

GRIEVING CHILDBEARING ISSUES Part One

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I would like to share with you my perspective on grieving, which I have developed through my work as a therapist and through my own ten-year struggle with infertility. I would like to share this because my own grieving has been the most profoundly enriching experience of my life. Yet, prior to this experience, and certainly in the midst of it, I had thought of grieving as only a negative, lost-time experience, better avoided if possible.

In my own journey through grief, I was accompanied by a Jungian analyst and my own work using Gendlin's Experiential Focusing in the context of Listening/Focusing self-help communities. I learned many, many things from exposure to the Jungian philosophy, but most importantly, I learned that depression is a tunnel with light at the other end. No matter how long or how dark the passage, there *will* be an end to it.

Depression and grieving are also alchemical processes. The heat of the emotions burns away the dross and leaves gold. Grieving is not just about loss. At the same time it is a building. The very act of grieving through to a letting go builds new solid ground on which to stand. Although this process is hard to describe, it is like the making of spiritual gold.

Not the "You'll be stronger for It" (I don't *want* to be stronger!) of our Puritan heritage. Nor the "detachment" of Americanized Eastern philosophy (I don't *want* to be detached!). But it is like these. It is a strength or ease in the world that comes from learning that life is a process, that it does have peaks and valleys, that there will always be more peaks and more valleys. It is a detachment that does not mean lack of emotion or involvement but a greater ease in letting go, in moving through.

In speaking in this 'spiritual' way, I do not want to make light of the losses, especially as these relate to pregnancy and birth and children who do not live. And I do not want to take away the grieving and the validity of that infinite sadness. I only want to say that there is a way through. That grief is a natural process, and, if you can allow it, it will give you its own gift. And I only say this after going through years of grievous infertility, divorce, the seeming loss of all possibility—only to emerge in the most glorious place of happiness and simply having to say, "I would never have gotten to **this** place, here, if I had not been forced to go through the loss of everything that bore meaning for me in that previous place."

I would like to try to demonstrate from my own experience. Within my marriage, my ex-husband and I tried to conceive a child, on and off, for ten years. I (we) went through literally years of timed intercourse, hyper-awareness of bodily changes so that I was often sure that I was pregnant, then the coming of menstruation, and the grieving for *this* month's baby. Over and over again, the fantasied pregnancy and child, the loss and the grieving. There were interludes when we stopped trying, and I underwent tests, and surgeries. Finally, I was put on the drug Danazol to control endometriosis. Simultaneously, I knew that I had to start plans to adopt a child should this attempt fail (I was 38 years old).

The weekend that I started to take Danazol, my ex-husband's father died. We went through the funeral and a couple of months. My ex-husband seemed withdrawn, unavailable. I asked that we have couple's therapy, to find out how we could connect around his grieving and to talk about moving forward with adoption plans.

At the first couple's session, he announced that he was leaving me. And he did leave

me *that day*. He was overwhelmed by his own grief and could not handle the demands of a relationship.

I felt as if I had just been notified that my husband and all of my children had been killed in a car accident. I stayed with friends. I woke in the night and cried and cried and shook with fear. I tried to figure out how to get him back, what to do. I cried all weekend long and in between clients during the week. I cried and cried and cried and asked God to help me through this (not because praying came easy to me but because I was desperately needing to find a way through).

We had time of reconciliation, then new losses. I looked desperately for a place where I could have artificial insemination as a married but separated person, given that, at the end of my Danazol treatment, I would have a few months to try to get pregnant before the endometriosis came back. Somewhere in here, my cats died, I lost my apartment, the transmission fell out of my car. Everything of my previous life was dying. I was sure that I was dying. This process of grieving went on for over a year and a half.

However, eventually pushed out of the old apartment, as I had had to be pushed out of the too-small marriage, I moved to a new apartment. It was better, more cheerful, rid of a landlord-ogre. I made new friends. In my therapy, I discovered a sexuality related to motherhood that I had never known existed and would not have known had I stayed in my marriage. I lost ten pounds. I stopped being afraid to be alone and was really quite happy.

And, finally, I adopted a baby as a single parent, the entire process, from firm decision to a baby in arms, taking seven months. I've moved to a friendlier city, bought a house, and am thriving with my child. I know that there will be other times of loss in my life, other valleys, but I am less fearful. I have ridden major loss through to the end and know that loss lived through builds firm ground on which to stand. I am a larger Self than I would have been if not challenged by my grieving. And I am less afraid, more open to the highs that can only come with the willingness to risk some pain.

In the next issue, I will describe how to grieve. Some books on childbearing and grieving are:

Arthur, K. *As Silver Refined: Learning to Embrace Life's Disappointments*. Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 1999.

Borg, S. & J. Lasker, *When Pregnancy Fails*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1981.

Lerner, G. *A Death Of One's Own*. NY: Harper Colophon Books, 1980.

Lewis, C.S. *A Grief Observed*.

Limbo, R. & S. Wheeler, *When a Baby Dies: A Hand book For Healing and Helping*, La Crosse, WI: Resolve Through Sharing, 1986.

Panuthos, C, & C. Romeo, *Ended Beginnings: Healing Childbearing Losses*. Hadley, MA: Bergin & Garvey Publishers, Inc., 1984.

