behavioral changes

The CDC, who gave us that previous data, also lists that in the year 2014 there were 851.5 deaths for every 100,000 people in the United States. Using those numbers, we can see the impact that has on a familiar but unnamed Fortune 100 company as an example.

The company has approximately 130,000 direct employees, which means using the ratio above, the business could experience over 1,000 deaths per

year. While staggering on its own, that is just current staff and does not account for the loss of employee spouses, children, siblings, or parents. Taking family into account raises the bereavement impact number much, much higher. Each single employee can experience multiple losses in his or her family throughout their tenure of employment.

Businesses are coming to understand that supporting their bereaved employees actually mitigates the negative impacts at the workplace. Beyond just offering confidential assistance through a typical program such as an EAP (Employee Assistance Program), new innovations are being brought in.

Today, corporations are outsourcing to grief support organizations with skilled councilors who focus on helping not only the bereaved but the business as well. These organizations are working with executives, managers, and front-line supervisors to provide training and awareness on how to work alongside those who have just lost a loved one.

We can all hope that many businesses will realize that grief does not just go away when an employee returns to work. As you move forward in your grief journey, you may find yourself promoting such ideas with your own employer. It certainly makes the workplace a safer, more comforting environment, and increases productivity and revenue. More than that, though, it will help those poor souls who have lost a dear loved one.

Work as a Distraction

Many who have recently lost a loved one might actually look forward to a return to work. Throughout the initial days after your loss, many good hearted people told you to *take care of yourself*. As a man, that might easily be interpreted as staying busy and remaining active. Taking care also includes returning to work and putting your *all* into it, which keeps your mind occupied on anything other than the pain.

So many well-wishers also told you that *time heals all wounds*. Time does not heal all wounds, of course, but your mind wants to believe that little diddy. So, on this advise you dive headfirst into your job, hoping

beyond hope that if distracted long enough, the pain will fade before you have to confront it.

Truth be told it may be some time before you can work without emotions invading your thoughts. The power of grief does not wane or lessen each time you push it away. In fact, an emotion may actually become more intense and force its way back so powerfully that you must give it your full attention. Will that come at a point during a dangerous or sensitive task?

Throwing yourself back at work may not only be a way to distract yourself from the pain, either. It may also be an attempt at gaining some sense of control over your life. When we lose a loved one, it is out of our control and something we had no say so over.

Your job, on the other hand, is something you are very good at, and regardless of your position, have some level of control there. At work, you may try to replace the lack of control in losing your loved one with showing yourself and others you can control your job very well.

If you find yourself working longer hours than usual, taking fewer breaks, and generally becoming a

workaholic, know this is not a healthy strategy for moving forward. It is worth repeating that the pains of grief need to be faced in order to move forward to your new normal. Do not allow yourself to be delayed.

CLOSING WORDS

We are not human beings having a spiritual experience,
we are spiritual beings having a human experience.”

~ Dr. Wayne Dyer

It is my hope that you truly understand and appreciate the concepts within the Griefcase. We are men, and men have an instinctual urge to actively organize, manage and use tools to fix issues in our lives. The Griefcase is the perfect visual utensil to help you do just that on the journey toward the new normal in your life.

In that journey, it is understood we all handle grief in our own way, and on our own timeline. We also recognize there are some common milestones we need to meet along the way. They will not be pretty, and they will not be easy to accept, but we are not about pulling punches. We are about moving forward.

First, we accept the reality of the loss. Second, we use the Griefcase to work through the emotions within grief. Third, we recognize that every day we are finding and adjusting to a new normal where someone

we love dearly is no longer there. Fourth, we are able to use the memory of our lost loved one for joy, instead of pain.

The first three milestones are difficult, but worthy when you discover the joy within the fourth. You will need to work actively in dealing with loss. By doing so directly, and finding the right support when needed, you will travel through the grief journey in a way that rebuilds a positive self-esteem, removes the clouds from self-worth, and brings negative traits out from the subconscious. It will help heal your broken heart, too.

I do pray that you will use the Griefcase to help other bereaved men you know or may meet along the way. My ultimate hope, however, is that whether through the Griefcase or through your own strength you will continue to move forward towards wholeness and healing. We have experienced an unimaginable tragedy in life but truly are destined to find peace and purpose again.

DEFINITIONS IN THE GRIEFCASE

Death leaves a heartache no one can heal,
love leaves a memory no one can steal.
~From a headstone in Ireland

Grieving is some of the hardest work an individual ever does, and it helps to know some of the definitions common to the journey towards the path to healing.

The definitions below are provided as they relate to the passing of a loved one. Some definitions may have meanings outside of the topic of this book and therefore not included in the text.

Moving Forward

The personal act of addressing the deeply painful emotions within grief in order to keep each from incapacitating the griever in a constant mental state of despair, anguish, and confusion.

Moving forward is one of the most important concepts in the overall recovery from the loss of a loved one. It includes the awareness that each emotion in grief must be continually addressed, even

with the awareness that the process will be difficult and lengthy. The concept of moving forward should remain a constant for the bereaved.

The New Normal

The state of the bereaved mentally acknowledging that the life considered *normal* before the loss will never return, and the future will always hold some level of longing and pain for the one that passed.

Acknowledging the new normal usually comes with the recognition that life for the bereaved after a loss should still be one of joy, happiness, and purpose. In addition, there will be an eventual awareness that the spirit of the lost loved one remains interwoven in the griever's thoughts, but brings warm remembrances instead of pain.

The promise of a new normal can be incredibly important to the griever, as well as those supporting him. Awareness that the destructive impacts of some emotions felt, such as despair, can be left behind give new hope when the bereaved feel overwhelmed.

The new normal will never announce itself in a manner allowing the griever to celebrate, as it is a

continually progressing state of mind. Progress, however, becomes recognizable to the bereaved when they realize that mental anguish does not interfere in every choice made and no longer stops the griever from taking actions in life.

Grief

The normal and natural consequence to loss or change which can encompass a wide range of intense emotional reactions. Grief is neither a pathological condition nor a personality disorder.

The more significant the loss, the more intense the grief will be. There is no defined time limit for grieving. Each person will process the emotions within grief in their own time.

The origin of the word *grief* comes from the latin "*gravare*", *to burden, load; oppress*.

Emotionally, grief can bring sadness, guilt, anger, fear, anxiety, or mood swings. On the cognitive level, there may first be disbelief, or an inability to assimilate the reality. Preoccupation with thoughts about the lost loved one is common.

Physically, the griever may experience tears, crying, tightness in the throat, heaviness in the chest, emptiness or churning in the stomach, fatigue, weakness, restlessness, insomnia, or physical pain.

Mental functioning can be disrupted in the bereaved. There may be symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or even Attention Deficit Disorder. Socially, the griever may feel an urge to seek companionship and support, yet withdraw and isolate themselves.

Spiritually there is a challenge to the griever's assumptions about the safety and security, fairness and justice of the universe, or even the very existence of God.

Unresolved Grief

The emotions or feelings within the bereaved which are either avoided altogether or are so incapacitating that one or more interferes with the griever's ability to take care of daily responsibilities.

The emotions within grief can be expected to cause some level of immediate decrease in the abilities of the griever. While there is no time limit to

grief, nor two people who will ever grieve the same, there comes the reasonable time after a loss when the bereaved should be able to care for oneself and carry out some level of daily responsibilities.

Unresolved grief can be the result of many reasons. Guilt is one of the most profound and can keep the bereaved from facing the pain. A new loss can also open the unresolved grief of a loss from the past. Multiple losses at one time can be an incredible burden to process, and cause an inability to cope.

Unresolved grief will hold back the bereaved from moving forward down the path towards healing and can lead to psychological and even physical problems.

Some of the common indicators of unresolved grief are when the bereaved avoid:

- ~ Talking about the loss altogether
- ~ Memories of the departed, even good ones
- ~ Places and events shared with the departed
- ~ Wall pictures and photographs of the departed
- ~ Events or locations shared with the departed

Complicated Grief

A condition in which the bereaved is caught up in deep debilitating thoughts well beyond the initial loss of a loved one. Indications could include the bereaved continually going over the circumstances of the death, incessantly worrying about the consequences or persistent avoidance of the loss altogether.

In complicated grief, the bereaved may be unable to comprehend the finality and consequences of the loss, which leads to the overall avoidance of the thought.

Additional support for the bereaved experiencing complicated grief should be sought. It occurs in approximately 7% of griever after a traumatic loss, and should be resolved as soon as possible to allow the griever to move forward.

Mourning

The rituals for the loss of an individual which are recognized by socially expressed customs and ceremonies. Examples may be wearing black,

lowering flags to half-mast, black armbands, sending flowers, and attending funeral services.

Although cultures differ widely, mourning is usually observed for a period of time where one or more withdrawal from normal activities for quiet, respectful behavior towards the departed.

The mourning process is intended to help the bereaved face the reality that their loved one is gone and then to slowly begin to accommodate to that fact.

The origin of the word *mourn* comes for the Middle English word *mournen*. The unverified meaning is *to remember*.

Bereavement

The overall experience of both grief and mourning after a death. While grief refers to the emotional *reaction* to the loss, bereavement refers to the *state* of loss. When someone is grieving and in mourning, they are known to be the *bereaved*.

The origin of the word *bereave* comes from the Old English word *berēafian*, meaning “rob,” “deprive,” and “seize.”

A PLACE FOR YOUR NOTES

A Place for Your Notes

RESOURCES – GRIEF AND BEREAVEMENT

Those who have suffered understand suffering and therefore
extend their hand.

~ Patti Smith

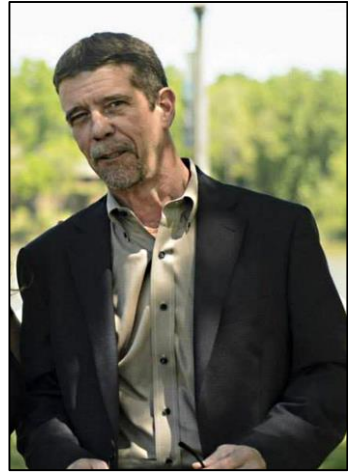
National Grief and Bereavement Support

Below is a list of non-profit grief support groups who have done tremendous work with those who have lost a loved one.

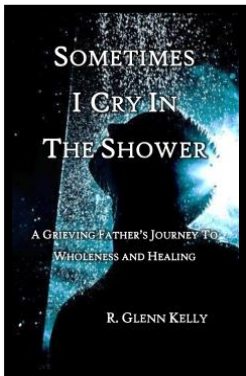
- ~ Cry For Me...No More ~ cryformenowmore.com
Support for families and corporations
- ~ Lynda Fell & The Grief Diaries ~ griefdiaries.com
National Grief and Hope Coalition – Support | All types
- ~ The Compassionate Friends ~ compassionatefriends.org
Support for families after the death of a child
- ~ Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors ~ taps.org
Support families after death of Active Duty Military
- ~ Bereaved Parents of the USA ~ bereavedparentsusa.org
Support for families after the death of a child
- ~ Alive Alone ~ alivealone.org
Support for families after the death of an only child
- ~ Heartlight Studios ~ heartlightstudios.net
Individual and family support – Workshop Speaker
- ~ C.O.P.S. ~ nationalcops.org
Supporting grief within the law enforcement community

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

R. Glenn Kelly is a writer, public speaker, Grief Support Advocate, and grieving father. After the tragic loss of his teenage son, he left behind the corporate world to work exclusively with bereaved men, and the women who want to understand them.



R. Glenn is the author of the self-help book, “Sometimes I Cry in the Shower: A Grieving Father’s Journey to Wholeness and Healing,” and has appeared on television, support workshops and even college universities to discuss moving forward towards the new normal in recovering from traumatic loss.



Look for Sometimes I Cry in the Shower in paperback and eBook on-line at R. Glenn’s website, grievingmen.com, Amazon, Barnes and Noble and bookstores everywhere.

If you would like to enlist R, Glenn Kelly for speaking engagements, interviews, articles or support, please go to www.grievingmen.com or contact him by email at rglennkelly@rglennkelly.com or [@rglennkelly](https://twitter.com/rglennkelly) on Twitter.