

Grief Endings and Beginnings: Giving Attention to Each and Both



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Take a Pause...



The Guest House

**This being human is a guesthouse.
Every morning is new arrival.**

**A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.**

Welcome and entertain them all!

Beginning lines of a poem by Rumi



**Is A Time When
Predictability Breaks Down**

**Our Predictable Ways
Of Thinking About And Doing Things
Are Interrupted By Change**

Change Results

In Uncertainty



Otherwise

I got out of bed
on two strong legs.
It might have been
otherwise. I ate
cereal, sweet
milk, ripe, flawless
peach. It might
have been otherwise.
I took the dog uphill
to the birch wood.
All morning I did
the work I love.

At noon I lay down

with my mate. It might
have been otherwise.
We ate dinner together
at a table with silver
candlesticks. It might
have been otherwise.
I slept in a bed
in a room with paintings
on the walls, and
planned another day
just like this day.
But one day, I know,
it will be otherwise.

from *Constance. Poems* by Jane Kenyon (1993). St. Paul:
Graywolf Press.



Losses and the Resulting Grief

LOSS refers to
being deprived of or ceasing
to have something
that one formerly possessed
or to which one was attached

LOSS can and does disrupt
past, present and future stories

Grief is a whole body response to losses:
emotional, cognitive, spiritual, and
physical



Life As Teacher

You would think we would be better at this stuff.

If life is the best teacher, you would think we would be better at losses, changes, disruptions. Life starts with the first ending as a child leaves the womb.

John Brantner



Losses – Conspicuous and Perceived

Some losses are obvious – loss of health, mobility, hearing, retirement, death, move from one house to another, from childhood to adulthood

Other losses are known only to the individual person, family or a few others – dreams, hopes, self-image, one's future story, sense of self



Examples of Shattered Dreams and Families

- the dream of health and recovery
- the dream about how or where a home "should be"
- the dream of time for self (autonomy/control)
- the dream of being or seen as competent
- the dream that the family relationship could withstand any stress or challenge
- the American dream of "social security" – we can afford this
- the dream that plans would be sufficient
- the dream of dying and death



Assumptive World

All of us from the moment of our birth, have been building inside ourselves a model of the world, a set of assumptions on the basis of which we recognize the world that we meet and plan our behaviour accordingly. Because this model is based on reality it is, most of the time, a valid and useful basis for thought and behaviour. We rely on the accuracy of these assumptions to maintain our orientation in the world and to control our lives.

Anything which challenges this model incapacitates us.





Accounts of Disruptions to Assumed Worlds (**ambiguity**)

Life changes fast. Life changes in the instant. You sit down to dinner and life as you know it ends (Didion, 2005).

He will glare at his son's persistence with the anger the sick have for what a healthy body can't know. He will force you to smell the blossoming of his terrible resolve. He would rather die (Eady, 1995)

I know that it is a classic symptom...this turning against the person you love most, and this knowledge is secure above my eyebrows, but very shaky below. I want my mother to be my mother. And she is not. Not any more. Now every again. (L'Engle, 1974)

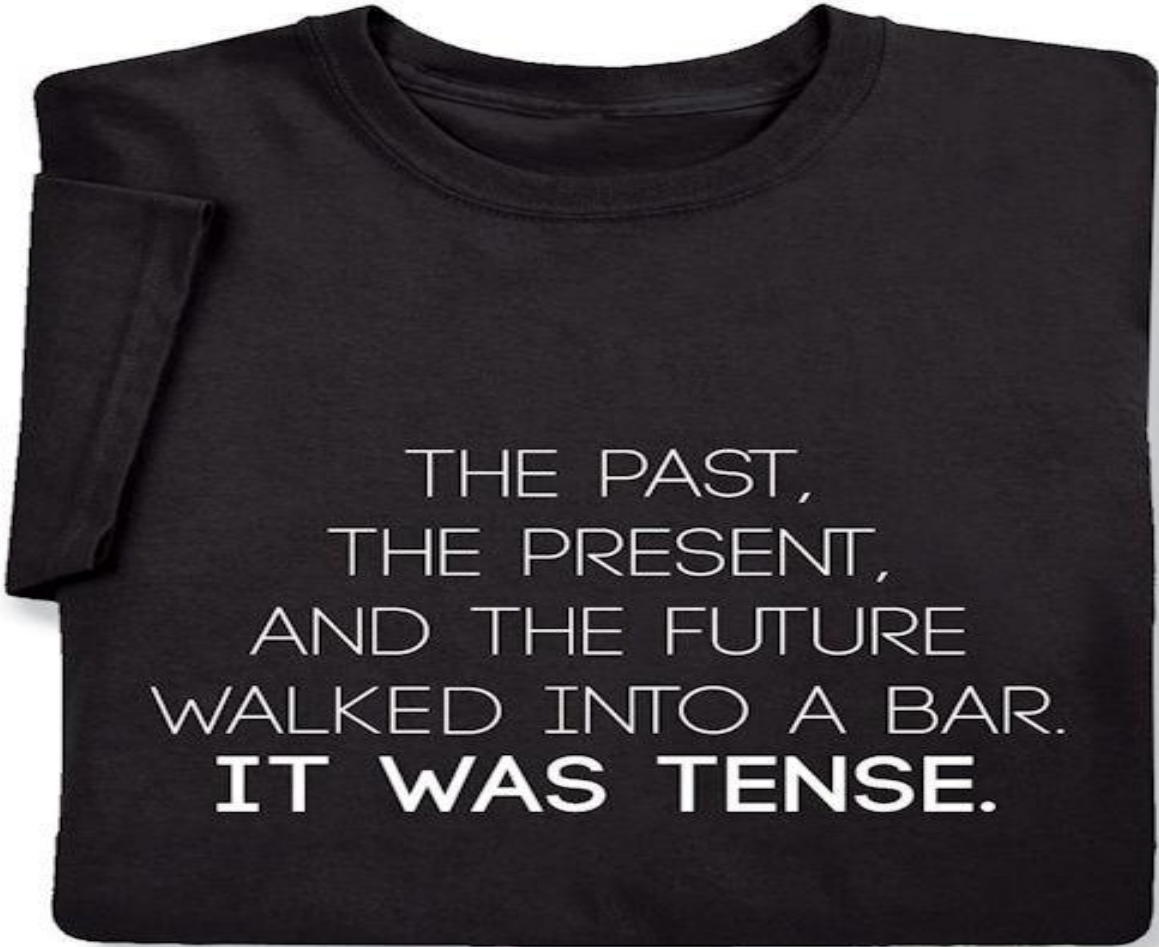


Transition Starts With an Ending

The starting point for transition is not the outcome but the ending that you will have to make to leave the old situation behind. Situational change hinges on the new thing, but psychological transition depends on letting go of the old reality and old identity you had before the change took place.

Wm. Bridges – *Managing Transitions*

(Commentary: returning to normal is not transition)

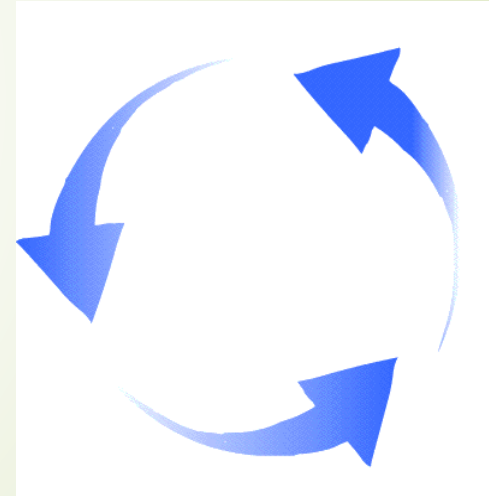
A black t-shirt is laid flat, showing a white text design. The text is arranged in five lines: 'THE PAST,', 'THE PRESENT,', 'AND THE FUTURE', 'WALKED INTO A BAR.', and 'IT WAS TENSE.' The first four lines are in a thin, white, sans-serif font, while the fifth line is in a bold, white, sans-serif font. The t-shirt is set against a white background, which is itself on a light green slide. The slide has a dark green vertical bar on the left with thin, curved lines, and a solid dark green horizontal bar at the top left.

THE PAST,
THE PRESENT,
AND THE FUTURE
WALKED INTO A BAR.
IT WAS TENSE.

Therefore:

Families will routinely experience distress as they face caregiving matters. That can lead to:

**ambivalence faith crises
ambiguity perspective
regret guilt
flashbacks/history context
second guessing conflicts
the need for an internal compass**





Self Awareness - Families

The expectation that a family can live with a chronic condition and not be touched by it is as unrealistic as expecting to be able to walk through water without getting wet.

The expectation that we can leave stresses in our personal, school and work lives and not bring them to other parts is also unrealistic.

The way we deal with distress and loss shapes our capacity to be present to life more than anything else.

Caregivers

There are only four kinds of people in the world:

Those who have been caregivers

Those who are currently caregivers

Those who will be caregivers and
those who need a caregiver

Rosalynn Carter

**You ARE a caregiver...currently and
in the future**

**You deserve and will continue to
need a caregiver (s)**

Ted Bowman



Communicating About Change And Distress

- **Information tames fears**
- **Information gives a sense of control**
- **Communication gives permission**
- **If you don't talk, people fill in blanks**
- **Communication helps with future fears, plans, or concerns**
- **Remember one experience of ____ is one experience**
- **Listen with empathy**
- **Don't interrupt too quickly**
- **Revisit and re-communicate**
- **Be patient**

Emswiler and Emswiler

Ambiguous loss occurs when there are...

**Unanswered questions, uncertainty and the disruption of family and work life due to Covid19
(and many other local, national, and world events)**

“What is distressing us is not just the virus, but the ambiguity surrounding it, what it will do, and what we should do about it. Science provides some answers, but we are experiencing uncertainty, and that’s very stressful for a society that is accustomed to solving problems and having definitive answers.”

Pauline Boss

Responses to Ambiguity

- **Label what people are experiencing (responses will vary)**
- **Provide a structure and setting for contact**
- **Provide information**
- **Increase tolerance for ambiguity**
- **Be flexible, adapt routines, minimize helplessness, normalize situation**
- **Emphasize what can be changed or addressed and what can not...**
- **Move from “either/or” choices to “both/and choices”**

AMBIGUOUS PARABLES

Poems and Prose
of Loss and Renewal



TED BOWMAN

Responses To Stresses/Losses

Name Losses

Address Stressors/Grieve Losses

Put The Loss In Perspective

**Reinforce Or Build Support Connections
(Support Groups, Teams, Informal Support)**

**Set Limits
(Saying No To Some Things So That You Can Yes To Others)**

Ask for Help and Be Willing to Accept Help

Develop A Healing Plan

Appreciative Inquiry



**The World Loves Closure,
Loves a Thing that Can,
As They Say, Be Gotten Through.
This is Why it Comes
As a Great Surprise to Find That
Loss is Forever,
That Two Decades After the Event
There Are Those Occasions When
Something in You Cries Out
At the Continual Presence of an Absence**



Be Grateful for What Has Been

Be Loose With What Is

Be Generous With What Will Be

I am only one. But still I am one.

I cannot do everything,

But still I can do something.

And because I cannot do everything,

**I will not refuse to do the something that I
can do.**

Edward Hale



Reflections About Doing Hospice Work Gathered at the Rowans Hospice, England

Take care of yourself

Know what are your stresses, losses, pluses

Stay curious

Listen – be mindful

Take yourself seriously, but also lightly

Humor, value laughter

You can't get it right every time

Be prepared to say no as well as yes

Build in reflection time

You can't FIX anyone...that's okay

Don't tell people at a party where you work

Be compassionate to yourself



**Storying And Re-storying
After Loss or Disruptive Change
Involves Grieving The Old Story**

**Before Creating The Next
(Not Necessarily New) Story**



Listen For

**Major Components/Themes/Values
Of The Old Story**

**How Can They Be Reframed In
The Next Story**



Holding On and Letting Go A Time for Discernment

Naming the present realities

Receiving how others are experiencing their realities

Laying aside some expectations

Embrace the experience of some vacillating

Rehearsing values

Making promises about how we treat ourselves and others

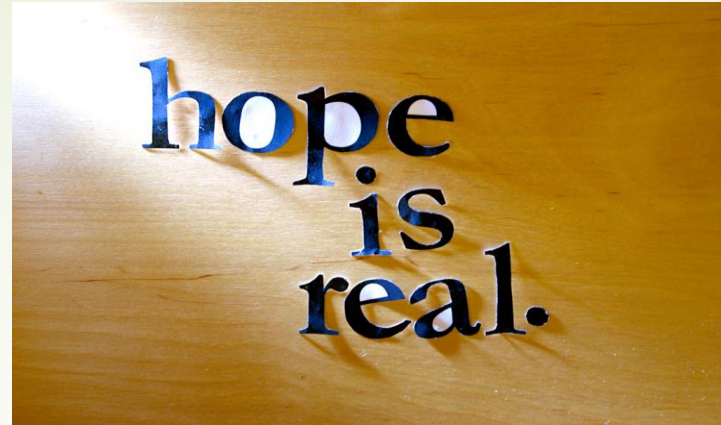
Adapted from work of Susan Nienaber



SHRINKING GRIEF

GROWING YOUR WORLD





Definitions usually include:

EXPECTATION or DESIRE

Which can involve **GOALS, ATTRIBUTES, REDEFINITION,
MEANING, PEACE, ENERGY**



Joy and Grief *and both and*

It does not seem to be the case that joy and grief can occur simultaneously, but they can occur alternately; that is, the pervasive emotion may be grief, and yet joy can slip in momentarily. So, it may happen that even in the deepest grief, filled with guilt and sorrow and regret and despair, I may still see and feel joy there-in-the-world, trembling at my fingertips. Grief is not thereby lessened; indeed, it often intensified.

Nel Noddings



Resiliency/ Hardiness

- **The capacity to spring back, rebound, and successfully adapt to adversity – Bowman from many sources**
- **The capacity to spring forward...**
- **Resilience arises from ordinary resources and processes Masten**
- **The ability to connect, reconnect, and resist disconnection in response to hardships, adversities**

Examples of Resiliency

- Accepted What They Could Not Change, Changed What They Could
- Manageable Pieces/Steps
- Realized: Bad Things Happen To Good People
- Used Creativity
- Healed Themselves By Helping Others
- Did Not Allow Bitterness To Consume / Define Them
- Hopeful Visions Of Future
- Drew On Spiritual Resources



Dual-processing model

(Stroebe and Schut 2001)

31

Loss/Stress Orientation

Stress/Grief work

Intrusion of grief

Denial

Sorting, choices

Autonomy

Restoration Orientation

Attending to life
changes

Doing new things

Distraction, denial,
avoidance of grief

New roles, identities,
relationships



Reasonable Hope

Reasonable hope is relational

Reasonable hope is a practice

Reasonable hope maintains that the future is open, uncertain, and influenceable

Reasonable hope seeks goals and pathways to them

Reasonable hope accommodates doubt, contradictions, and despair

Weingarten

GROUP DISCUSSION

