

THE NEXT STEP

A Mountain Valley Hospice & Palliative Care Publication

Volume 1, Issue 11

April 2015

Broken Crayons Still Color

Ben Webb, Kids Path Coordinator (Mount Airy, NC)

Traveling down the interstate, I noticed a billboard that I had passed many times before yet never really read. Its message was simple but brilliant. Bold, white words stamped on a soft baby-blue background read, "Broken crayons still color." I smiled and continued driving but then, in the same way a warm breeze can transport you to somewhere you have long forgotten, those big, white words carried me away to a memory almost forgotten.

In my mind, I immediately found myself sitting at a wooden table across from a boy who had recently lost his

father. As a Kids Path bereavement counselor, I often joke that I get paid to play or that I am the only person in our agency allowed to document in crayon. But the truth is, I have learned some valuable lessons about life, love, and loss while coloring submarines and drawing dragons. This particular visit provided one of those lessons that live on even after the event has been laid to rest.

I remembered myself and the child sitting in the dimly lit dining room, rummaging through my box of crayons, looking for particular colors to complete our masterpieces.



We discovered that many of my crayons were bent and broken. I had a bad habit of leaving my coloring box in the car on hot days. I should have remembered my childhood discovery that crayons do not react well to heat. I had learned this the hard way as I scraped splattered

crayon from the roof of my grandmother's microwave after attempting to make finger paint by heating my crayons in a Styrofoam bowl.

I apologized to the young man that my crayons were in such poor shape. He selected a broken cherry-red Crayola that was missing its wrapper and, before returning to his picture, said with a childish grin, "It's okay! Broken crayons still work."

I did not think much of his statement at the time, but today at the intersection of past and present, the deep

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A Story of Grief

Stacie Adams, Counselor/Medical Social Worker (Joan & Howard Woltz Hospice Home)

This story of grief began before I was born - you see, we begin to lose before we gain.

"How is that?" you might ask. Think about it: We are created in the warmth of our mother's body, supplied with all that we need. Then we begin to lose space and comfort as we grow; we struggle to be born, and we feel coldness, aloneness, pain and hunger. Although our families generally shower us with love and affection, we still have lost what was known and safe. Navigating this new world is frightening,



and just as soon as we feel safe and comfortable, we lose something again. Now this particular type of loss may not be a bad thing necessarily, but a loss all the same. I have found life to be this way not only for myself, but also for others

whom I have talked to along my journey.

Grief takes on many forms. It isn't just the profound sadness from the loss of a family member or friend; it is also the sadness from other losses that we have in life.

All of the small losses in life add up, and we accumulate them in the recesses of our minds. We may not think about them as much, or even remember them at all, but our cells do. Our bodies have cellular memory, and when a new event happens, we store

emotions deep within our beings. Sometimes we find ourselves feeling very overwhelmed and crying and can't quite explain why. My thought is that it is all of those stored memories and feelings being released when triggered by something someone said, a song we heard, etc. For example, I may be fine speaking with you about the passing of my mother, sharing stories and laughing today, yet tomorrow, I might break down when I hear a certain song on the

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Broken Crayons cont.

truth concealed in his words spread a childish grin across my face, much like the one I had seen on his face that night after his dad's death. True, people are not crayons, but I think there is a lesson about grief to be learned from crayons bent by heat and broken by pressure. Broken crayons still color and broken people are still useful.

People often feel useless and sometimes even worthless after a loss. It is as if death strips away some part of their identity, leaving them bare like a crayon whose label has been peeled away by a piddling child. In times of grief, questions surface that are sometimes difficult to answer: "Who am I now that I have lost someone who was so much a part of who I am?"

"What do I have to live for, when what I lived for lives no more?" Those questions and many more can be summarized in the question, "What good is a broken crayon?"

I do not have the answers to all of the questions that a grieving person may struggle with, but I do know a lesson I learned from a little boy with a broken red crayon in his hand: Great beauty can rise from great brokenness when placed in the hands of a skilled artist. Looking back, I remember the final strokes added to the picture by my little friend. I can still see him hard at work, his tongue slightly sticking out of the corner of his mouth as he completed his masterpiece. He proudly held it up for my

approval, and I have to say it may have just been the most beautiful red rose a six-year-old boy ever imagined onto paper.

As I write these words, a broken red crayon lay beside my computer as a reminder to appreciate the beauty that can come from brokenness. I hope I will never again associate brokenness with uselessness. Brokenness is not hopelessness; it is simply a chance to find a new use for an old object. I have learned not to be so quick to throw away the broken ones - they may be the ones needed to produce perfection in the artist's masterpiece.

Ask the Staff: Can There Be Healing after Loss?

Sandra Yates, Bereavement Coordinator (Mount Airy, NC)

Q. Do you truly believe that healing can take place after loss?

A. Remember, grief is not a destination, it is a journey. We don't wake up one day, come to a particular destination and say "Well, I'm now healed of my grief." No, instead, it is a journey that we take, and some days it is simply putting one foot in front of the other. Chinese philosopher Lao-Tzu said it best: "The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."

It is true that we learn to live with grief as we accept it, and we move on because life forces us to do so. But it does take time. As we learn with any journey that we take in life that requires growth, we grow a little at a time. Just as a baby learns to walk only after

crawling, grief can be the same way. We must learn to crawl before we can walk.

It is not expected nor anticipated that one day we will be completely healed of our grief. Rather, it is to be expected and anticipated that we will learn to live with our losses better today than we did yesterday. As you know, there will be good and bad days, just as there were when we were maturing toward adult life. Think back to when you were a teenager - did you ever think that you would "arrive" at adulthood?

Although grief is a journey, it does hopefully become easier with time. Somehow we find ourselves more secure and expectant of the future. The person that we lost through death is integrated into our journey. We never lose sight

of them nor do we ever forget the ways that they touched our lives. Yet, we begin to forge new relationships and learn new things as we become more and more a part of the new "normal" that we develop in and through the journey of grief.

So, is there healing? Yes, we experience the healing of our emotions and feelings. However, we are forever changed by the experience of grief. Yet, we can become an example of grace as we weave each loss into the fabric of our lives and use those various fabrics to console others who are also on the journey of grief.

Prayer for Survivors

Judy Collins

Dear God,

Let me stay the course on this journey from darkness to light.

Let me shine the light of my own experience and healing, so that others who are new to this path may see the possibility of a new and clear life built on surrender and acceptance.

Let me carry a warrior's banner before me, believing I may change the power of loss into learning; taboo into transition; burden into blessing; grief into growth.

Let me use the energy and life in us to ease the burdens, the heartache, the taboos and the darkness of suicide and other tragic losses.

Let me be a servant of light, understanding and joy.

Let me overcome my reluctance with determination; my fear with faith.

I am lost without help. Stretch out Your Hand to me here on the path, and pull me toward You when I falter.

Let me not falter too long, but be back on the path after rest. In conviction, let me be kind. In anger, let me be swift and burn bright. In surrender, let me be rekindled by pure love.

Bereavement Staff and Support Groups

Mount Airy, NC

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Saundra Yates, M.Div. NCBF

Josh Armstrong, BS

Sarah Tweed, BSW

Ben Webb, BA

Fonda Younger, BS

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Josh Armstrong, BS

Yadkinville, NC

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Sarah Tweed, BSW

Elkin, NC

336-526-2650

Lisa VanHorn, BS

Hillsville, VA

276-728-1030

Bruce Thomas, M. Ed

Stuart, VA

276-694-4416

Patricia Morris, BS, TRS

Mount Airy

2nd Thursday of every month

9:00 a.m. Good Mourning with Fonda

Holiday Inn Express

4th Tuesday of every month

11:30 a.m. Fonda's Lunch Bunch

Golden Corral

Elkin

1st and 3rd Tuesday of every month

10:00 a.m. "Living with Grief"

Matty's Restaurant

1st Monday of every month

7:00 p.m. "Transitioning to the New"

Fairfield Inn

4th Monday of every month

7:00 p.m. Prime Time with Lisa

(Loss of spouse in one's 30s, 40s, and 50s)

Fairfield Inn

Hillsville

3rd Thursday of every month

11:30 a.m. Moments with Bruce

Hillsville Office

Stuart

3rd Wednesday of every month

1:30 p.m. Support with Patricia

Stuart United Methodist Church

Alleghany County

3rd Wednesday of every month

10:30 p.m. Listening with Lisa

Mustard Seed Café • Sparta

Yadkin County

1st Thursday of every month

11:30 a.m. Sharing with Sarah

Ace's Restaurant • Yadkinville

Story of Grief cont.

radio. That's just how it goes. Grief is like the ebb and flow of the tide - sometimes it is calm, and sometimes it rages.

What I want you to take away from this story is how important it is to be kind to yourself and to know that if you find yourself crying or feeling overwhelmed, it is because you have suffered loss since the beginning of your existence. It is important to cry or develop other expressive means of emotional release. You can also develop other rituals to remember not only your loved ones, but your former

self as well. You will never be the same, because loss forever changes whom you were. But just as you emerged at your birth, you can emerge from your grief and pain and be a new creature.



GriefShare.org
offers daily emails to help one
through the grieving process.

Life Is But a Stopping Place

Author Unknown

Life is but a stopping place,
A pause in what's to be,
A resting place along the road
To sweet eternity.
We all have different journeys,
Different paths along the way.
We all were meant to learn some things,
But never meant to stay...
Our destination is a place
Far greater than we know.
For some, the journey's quicker,
For some, the journey's slow.
And when the journey finally ends,
We'll claim a great reward
And find an everlasting peace,
Together with the Lord.

Mountain Valley Hospice & Palliative Care Bereavement Services

Following a patient's death, Mountain Valley provides specialized grief support services to help loved ones cope with their loss. These services are provided as part of hospice care for 13 months, at no cost to the recipient, and include:

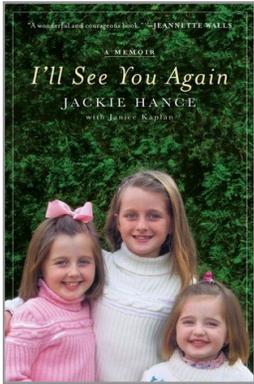
- Grief counseling and education
- Face-to-face/phone sessions
- Monthly support groups
- Monthly newsletter

Community support is also available for bereaved individuals whose loved ones were not in hospice care.

For questions and comments, contact Mountain Valley Hospice at 336-789-2922 or 888-789-2922, or mtnvalleyhospice.org.

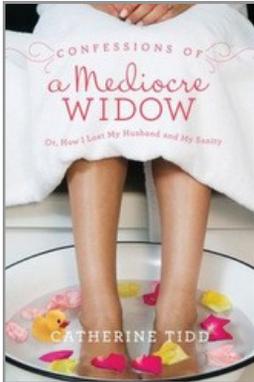
The Next Step — Publisher: Kristie Byrd Editor-in-Chief: Josh Armstrong

Now available at our Grief Resources section



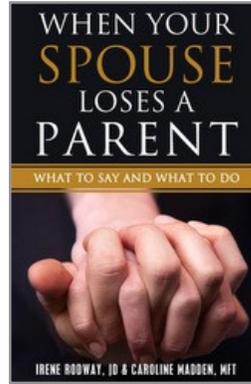
I'll See You Again
Jackie Hance

Known as “The Taconic Mom,” Jackie Hance shares her story of the loss that occurred when a car accident on New York’s Taconic State Parkway claimed the lives of her three young daughters. Discover how Hance triumphed over the grief that shook her faith and nearly destroyed her marriage, in her inspiring, best-selling memoir.



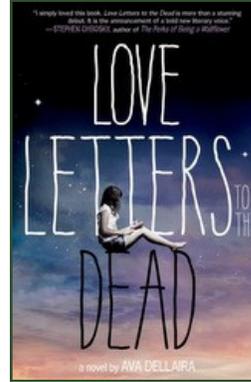
Confessions of a Mediocre Widow
Catherine Tidd

At age 31, Catherine Tidd became “involuntarily single” with three children under six years old and a rusty résumé. In *Confessions of a Mediocre Widow*, Tidd observes her experiences in widowhood, infusing her heartfelt story with humor.



When Your Spouse Loses a Parent
Irene Rodway, Caroline Madden

When Your Spouse Loses a Parent explains the stages of grief that a spouse may experience, how grief could impact a marriage, and what to say and do to comfort your spouse through their grieving process.



Love Letters to the Dead
Ava Dellaira

In Ava Dellaira’s critically-acclaimed narrative, Laurel is assigned to write a letter to the deceased individual of her choice. She chooses Kurt Cobain, because her sister, May, loved him - and because he died young, like May did. As Laurel writes to other deceased celebrities, her letters lead to a deeper understanding of May, from strengths to imperfections.

Find these titles and more at Northwestern Regional Library locations in Alleghany, Stokes, Surry, and Yadkin counties. To view our complete selection of books and videos, visit MtnValleyHospice.org/GriefLibrary.

Return Service Requested

