

*Discovering*  
Permission to Grieve



**Special Care Series *Book One***  
**Doug Manning**

*Discovering*  
Permission to Grieve



**Special Care Series**  
*Book One*

**In-Sight Books, Inc.**  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

# Preface

Grief is the normal response to any loss, it is nature's way of healing a broken heart. The fact that it is normal does not mean it is easy or automatic. Nor does it mean you can walk alone with no one to help.

This little book has been sent to you by someone who wants to walk along beside you in this process. It is the first of four books that will be sent to you during this first year of your journey.

The hope and prayer of both the sender and the author is that these words will speak what you need to hear when you need to hear them and help make your valley not quite so dark.

— *Doug Manning*  
*August 12, 2003*

# Discovering Permission to Grieve

Grief begins with a whirl. Like so much confetti thrown into a fan, your mind whirls out of control. Thoughts whiz by but do not stay long enough to be considered. Feelings seem to be in constant flux. Your whole being

may feel like it is either totally out of control or under the direction of some outside force you have nothing to do with.

Reality is in the whirl but it hits and runs. The first days after my brother died the thought that I would never see him again would almost come into focus and then it was gone in the whirl. It seemed real but not real. It was like watching a sad movie. The movie brings tears, but deep down you know the movie will end, the credits will roll and everything will be back to normal.

One mother said, "We are sitting here planning the funeral for my son, but I expect that door to open at any moment and he will walk in." The human mind will protect itself from overload. When a deep grief comes the mind goes into shock so the reality can gradually dawn. If it hit all at once, no one could stand it.

*No one can tell you about grief, about its limitless boundaries, its unfathomable depths. No one can tell you about the crater that is created in the center of your body, the one that nothing can fill. No matter how many times you hear the word final, it means nothing until final is actually final.*

—Ruth Coughlin

## **When the Whirl Stops**

Grief may start in a whirl and shock may protect you for a while, but the time comes when the whirl stops and reality begins to dawn. It may already be happening to you. It may also be a surprise. You may have thought you were doing quite well and then it hit. I talked this week with a father whose son died a couple of weeks ago. He was quite confident that they had already been through the worst part. I did not have the heart to tell him that his confidence was about to be jarred in ways he could never imagine.

The day comes when reality lands and envelopes you entirely. Your chest may hurt and you may feel as if you can not breath. It is surprising how much physical pain there is in grief. You may call someone and have no idea why you called or what to say. You cry until you think there could not possibly be another tear in your body, and then a flood of them overwhelms you again.

The questions come, only this time they don't go away. I have no way of predicting what your questions will be, but after over twenty years of listening to people in grief, I have a list of the ones I hear the most often.

### **Will I Survive this Pain?**

The number one question of grief seems to be, "Will I survive?" It may be asked in many ways such as:

Will I ever be well again?

How long will I hurt like this?

When will it stop getting worse?

Can I stand the pain?

# *Discovering* Significance



**Special Care Series *Book Two***  
**Doug Manning**

# Preface

Grief is as unique as a finger print. No one grieves on schedule. There is no set pattern to follow. There is no right way or right length of time. Each person must walk through the pain in their own unique way and on their own unique schedule.

The more I listen to people in grief the more I understand that there is no “normal” way to grieve. However, the more I listen the more I am convinced that everyone in grief has one basic need — someone to simply notice and acknowledge the depths of the pain.

— *Doug Manning*  
*August 12, 2003*

# Discovering Significance

A woman gave me a wonderful description of the grief journey. She said:

*When someone dies, you don't get over it by forgetting; you get over it by remembering, and you are aware that no person is ever truly lost or gone once they have been in our life and loved us, as we have loved them.*

—Leslie Marmon Silko

“My daughter died four years ago. She now lives in my heart and I sense her presence on my left shoulder. She is with me all of the time and I love having her there. I would give my whole life if she were here and alive, but her presence partially fills the void her death left in my heart. I talk with her often. She does not answer in words, but her presence seems to speak and, somehow, I feel as if we have talked. I think she enjoys being on my shoulder. She would not want to dominate my life, nor would she want me to stop being who I am.

“For a long time she was right here.”

With that she held her open hand right in front of her nose.

“She dominated my every thought. There was never a moment in the day when I was not thinking of her. I stopped being who I am and became her bereaved mother. I had no identity beyond that. I was afraid to laugh, because I thought that would somehow diminish her memory. I was afraid to move on in my grieving,



because it seemed like my whole existence had to be dedicated to honoring her.

“When people asked how I was, I wanted to scream at them. Couldn’t they see? She was right there in front of my face. How could they not see? If they saw, then they knew how I was.

“I was afraid for her to move from in front of my face. Any movement felt like I was forgetting her. I had to keep her there and think of her every moment, or I was in some way failing to honor her memory. I would feel her slipping just a little and I would pull her back and redouble my efforts of thinking about her all day every day. I was afraid that I would forget what she looked like, the beauty of her voice, the way she walked, the joy of holding her close, and even how she smelled. I wanted every memory of her to remain fresh forever, and it seemed to me that her moving meant those memories were fading away.

“When other members of the family seemed to be moving on with their lives, I would resent them deeply and began feeling like a martyr. I was the only one who knew how to suffer properly. I lost my daughter and it would be wrong of me to ever live again. I sentenced myself to never enjoying anything for the rest of my life.

“Family members tried to urge me to let go, but I felt like they were forcing me and taking away my grief. She had to stay right there in front of my face.

“I finally came to the place where I could not keep her there any longer. I don’t know how long it was after her death, but the day came when I let her begin to move.

# *Discovering* Understanding



**Special Care Series *Book Three***  
**Doug Manning**

*Discovering*  
**Understanding**



**Special Care Series**  
*Book Three*

**In-Sight Books, Inc.**  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

# Preface

When we hurt, all of the explanations and words of comfort can never replace one friend who simply understands.

— *Doug Manning*  
*August 12, 2003*

# Discovering Understanding

*Believe me, every heart  
has its secret sorrows which the  
world knows not; and often times  
we call a man cold when  
he is only sad.*

— Henry Wadsworth  
Longfellow

Grief is never over until it is expressed. That expressing can be the wailing of a broken spirit.

It can be openly shared tears. Or it can be words spoken by a broken heart and understood by a caring ear. In most cases grief is never over until it is spoken.

Speaking your grief is not always as easy or as simple as it sounds. You may feel it is too personal to express. You may find it frightening and worry that you might get out of control and not be able to do anything about it. Some people need time to get ready to speak. Others start immediately and often wonder if they will ever even pause, much less stop.

Men usually find it harder to talk than women. We tend to want to go off in our caves for a while before we are ready to face the intimacy of talking. This tendency can have an impact on a marriage. Often the wife becomes not only ready to talk, but talk becomes an absolute necessity for her, while her husband is still in his cave. Reaching some kind of mutual understanding and learning to meet each others needs can demand a great deal of time, talking and effort.

Somehow talking about pain or attending a grief group makes a person feel vulnerable or uncomfortable and some find that to be embarrassing. Admitting that help is needed is never easy.

Unexpressed grief does not just go away in time. Unresolved grief internalizes and comes out in some other way,

such as sickness, substance abuse, depression, or even divorce.

A seventy-five-year-old woman attended a grief recovery group on stillborns and miscarriages. She arrived early so the leader had time to talk with her. She said:

Fifty years ago I had a stillborn child. Fifty years ago we were not allowed to grieve. My husband took my son and buried the body. When he came back he announced that the experience was over and he did not want to hear anymore about it. For fifty years I have seen other children and wondered what my son would look like. My husband is gone and now I want to talk. The first thing I want you to know is I named him Tommy. No one knows he even had a name.

The leader, with great wisdom, led her in a simple time of remembrance and prayer for Tommy, fifty years too late. Grief is not healed by time alone.

## The Power of the Ear

*We can see the smoke of a  
burning home but who can know  
of a burning heart?*

—Malay Saying

I think people talk their way through the grief journey.

When I say that to an audience or a person, the usual response is, "How can that help? What is so great about talking?"

I happen to believe that the ears are the most powerful parts of the human body. Ears can heal when tongues have given up. Ears can heal when tongues have caused great damage. No one is ever hurt by the human ear. No one ever



# *Discovering* Comfort



**Special Care Series *Book Four***  
**Doug Manning**

*Discovering*  
**Comfort**



**Special Care Series**  
*Book Four*

**In-Sight Books, Inc.**  
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma



# Preface

These small books have given me more joy than anything else I have written. Being a companion to people as they walk through the first year of grief is a great privilege indeed. Hopefully our thinking together has helped you get started on the continuing journey of grief. Hopefully this fourth book will help you understand the journey ahead. The books may stop, but that does not signify that you should be over your pain. The first year may pass, but that does not mean you should be at some defined place in your progress. Permission to grieve as long as it takes is the major purpose of these four small books. My hope is that no one will take that away from you.

— *Doug Manning*  
*August 12, 2003*

# Facing the Anniversary

*Although the world is full of suffering, it is full also of overcoming it.*

—Helen Keller

It has been almost a year since you started your grief journey. It may not seem possible but the first anniversary is approaching. It may seem like just yesterday and forever at the same time. It is amazing how the days seem to drag on and on and yet how fast time flies by. If you are like most, the anticipation of the anniversary has already started.

The anticipation usually starts about thirty days before the date. It can begin so quietly that you may not notice or make any connection. It usually starts with feeling a sense of nervous foreboding with no reason to feel that way. You may feel irritated and react to things you normally would ignore. It may take a few days before you make the connection between these feelings and the coming anniversary. When the connection is made, the pain begins in earnest.

You can expect the whirl to return and the waves to hit. Your body may begin to react much as it did when the loss happened. It is normal to dread and even fear the anniversary. You might wonder how you will react or even whether or not you can take the experience. The closer the day comes, the more intense the feelings are. Fortunately, most people say the anticipation of the day is worse than the day itself. The fear and dread builds up higher and higher until it is so intense that the day itself can be an anticlimax. I hope your day follows that pattern.

It helps to plan the day in advance. Decide how you wish to honor your loved one and how you wish to spend the day. Some people choose to go on a trip and simply avoid it all together. One of the women I am companioning stayed home the first anniversary and has been gone for the two anniversaries since. Others would not think of being gone on this day of all days. There is no right decision to make. You must decide what is right for you and find the strength to follow whatever you decide. Others may have alternate plans to offer or all kinds of advice as to what is best for you, but you and your family alone know what you need on this day, and that is who should make the decisions.

You should also decide with whom you want to participate on that day. You need the freedom to choose the people you feel comfortable with or the ones who bring special meaning to the day. This may be hard for some friends or even some family members to understand, but this day must be spent in a way that you find meaningful and healing.

Some people find this to be a good time to begin forming the traditions and ceremonies of honor for a loved one. Ceremonies speak when words fail. Building ceremonies that will be followed for the years to come, can be warm, healing events in our lives.

Some people light a candle or plant a tree. Some build a memorial spot of some kind—maybe a fountain in the back yard or some other meaningful place. Some choose to form a memorial in some other fashion—a gift to an organization, a scholarship fund, or a plaque. All of these will have more and more meaning with the passage of time.