

remembering
for good

wholehearted living after loss



Jim Cath

"She was no longer wrestling with the grief, but could sit down with it as a lasting companion and make it a sharer in her thoughts."

- George Eliot

Through the course of the years (since 2002), as a Social Worker and Life Coach working with hundreds of people moving through loss, as well as [my own personal journey](#) of learning to live wholeheartedly after loss, I've discovered a few common myths about grieving and healing. These myths obstruct our healing and, at best, create a facade of someone "going on with their life." The facade makes some things easier, but it's not healing or wellness or wholehearted-living.

You've lost enough already. You don't have to also give up the opportunity to feel deep peace, security, joy, wellness and love – feelings that I've been surprised to discover can co-exist alongside even the deepest, darkest emotions we meet in our grieving process.

This document is the "what" and "why" of Remembering For Good. Where's the "how," you ask?

You have it.

It's my hope that by understanding the what and the why, you'll begin remembering and trusting your how. And if you get stuck on remembering and trusting your how, [get in touch](#) - I'd love to help you with that.



Cath Duncan

www.rememberingforgood.com

Contents

1. I'm Cath
4. Who I wrote this for
6. You, after loss
9. Wholehearted living
14. Grief: there is no cure
17. Healing vs Resilience
18. Grieving & remembering
20. Remembering For Good
21. Remembering love & loss
24. Remembering is good for you
27. Remembering is good for others
29. Remembering your way
31. Remembering in community
34. Remember with us



“To know that they will not be forgotten is a source of peace for the dying as well as for the living. The significance of a person’s life continues even if the person is not around as a physical reminder. How wonderful to know we continue to teach and have a voice even after death.”

- Lorraine Hedtke, www.rememberingpractices.com

Who I wrote this for



Remembering For Good is for anyone who is grieving the loss of someone or something important to them.

It doesn't matter how long ago your loved one died – an hour ago or 25 years ago. Time becomes a bit warped and irrelevant after loss, in much the same way it does when we're falling in love.

And your "loved one" might have been a person, a pet, an intangible thing (like a job or your health), or even something that only ever existed as a dream (yes, sometimes our dreams die. Discovering that you're infertile when you've always imagined you'd birth children naturally is an example of this kind of loss.)

If you've loved and lost, and you want to live wholeheartedly after loss (in spite of the enduring risk of future losses), then I wrote this for you.

"When you are sorrowful look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight."

- Kahlil Gibran

Notes & reflections

Who, or what have you lost most recently?

The loss of a loved one or something really important to us often causes a ripple of losses through our lives... what else has been lost because of the way that this loss has changed you? What are the "invisible" losses - the dreams that you've lost before they even lived? Circle the losses that have been hardest to bear.

Our losses can often feel harder when we've had a series of big losses over the years... use the space below to create a timeline of the losses you've lived through.



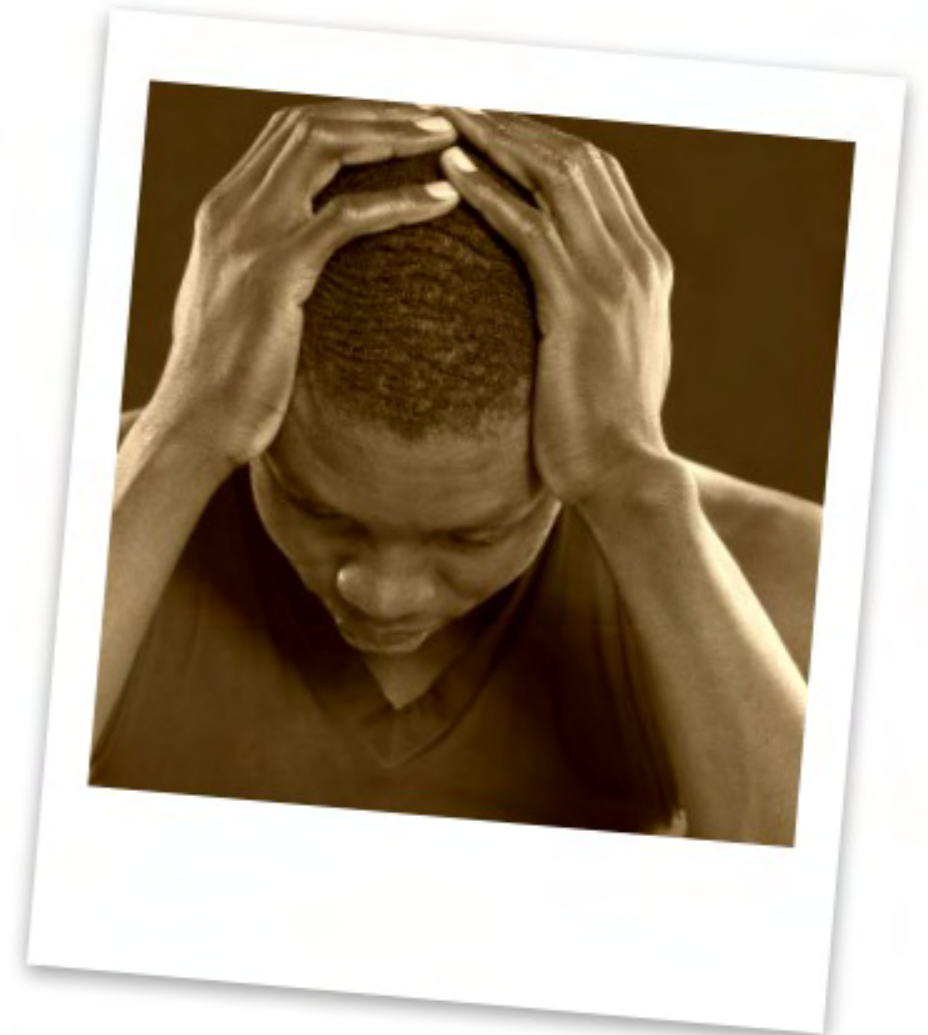
You, after loss

One thing's for sure... loss changes us and introduces us to emotions, thoughts and physical reactions that we may never have experienced before.

Contrary to the popular idea that there are 5 grieving emotions, there are a wide variety of normal, healthy reactions to loss.

Common emotions that you might experience after loss:

- Sadness, yearning
- Anger, disgust, resentment, bitterness
- Fear, specific phobias, generalised anxiety
- Mild paranoia or feeling "picked on"
- Jealousy
- Shock/ denial/ disbelief
- Numbness, emptiness
- Loneliness, meaninglessness, purposelessness
- Hopelessness, despair
- Guilt, self-blame
- Agitation, or inability to calm yourself
- Feeling lost, disoriented or groundless



You, after loss

Loss doesn't just affect our emotions though - it affects our thinking abilities in some significant ways too.

Common changes in your thinking ability that you might experience after loss:

- Inability to concentrate, feeling like you have a "foggy brain"
- Forgetfulness, making more mistakes when doing thinking tasks
- Slow mental processing
- Indecisiveness, inability to prioritise
- Intrusive memories or thoughts about your loved one
- Having difficulty trusting yourself and/or others
- Fatigue, lack of motivation
- Being unable to feel interested in things that use to interest you or feeling like you don't care about anything and nothing matters anymore
- Being unable to imagine or visualise your future
- Being preoccupied with thinking about your loss

Loss and grief can be very physical too. You may notice some of these physical changes even before you're conscious of the thoughts and feelings that your loss is bringing up for you.

Common physical changes you might experience after loss:

- Fatigue
- Nausea, vomiting, dizziness, headaches, migraines
- Aches, cramps, stiffness and physical pain
- A physical pain in your heart area (people often seek medical treatment for this, worrying that it might be a heart attack)
- Lack of appetite or increased appetite. Weight-loss or weight-gain
- Insomnia or sleeping much more than usual, nightmares
- Clumsiness, having more accidents and making more mistakes
- Lowered immunity, picking up illnesses

This exhausting (yet non-exhaustive) list of emotions, thoughts and physical changes that loss and grief can bring can be quite overwhelming. And yet it's only part of the picture of the reactions we commonly have to loss. I'll explain more about that in a bit, but first let's talk about "wholehearted living"...

Notes & reflections



List the changes that you've noticed in your emotions, your thinking and your body since your loss... (And feel free to add things that aren't on the lists provided - grief shows up in many different ways.)

Wholehearted living

Considering all of the uncomfortable and painful reactions we might experience after loss, it's understandable that there's often an impulse to close our hearts to ever loving again, in an attempt to protect ourselves from potential loss and pain.

But closing our hearts to potential loss and pain also closes our hearts to potential connection, belonging, love, meaning, joy and peace. We can't close our hearts to some emotions that we don't want to have and keep our hearts open to other emotions that we do want to have. We're either open, wholehearted and fully alive, or we're numbing ourselves to all that life has to offer.

“To love someone fiercely, to believe in something with your whole heart, to celebrate a fleeting moment in time, to fully engage in a life that doesn't come with guarantees - these are the risks that involve vulnerability and often pain. When we lose our tolerance for discomfort, we lose joy.”

- Dr Brené Brown, www.ordinarycourage.com

Which brings us back to the rest of the common reactions you might experience after loss...

It's not talked about much, because we tend to have an oversimplified, polarised way of thinking about loss and grieving, but recent research is confirming that the following reactions are also very common, normal and healthy after loss - even in the early days and weeks after a significant loss (so you're not weird or “inappropriate” if you experience them!)..

- Relief, peace
- Pride, a sense of feeling empowered, stronger self esteem/ self-acceptance
- Gratitude, appreciation
- Deep connection, love
- “Okay-ness,” contentment, joy
- Generosity, desire to “give back”
- Meaning, deeper sense of purpose, clearer priorities
- Courage
- Hyper-focus on certain ideas or tasks
- Laughter, humour

Notes & reflections

How has your loss affected your willingness to open your heart, connect and love and live wholeheartedly?

What are some examples of times when you experienced any of those not-often-talked-about (but very common) “positive” emotions after your loss? Make a few notes about some specific examples...



Wholehearted living



Wholehearted living is just as it sounds - it's about living with your whole heart and being willing to experience all that life has to offer you. Wholehearted living is about being willing to love completely and to invest with your whole self, in spite of the risks that you may lose what you've loved and invested in.

Instead of numbing yourself to all emotions by protectively closing your heart, wholehearted living is about being willing to feel the full range of feelings you can feel, so that you can access the connection, love, peace, meaning, belonging, wellness and joy that you want at a deeper level than you ever imagined possible.

We tend to think that a good, successful and happy life is one where loss and so-called negative emotions don't happen. But that's an unrealistic goal. At some point in our lives - usually on multiple occasions, we all experience the loss of something or someone that we love.

"The dark does not destroy the light; it defines it. It's our fear of the dark that casts our joy into the shadows."

- Dr Brené Brown, www.ordinarycourage.com

Wholehearted living

What's wholehearted living like?

The best description I've ever found for what it's like to live wholeheartedly comes from Alice Walker...

"There is always a moment in any kind of struggle when one feels in full bloom. Vivid. Alive. One might be blown to bits in such a moment, and still be at peace... To be such a person or to witness anyone at this moment of transcendent presence is to know that what is human is linked, by daring compassion, to what is divine."

- Alice Walker

"Full bloom. Vivid. Alive." That's wholehearted living.

The goal is not to avoid loss or suffering but to live all of our experiences of loving and losing in "full bloom" and fully alive.

When we're living wholeheartedly, we stop bracing ourselves in fear of loss. Instead, we recognise that a full life has losses and gains, and every experience (of loss or gain) is an opportunity to learn, to become more resourceful, to love and to decide what we want to create with the cards we've been dealt.

Wholehearted living can feel like a scary leap of faith, but when you make the decision to live that way you'll be rewarded with increased confidence, agility, resourcefulness, creativity and resilience, and ultimately a more expansive and meaningful life.



Notes & reflections



What's your description of what it would mean to "live wholeheartedly"? What would that look like for you? How would you know you're doing it? What sort of emotions would you feel? What would you spend your time doing? How would it affect your relationships? What would you want to create or contribute in the world? What would your body feel like?

Grief: there is no cure

We typically talk about grief as something to be fixed, healed or cured. We talk about the common emotions, thoughts and physical changes after loss as “symptoms” of grief - as though it’s an illness or brokenness. We worry about people who are showing these “symptoms” of grief and we focus on trying to cure them of those symptoms.

We talk about grief as though the pathway through it is linear and progressive. We tend to believe that grieving is a time-limited process with an end point that we need to get to.

Largely as a result of these assumptions, grieving people are often incredibly ashamed of their grieving, and tend to place pressure on ourselves to “get better” or to “heal” quickly. Many of us withdraw to grieve in private to protect ourselves from public shame, and we’re incredibly afraid of our reactions to loss.

Through my own personal experience, through supporting and witness others after loss, and through my research into various psychological theories and approaches to grieving, I’ve come to reject these ideas and assumptions about our reactions to loss. Here’s what I believe instead:

I. You’re not ill or broken. Grief is a natural and healthy response when we love and lose what we love. I believe that every emotional and physical reaction we experience is purposed for our highest good. I view the grief “symptoms” as both signals that your mind and body is functioning well and gateways to deeper wisdom and increased resourcefulness.



Grief: there is no cure



Rather than fighting yourself and your natural, healthy reactions, I believe we get to experience more peace, love, meaning and joy when we learn how to appreciate and access the resources that our reactions to loss are trying to deliver to us and when focus on welcoming the feelings we want rather than trying to eliminate or fix the feelings we don't want.

2. There's no linear path through grief. It would be easier if grief did develop over the 5 progressive stages as conceptualised by Elizabeth Kubler-Ross. That way you'd be able to know how much further you have to go till you're fixed, and it would feel much less scary because you'd have a nice, neat map of the process. But the reality is that the research shows us that there are a wide variety of different ways that grief can change us and many different "successful" paths that we can follow after loss.

3. You'll have a relationship with your grief for the rest of your life. Like all other relationships, your relationship with grief will change as you change. Keeping this relationship healthy requires you to give it some ongoing attention and nurturing, to learn new skills, and to keep growing. As you continue living after loss, you'll rewrite your story over and over again. And you'll be changed by your rewriting of your story over and over again. In this sense, you never finish and there's also no place you have to get to. There's just ongoing living, loving and learning.

(Remember when I said that this book is the "what" and the "why" of Remembering For Good and that you have the "how"? This list above is 3 reasons why I know that the place to look for the "how" is inside you.

Notes & reflections

How would you describe your relationship with your grief? Is it a new relationship or an old, familiar one? Is it a peaceful relationship or a conflicted one? Is it a predictable relationship or an unpredictable one? Is there mutual give-and-take or do you feel like your grief just takes and takes and takes? How do you feel when you're relating to your grief... safe, afraid, lonely, loved, angry...?

What would you like your relationship with your grief to be like?



Healing vs resilience

*"I hope you will go out
and let stories happen to
you, and that you will
work them, water them
with your blood and tears
and your laughter till they
bloom, till you yourself
burst into bloom."*

- Clarissa Pinkola Estés

When people are talking about grieving, the word "healing" tends to come up a lot. The word "healing" sounds like a good thing. Much like the word "freedom", it sounds like it's pointing to something good - something we want. But "healing" doesn't point to what we want and it doesn't acknowledge or affirm what we already have that's valuable.

The problem with words like "healing" and "freedom" is that they have deleted assumptions wrapped into them. What they really mean is "healing from... (insert the brokenness or illness)" and "freedom from... (insert the problems that's been making you feel trapped)." Every time we say or think, "I need healing..." or even "I am healing..." we're pointing to what we want to get away from and affirming ideas like, "I'm broken or ill. I need to fix the brokenness or illness. I'm not okay the way I am. I need to get somewhere else." These are very negative self-appraisals and the risk is that they create and reinforce shame, and shame disconnects us from each other and ourselves.

Language is really powerful - it's the main way that we make meaning of the world and connect socially. And our meaning-making and social connections play a big role in determining our levels of happiness and peace. For this reason, I prefer not to use the word "healing." Instead, I talk about what we're wanting to recognise and affirm - which is the wholeness, resilience and resourcefulness that we already have, and which can continue to expand infinitely.

As you read this book, I'll encourage you to think and talk about wholehearted living, resilience and resourcefulness - all of which implies and affirms that you are already whole, you have an extensive set of emotional, social, cognitive and physical resources and your pursuit is not to fix a broken self, but to learn more and better ways of accessing your resourcefulness and resilience and living with your whole heart through all of the experiences that life has to offer.

Grieving & Remembering

Going forward, you'll notice that I use the term "remembering" a lot, rather than the term "grieving." Grieving is: "...to feel or cause to feel great sorrow or distress, especially at the death of someone..."

As evidenced in the dictionary definition of the word grieving, we think of grieving as being only the "negative" emotional, cognitive and physical reactions that I listed earlier. This is why I prefer to use the word "remembering."

While you'll continue to have an evolving relationship with your grief (and with the person, thing or dream you lost) for the rest of your life, over time you'll feel those "negative" grief reactions less intensely and less often.

Talking about "remembering" instead of grieving allows for the ongoing unfolding and evolving of your story and your relationship with grief and the person you lost, without binding you to feeling intense sadness/ anger/ fear, etc for the rest of your life. Remembering allows space for you to feel all of the feelings you want (the love, peace, meaning, joy, etc) and to welcome a hopeful and rich future whilst continuing to access and celebrate the meaning, connection and wisdom in your history.

"I have found the paradox, that if you love until it hurts, there can be no more hurt, only more love."

- Mother Teresa

Grieving & Remembering

“Even his griefs are a joy, long after, to one that remembers all that he wrought and endured.”

- Homer

Most of us think of remembering as a process where we:

1. Become aware of certain information and facts, and store them as static, complete entities in a sort of “filing system” in the brain.
2. Open up the “filing system” and re-read the static “files” to recall our memories.

Actually, our memories are living, growing and changing all the time...

Every time we remember, rather than “finding” the memory, we are actually creating or reconstructing the memory. With each reconstruction, we reinterpret the memory and tell new stories about what the memories mean, based on the experiences we’ve had since we last remembered. We also forget bits of the memory and even add in new details and assumptions to the memory. In this way, our remembering is a constantly evolving story.

It’s been found that our brains are wired for a preference for remembering negative or threatening experiences and information better than neutral and positive experiences and information. This is the default setting, but we can also train ourselves to notice and remember neutral and positive information and experiences better, through focusing on those parts of our memories. And as our lives go on and we grow and learn, we can also deliberately choose new meanings to infuse into our memories and make new connections between events in our lives.

You are the artist and director of the movie-memories in your head and Remembering For Good is all about learning how these movie-memories are made and how you can shape them to support you to be, feel and create more of what you want to be, feel and create in the world.

Remembering For Good

Remembering For Good is about 4 kinds of remembering:

1. Remembering those you've loved and lost for as long as you remember them. (Remembering is a permission, not a prescription.)
2. Remembering for your own good, by understanding the difference between ruminating and remembering.
3. Remembering for the good of others, by letting your remembering inspire your contributions in the world, and by sharing the wisdom that you access through your remembering.
4. Remembering your way through your unique journey after loss by recognising that a part of you already knows how to live wholeheartedly after loss, and trusting that part to guide you rather than looking to learn the answers from outside yourself.

In the next section I'll explain briefly why each of these kinds of remembering are important.



Remembering love & loss



Remembering is unfortunately still a fairly unconventional approach to living after loss, so the hardest part about it is that you'll be going against the grain, and that takes lots of courage.

In the Western world in general, we're obsessed with achieving progress, "moving on" and avoiding vulnerability. We've moved death from our homes where our friends and families are a part of it into hospitals, hospices and funeral homes, where we hope that professionals will deal with it for us, and in so doing, we've lost a sense of the naturalness and healthiness of death and introduced a lot of fear. In our fast, over-scheduled lives we don't have time for the slowness and groundlessness of grief, let alone the vulnerability and mindfulness of looking back and reflecting on the past.

Traditional psychological approaches have shaped popular societal perspectives on grieving and tend to talk about the importance of achieving "closure" and emphasise the need to accept the reality of your loss and "let go" so that you can "move on." Popular positive psychology perspectives in recent years are often taught in a way that casts judgement and shame on people who "dwell on the past," and ideas like the "Law of Attraction" that tell us that your negative emotions have the power to attract more tragedy into your life make us even more fearful of allowing space for fully experiencing our grief.

Closer to home, of course another reason why we resist remembering is because it's really hard to watch someone you love experiencing any of the "negative" reactions to loss. We want their suffering to end, we think that their suffering is caused by remembering their love and loss, and so we try to encourage them to stop thinking and talking about it and to "move on" and look to the future instead. We fear bringing up the topic of their loss

Remembering love & loss

because we think we'll be reminding them of their loss, and causing them to suffer. We don't realise that they remember anyway, and their tears that show up when we bring up the topic of their loss aren't because you caused them to remember their pain but because your interest makes them feel seen, validated and loved.

When we encourage each other to "move on" or "let go," we're expressing pressure and judgement and encouraging resistance and shame of our natural, healthy reactions to loss. When we resist emotions, they're forced into unconscious expression, giving them greater power over us and leaving us feeling even more out of control, stuck and afraid in our grief. Shame isolates those who are grieving, giving them further losses to grieve. "Letting go" and seeking "closure" disconnects us from the rich wisdom, sense of belonging, meaning and resourcefulness within our past relationships.

Remembering For Good is about giving yourself permission to remember the one you love and lost for as long as you remember them. You don't have to "seek closure." Closure is an unnecessary focus and pursuing closure often leads to closed-heartedness. It's safe and healthy to remember your lost loved one. Because remembering doesn't have to be painful. Your Remembering can be good for you. And it can even be good for the world around you.

Remembering is not a prescription though. It's a permission. And giving yourself and each other permission to remember as long as you do will give you access to gifts and resources beyond your wildest dreams.

"This practice can be a resource for strength, resiliency, love and hope for those still living. This approach to death offers us the possibility to continue to have access to stories, connections, love and meaning. Regardless of death, a person we love who dies can continue to be part of our membership club in this new way of thinking. Their stories about us can be affirmed. Their views of us can contribute to our preferred stories about ourselves... From this perspective, grief becomes an evolving and creative opportunity for story development and change, rather than an unpleasant task to be worked through as quickly possible."

*- Lorraine Hedtke,
www.rememberingpractices.com*

Notes & reflections



In your family and amongst your groups of friends and other social communities that you're a part of, what is the dominant approach to loss and grief? How do other people respond to your loss and grieving? Are there any community rituals, practices or spaces for remembering what you've loved and lost? How do others feel about you remembering what you've loved and lost?

Finish this sentence... "If I remember what I've loved and lost, people will think..."

Read your finished sentence... how does it make you feel? Is it liberating you to remember as long as you remember, or is there some pressure to "let go" or "get closure"?

Which people, specifically, will think this? And do you really want these people to decide for you how you should live after loss?

Remembering is good for you

Some people worry that remembering your loved one who died will invite negativity, sadness, anger and bitterness into your life. But you don't have to choose between remembering and feeling peace and joy. Remembering can bring you and your family more of the good feelings and experiences that you want – the peace, the sense of “all-is-well,” the love, the wisdom, and even the laughter and joy that's your birthright. All of that good stuff can co-exist alongside your grieving. Remembering For Good is about discovering all the ways that your remembering can be good for you.

There's a big difference between ruminating and remembering. We make sense of our world through stories. When we're ruminating we're not exercising mindfulness or creativity in our story-telling - we're mindlessly repeating the same old, tired, painful stories to ourselves over and over again. Repeating the same stories gets us stuck in negative emotion and closes off access to the rich resources and wisdom in our past and the opportunities for growth, meaning, love, joy and hope in our future.



Remembering...

“... is less about accepting reality and more about creating reality and this constructed reality becomes a resource for strength, resiliency, love and hope for those still living.”

- Lorraine Hedtke, www.rememberingpractices.com

Remembering is good for you

When we're remembering, we're mindfully examining our stories, we're noticing the painful parts of our stories and we're actively searching for evidence of resourcefulness within our past and present relationships and stories. Remembering welcomes the evolution of our stories, allowing us to actively create more liberating stories and to be changed by our editing and retelling of our stories.

Remembering For Good is not "expressing grieving emotions" (although it might facilitate that at times). Remembering For Good is about appreciative enquiry that seeks to create more liberating perspectives. It's about deliberately designing reflections and rituals that affirm the miracle and significance of each of our lives and give us access to the wisdom and resourcefulness of the generations who've passed before us.

"If you look deeply into the palm of your hand, you will see your parents and all generations of your ancestors. All of them are alive in this moment. Each is present in your body. You are the continuation of each of these people."

- Thich Nhat Hanh

Notes & reflections

What rituals, practices, spaces or people have helped you to remember in a way that allows you to feel peace, meaning, love, belonging, joy, or any other “positive” emotions?

What are some of the lessons you’ve already become aware of, and the ways you’ve grown because of your love for the one you lost?

What are some of the ways that you hope your loving and losing will continue to shape you and your life?



Remembering is good for others



In the Western world, grieving is viewed as a very narcissistic and needy journey. It can be that way, but often it's the exact opposite and our grief energy motivates us to align our lives with our true priorities, to appreciate the shortness and value of life, and to use our lives for greater service to others.

Because our societies aren't set up to support natural, healthy grieving, people sometimes get isolated or stuck in ruminating over their loss. That's when they start to use fear-based, narcissistic, needy or self-destructive behaviours. But when we remove the societal pressures, judgement and shame about our grieving reactions and allow ourselves to remember without shame, grief opens our hearts and motivates increased empathy and a greater desire to love and serve others.

Remembering doesn't just inspire us to act on serving others and working to improve the quality of other people's lives. Our remembering can also inspire others to greater love and service. When we reflect and remember our loved ones who've died and we tell and retell our stories about those relationships and people in community spaces, we affirm the value of all of our lives, and we access and share the wisdom, meaning and sense of belonging of our history together. This can change and liberate the audience to the story, and it builds deeper intimacy between the members of the Remembering community and ultimately enriches all of our lives.

"As audience members, we too might have experiences of increasing agency or choice and might find ourselves honouring our preferred stories of identity. We are not only benefactor(s) of hearing a good story, but can share in the remembering by being moved or enlivened through coming to know the person who has died."

- Lorraine Hedtke, www.rememberingpractices.com

Notes & reflections

What are some examples of ways that your loving and losing has motivated you to greater empathy and service to others?

What are some of the ways that you hope your loving and losing will increase your contribution to the world in years to come?



Remembering your way

“The only real valuable thing is intuition.”

- Albert Einstein

Loss breaks the illusion of certainty that most of us live with and reminds us of the many aspects of being human that are still total mysteries and miracles. This uncertainty and groundlessness can be quite scary, and most of us have a history of being trained to look outside of ourselves for direction and answers when we're uncertain, afraid and navigating unfamiliar territory. The inaccurate but common assumptions that grief is a form of illness or brokenness that needs to be fixed, and that grief is a finite, linear path with an end goal that you need to get to encourage us to go looking for gurus, maps and formulas that will tell us what to do to and how to live after loss.

But you're not broken or ill, everyone's reactions and journeys after loss are unique, and there are many different ways that you can create a wholehearted life after loss.

You don't have to learn how to grieve. It's something you already innately know how to do. Remembering For Good is about learning how to tune into your intuition and remember what you already know, and learning how to give yourself permission to follow that.

You don't have to do “grief work.” The only “work” you may need to do is to keep clearing away the muck that gets in the way of what you already know so that, using your natural self-healing intuitions, you can remember your way back home to yourself each time you're feeling lost in your loss.



Notes & reflections



There are lots of things that help us to calm down, quieten our minds and remember our own wisdom... art-making, music, walking, running, meditating, making puzzles, writing, photography, yoga, cooking, gardening, and much more. What are some things you do (or used to do!) that calm you and make it easier to hear your own intuition?

What do you intuitively feel you need in order to feel safe and inspired to live wholeheartedly after loss?

Remembering in community



In the modern Western world we have a high preference for individualism. Grief is seen as the job of the individual bereaved person and we have no formal or commonly accepted roles for other members of the community to play. In our “always-getting-somewhere” society, we’re terrified of public vulnerability and often retire behind the walls of our individual forts, both literally and figuratively, requesting “privacy during this difficult time...”

When we do come out to connect, we often make the assumption that the only people who’ll understand our grief are the people who’ve suffered a similar loss. This cuts us off from relationships with people who haven’t suffered a loss like ours, gives us a skewed perspective of reality and increases the loss and isolation in our lives.

Through my professional career I’ve worked with a lot of people who were grieving because all changes and problems involve some loss and grief. While each journey was unique, the one common thread that stood out was that people who had become isolated after their loss suffered more and were much less resilient and resourceful after their loss. The fact that “social support” (and by that they mean everyday friends, neighbours and family, not professionals) is one of the strongest factors that creates or restores resilience during and after tragedy is undisputed in the research.

When we keep our reactions to loss private from our everyday community, and seek out only “confidential” and professional partners in our remembering, we affirm the societal perspective that loss and grieving are personal, fearful, abnormal and shameful experiences that only professionals are equipped to deal with. We deny our own resourcefulness, strength, wisdom and intuition and that of our community and we deny the natural, general and healthy nature of loss and grief.

Remembering in community

When we're afraid or ashamed of grieving, our reactions to loss become an incredibly stressful experience. We're also more likely to hide our grief reactions and isolate ourselves, which disconnects us from the sense of belonging, resilience, love and support of our community and makes us even more vulnerable the next time we experience loss. When we disown the part of ourselves that remembers and grieves, that part becomes alienated from our community and ultimately we risk becoming alienated from ourselves. And that's the worst kind of loss and loneliness that a person can endure and the greatest risk to our resilience.

We're biologically programmed to be social and to live in interdependent community. This is the reason why, across every culture, we have a great fear of judgement, rejection or abandonment by others. Our self-identities, self-stories and self-esteems are not independent of our community - they're co-created with the multiple voices of our community. When we grieve in community our community can contribute their experiences, creativity and wisdom and help us to edit and revise our stories and self-identities to more liberating ones. Grieving in community lets us feel fully "seen" and affirms the validity and significance of our experiences, and ultimately our existence. This kind of being seen is a powerful source of healing and meaning that gives us the inspiration and courage to live more wholeheartedly.

"There are two ways of spreading light - to be the candle or the mirror that reflects it."

- Edith Wharton, Vesalius in Zante

Notes & reflections



Remembering in community and revising your loss stories in community requires compassionate, safe spaces and compassionate, safe community members. Who do you feel safe to remember with?

Can't identify any safe and compassionate people? I'm so sorry. That makes me really sad, because we're all deserving and worthy of being a part of safe, compassionate communities. If you're willing, I would love to be the beginning of your safe, compassionate community and to help you find and build relationships with other safe, compassionate people. [Get in touch with me](#) if you'd like that.

What conversations would you like to have, and who would you like to have them with, in order to build greater intimacy in your compassionate community, and to remember "in community"?

Remember with us

Thank you for taking the time to read all the way through this document. I hope it's helped you to develop a better understanding of the naturalness of loss and grief, a deeper appreciation for your amazing resourcefulness and a more steady trust in your innate ability to live wholeheartedly and create wellness, peace, love, joy and meaning through all the diversity of experiences that life offers.

If these principles resonate with you and you'd like to learn more about Remembering For Good and living wholeheartedly after loss, here are some ways you can do that:

1. Join the Remembering For Good Facebook page (<https://www.facebook.com/RememberingForGood/>) where I post about relevant articles, ideas and practices.
2. Sign up to receive my Remembrance eLetters to get tips, tools and inspiration to help you to live wholeheartedly after loss. (<http://www.rememberingforgood.com/eletters/>).

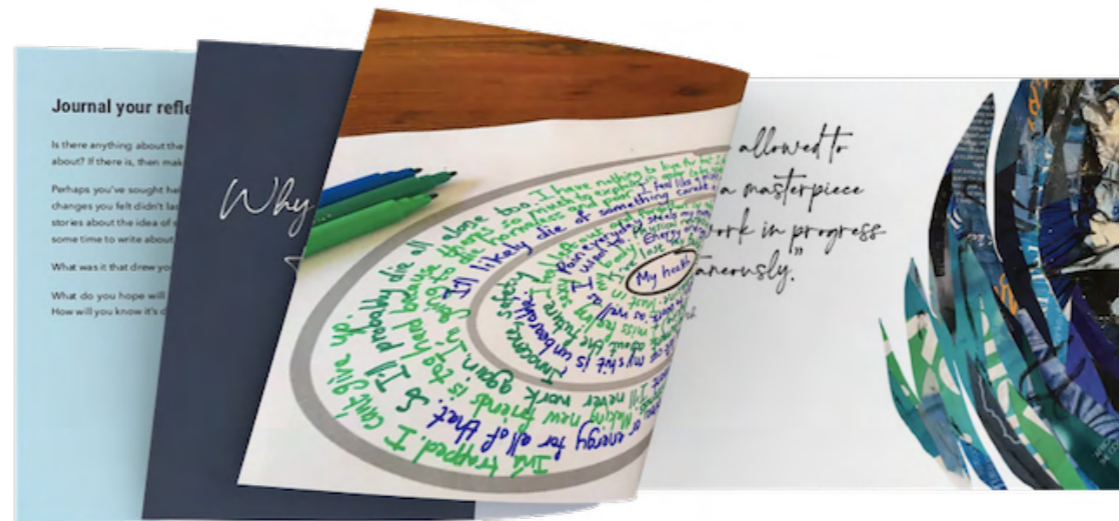
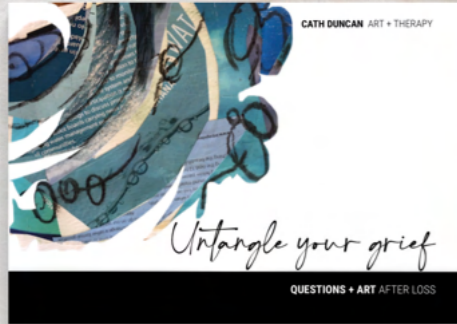


“Loss is nothing else but change, and change is Nature’s delight.”

- Marcus Aurelius, Meditations

Untangle Your Grief

If you found this book helpful, and you'd like to explore your grief more deeply through journaling or art-making, I'd love to share my latest book, "Untangle Your Grief," with you...



Beautifully laid out, this 67-page book is filled with incisive journaling questions, art-making prompts, helpful tidbits of information, inspiring art and stories, and Cath Duncan's vibrant artwork. Suitable for all kinds of losses, the Untangle Your Grief workbook will guide you to..

- become aware of hard-to-articulate losses that you've felt but not yet mourned.
- express your grief through journaling and creativity.
- identify the most painful aspects of your grief so you feel less overwhelmed and can prioritise what you want to attend to.
- better understand your own grief reactions and some of the dynamics that can make grief trickier and perhaps more enduring.
- understand some of the things that can influence how other people respond to your loss and grief, which in turn affects your grief experience.
- offer yourself and others more compassion as you better understand each other's reactions.
- develop greater clarity and comfort to be able to share your loss and grief stories with those you'd like to share them with, and draw closer in the relationships that are important to you.
- begin to find new perspectives, make new meanings and see new possibilities for living wholeheartedly after loss.

Now available at <https://www.cathduncan.com/untangle-your-grief/>

Remember with us



"I believe that imagination is
stronger than knowledge,
myth is more potent than history,
dreams are more powerful than facts,
hope always triumphs over
experience,
laughter is the cure for grief,
love is stronger than death."

- Robert Fulghum

Cath Duncan

www.rememberingforgood.com
cath@rememberingforgood.com