



## SunSet Community Counseling

“Providing a safe place for others to grow—personally & spiritually.”

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

### Healing Through the Grieving Process

It has been many years. So many years that if I am out in public or even with family and I mention the death of my parents, which still deeply affects me, I am cast aside. I have been told in no uncertain terms that I need to be finished with feeling burdened with the loss of my parents. For a while, I jumped on the societal band wagon and attempted to close off the part of me others said was done. I know that is not true. The need to continue holding on has lingered.

Dad died the day after Mom’s birthday. He died suddenly in the middle of the night. From all evidence available, Dad’s body came to a halt, without witness, while normal physical elimination was happening. He had messed his bed, gotten up and started a bath. When the water overflowed the tub, Mom heard the water running through the ceiling and admittedly ignored it. She thought if a pipe was broken nothing could be done until the morning. This information weighed heavily on me. It lingered.

How does an adult child process a loss of a parent? Well, traditionally through mourning or with additional support of grief therapy, which can be viewed as both an intervention and a process depending on the therapeutic perspective. I can talk about stages, phases or tasks. I did this and it worked... kind of. It fit into my master’s degree in community counseling. However I discovered the solution-focused, goal-setting and end-game style truly doesn’t fit grief. Grief is a journey which has a sense of both normalcy and chaos to it. But honestly, few people are willing to live this journey. A journey is continuous. Most people desire an ending. Continuation recognizes fluctuations. Many like the description and image of grief being similar to waves with the reflection of the tide coming in and rolling out. But in a broader picture, there are grief bursts also. Grief bursts are like explosions which happen in a moment and seem to be unconnected to anything. They just happen. These caused lingering because I wanted understanding.

Time does not heal us. Grief softens as we work to address the pain which accompanies the loss. Emotional healing happens nearly without notice, even by the person themselves. Lingering may apparently vanish with time, but actually it waits and may surface in a very disjointed way.

Let me add more to my story. In the majority of cases, parents have an opportunity to be with, learn about and know their children throughout the whole of their children’s lives. This was the case for me. Dad was a part of my whole being. I was a small part of his. I was an even smaller part because of the way Dad slowly separated away from people. This resulted in isolating behaviors not only to me, but too many. These caused more of my lasting lingering.

Mom decided to have a memorial service following Dad’s death. It was good. The service provided a week of checkpoints that my mom, sister and I collaborated on and orchestrated. Extended family, Dad’s old co-workers, and few friends attended without specific notification or invitation. It was simple and wonderful. There were picture boards, memorabilia, music and unplanned readings. My sister and I never had to bring up his style of life, his decline or plans for the future. This became my basis of invisible lingering losses.

In the years after Dad's death, Mom moved to Colorado, closer to my sister and me prior to her death. Her death wasn't sudden. In reflection, Mom's death took a path that was predictable, but I just didn't know it. I did not know the questions to ask regarding our situation compared to the scheme of things in the healthcare world. My only preparation was by trusting in professionals that didn't help much in verifying how I was "handling" my Mom's dying process. I think many professions are stuck in their own created silos of care which include diagnosis and treatment toward an impossible cure. I believe I was being watched and observed for the benefit of the professionals, but it served no purpose in caring for our family. This also added to my lingering losses.

My journey continues. I sought learning about my parents as individuals shortly after my mom's death. I sent cards reaching out to those who knew my parents. I gathered information which fed my awareness and provided insight. I uncovered things I didn't seek, but it helped me make sense of myself, my parents and our family. My persistent lingering decreased.

After years of being a grief counselor and mental health therapist, some of what I sought regarding my parents happens regularly. Discovery often happens following a loved one's or friend's or coworker's death. People find out things. Things may enlighten their perception by clarifying suspicion or give meaning to things which otherwise were obscure. This is a place where change for the future can happen because we do not have to follow the patterns of our parents. The burden of lingering is relinquished when clarity and choices are revealed.

So where am I going with this? Life as a journey is one of engagement, discovery and experience. The journey unfolds through time negating the grief theory of stages, phases and tasks. Personal growth in our stories is the reality and making sense of our identity is the outcome. Its usefulness is everywhere. Making sense is the privilege of being human. Making sense allows each of us to integrate our countless losses with our lives and continue on our journey. The lingering stops.

This is no small order. It is powerful. IT IS HARD! Individual grief counseling can be helpful in this work. Grief groups are common, traditional and often recommended. BE CAREFUL! A person must be ready to be with grieving strangers at this very vulnerable time of their life. Know that your experience is yours. If you are not ready, group can be hurtful and cause unintentional lingering

I co-facilitate local grief groups categorized by the specific type of loss. Members in the Loss of Parent group appear to be affected, influenced and challenged because the whole of their being has somehow, somehow been touched by their parent's death. Commonly grief support is sought as a loved one tries to help another and discovers their own need of support. People will come to grief group with an idea that they just need a tune-up. They can get overwhelmed by how much others have also been shaken, disturbed or distressed by their parents' death. The length of time since the loss of a parent has little effect on a person's need for support. When we need additional support, we should seek it, therefore reducing the likelihood of troublesome lingering. Loss of parents are foundational losses even if the relationship was estranged in anyway.

We are happy to encourage, support and assist as needed.

*"We talk about them, not because we're stuck or because we haven't moved on, but we talk about them because we are theirs, and they are ours, and no passage of time will ever change that."* Scribbles & Crumbles