

"...a great gift for grieving teens...
full of sage advice from one of their peers..."

— Dr. Kenneth J. Doka, co-author of *Living with Grief: Children, Adolescents, and Loss*



Weird is Normal When Teenagers GRIEVE

patience Mom anger questions overwhelmed
suddenly nothing love Nobody understands.
rage light distraught Is it better yet?
laughter friends caring comforting weeping signs of continued love
regret release faith talk hopelessness devastate
unfiling confusion dog chill life anxiety control fear Be strong. tired Anyone? cat change alive frog incomparable
present power support confusion faith talk hopelessness devastate
heartache bleak hope strength guilt sad anxiety control fear Be strong. tired Anyone? cat change alive frog incomparable
darkness I feel so... grandma grandpa lost sobs brother buried time absolute direction always strong hero Dad
grief cast aside grief loss healing at last hiding What do I do?
disbelief Don't bother me. going nowhere forever healing at last hiding What do I do?
loss grief cast aside grief loss healing at last hiding What do I do?
Dad

Jenny Lee Wheeler

CoNtents

Foreword by Dr. Heidi Horsley xi

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PART I: GRIEVING is Normal

IntRoduCtion

Dr. Heidi Horsley, who wrote the Foreword for this book and has helped teenagers who lost their firefighter fathers in the 9/11 tragedy, tells me grieving is normal, that grief and life often go hand in hand. I have found that it is perfectly normal to be grieving if you have lost someone close to you. But you may ask how I can accurately tell you that grieving is normal when the title of this book clearly says that, for teenagers, grieving is weird. This is because when I use the word "normal," in this case I mean "supposed to happen." If you are grieving, nothing is wrong with you, even if you feel you are grieving in different ways than adults (which is where the "weird" comes in). In fact, if someone you love has died and you aren't grieving, I'd suggest you read this book (which apparently you already are!).

Chapter 1

My Path of GRIEF

Throughout my life I have experienced grieving a number of different times. I guess you could say I am fairly “experienced” with grief because I know how it feels, at various ages, to have someone you love die. The first time I lost someone close to me was when I was 5 years old. Both of my grandfathers died a few weeks apart, and I missed them a lot.

I loved both of them and enjoyed spending time with them. My “Grampa Dutch,” my mom’s dad, lived near us and would come over to our house some mornings. I remember how he would always greet me with a huge hug, and then we’d devour together a treat he brought, like donut holes. When we would travel to Canada to see Grandpa Wheeler, my dad’s dad, we would play games. He taught me how to wink, and we would see who could wink alternating eyes the fastest. I really missed playing games with him.

Luckily, my mom was a local volunteer grief counselor, and she told me it was okay to share any feelings that I had, happy or sad. She encouraged my dad and me to express how sad or happy we were, and what we were thinking about the grandpas.

When I was 11, my “Gramma Ree Ree,” what I called my mom’s mother, died after being sick with lung cancer for about a year. Because she lived nearby, sometimes I helped my mom take care of her because Grampa Dutch had died a few years earlier and she lived by herself. My grandma and I had been very close. Ever since I was little she would babysit me when both of my parents were working. We would play with her cats together and make up fun games. One of my favorites involved tossing a cat toy, trying to land it in a certain spot on the floor. When I would miss she would repeat, “Close, but no cigar.” I was sad when she died, but it helped that our family already knew how to talk about our feelings and give each other support.

The most recent — and most painful — death in my family happened when I was 14, about a year and a half before I had the idea to write this book. My dad, who had always been healthy, was diagnosed with a type of cancer called lymphoma. He entered the hospital and underwent several chemotherapy sessions, but he died about a month later. It was painful to watch him get sicker. One day

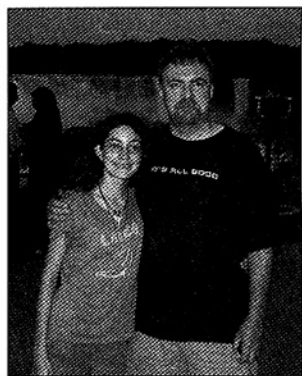


About the Author

Jenny Lee Wheeler is no stranger to death. She was 5 when both her grandpas died, 11 when her grandma died, and 14 when her dad got sick and died a month later.

As Jenny began to grieve her dad's death, she noticed that she mourned differently from the adults around her. Jenny's grief attacks — those waves of loss that come crashing down, often unexpectedly — seemed to be triggered by things that were unusual, even weird. Jenny decided to share her observations with other grieving teens to validate that weird truly *is* normal when teenagers grieve.

Jenny lives in Naples, Florida, with her mom, their five rescued cats, two guinea pigs, and two pet frogs. She attends high



Jenny and her dad at Niagara Falls, just before he got sick

school at Seacrest School, where she enjoys cross country, track, and playing flute in the orchestra.

She also likes to write fiction, poems, and song lyrics; play electric guitar; travel; rollerblade; watch the Animal Planet and SyFy channels; and, of course, hang out with her friends.

Jenny is the author of *Lunch Box Love Notes from Dad* and the illustrator of two children's grief support books, *Timmy's Christmas Surprise* and *Heart-Shaped Pickles*.

ARE you a TeenaGer dealinG with GRIEF?

You've got to pick up this book! It was written *by* a grieving teen *for* grieving teens. Like you, author Jenny Lee Wheeler has experienced (and is still experiencing) the challenges of how to grieve in an adult world filled with "shoulds" and unrealistic expectations.

You're not alone. Jenny shares her personal grief journey and reassures you that:

- You have the right to grieve in **YOUR OWN** way and on **YOUR OWN** timetable.
- Grieving teens sometimes get lost in the shuffle because most adults don't understand how teenagers mourn.
- Your grief attacks might be totally different from those of the adults around you. That's okay. In fact, it's normal. You're a teenager!
- You aren't crazy or imagining things if you see signs from your loved one. Signs don't have to be huge or obvious to everyone; they just have to be special to you, reassuring you that love never dies.

Proceeds from the sale of this book will be donated to The Gerry Wheeler Memorial Fund for Grieving Children, in memory of Jenny's dad, who died when she was 14. The fund provides free grief support books to grieving children and teens worldwide.

"Jenny's journey will strike a note with grieving teenagers everywhere. She gives sound advice and lets you know you are not alone. For surviving parents, family, and friends, this national award-winning book will help you get into the heads and hearts of bereaved teens....An excellent resource to use as a reference for adolescent bereavement groups."

— Dr. Heidi Horsley, Columbia University counselor to teens who lost firefighter fathers in the 9/11 tragedy and co-author of *Teen Grief Relief*

"We believe Elisabeth would applaud grieving teen Jenny Lee Wheeler for writing such a practical yet heartfelt book to help teenagers worldwide who have lost a loved one through death. As Jenny writes, teens often grieve differently than adults, and this book will become an important guiding light, bringing much-needed hope and healing."

— Ken Ross, President, The Elisabeth Kübler-Ross Foundation

grieving
railing
loved
quiet
please
numb
loneliness
submerged
eyes closed
deserted
understanding
in a pit
crying
feelings
peace
I wait...
happiness
escape
music
depressed
stay in bed
reach out
sister
withdrawal
apologize
lonely
incomplete

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