

FROM GRIEVING TO GRATEFUL



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From Grieving to Grateful
How to Heal Your Broken Heart

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From Grieving to Grateful by Jacqueline Steudler

Published by JST Art and Therapy Inc.

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Preface

In this short-read book (about 30–45 minutes), you will learn how to move from deep grieving to a state of gratefulness for the love you experienced with your loved one. Included is a journal-like workbook to guide you through the many action steps and exercises mentioned in the book. My sincere hope is that this book will help take you beyond your grieving heart and show you creative ways to find your way back to your inner strength, resilience, and brings you to a grateful state of healing.

Author's Note

The names and personal details of the people described in this book have been changed to protect confidentiality.

Accompanying free workbook in PDF format can be found at

HealingForGrievingHearts.com/grateful

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Introduction

In ***From Grieving to Grateful***, you will find easy-to-follow steps and heart-centered resources that will help you move your healing process to a new place of gratefulness for the love you experienced.

You know that your grief is a part of the love you felt, but at the same time, deep in your heart, you long for the pain to stop.

Will it be easy?

I can't guarantee that because everyone is different. You have a unique story and relationship with your loved one.

But I can guarantee that by working through the action steps in each chapter, you will gain new insights about yourself and experience relief from the unbearable pain that might sit in your heart right now.

What will change?

Again, I can't guarantee anything, but if you read and work your way through this book, you may:

- Be able to enjoy fond memories.
- Be able to acknowledge that feeling sad from time to time and talking about those feelings is perfectly fine.
- Be able to transform painful feelings of regret and remorse.
- Be confident to reach out to others for support.

And you will have resources at your fingertips that you can use over and over if necessary.

Will this book help me to not feel sad anymore?

The truth is that you will always miss your loved one, but by honoring his or her life and story, you will feel relief, and your grief and sadness will change.

The overwhelming sadness that you might feel right now can move to a gentler version.

This book will help you find a new place for your loved one in your life and transform your overwhelming grief so that in the future, a smile will form on your lips first when you think of them before your tears start to fall.

It will also help you to accept the new relationship that is forming with your loved one.

How do I work through From Grieving to Grateful?

Throughout this short-read book, you'll find links to worksheets that you can download or action steps or exercises you can do right on the spot. Have a journal or notebook ready while reading through the book. Jot down what you find important, or answer the questions as they pop up in the book.

Everything you'll find in this short-read book comes from years of experience working with grieving women and my own grief process after the loss of my mother in 2013. My approach to this work is based on my training as an art therapist and is lovingly designed to help you heal the very natural grief your heart is feeling.

Sometimes I've included a poem or a quote that has a spiritual background. You don't need to be religious or of a specific spiritual belief to appreciate those words.

Please be advised that this book isn't a replacement for in-person help with a therapist or a support group if you feel overwhelmed by your feelings. Take care of yourself and find help in your community immediately.

Never use a book or an online article as a substitute for professional in-person help.

This Book is for You if...

You lost your loved one a while ago or just recently, and you're trying to get your life back together.

You're feeling like time has stopped, and you don't know how you will move forward.

You wish you could be the same happy person again that you were before all this happened.

But you know going back is not an option; you can only move forward. But how to precisely do that isn't anything you know how to do right now.

When we grieve, our perception of ourselves and our lives can change. We're confronted with the fact that death is a part of life, our life. Further, nothing will be the same. The wishes and dreams we had built with our loved ones aren't possible anymore. We can feel lost.

You have to build a whole new life and a whole new you. If you run your own business, you might just throw yourself into your work, and that will help you for a while. It will be your oasis away from home where you can live as if everything were normal and pretend that everything is still okay.

But as soon as you step into your home, you feel the void, even if you didn't live with your loved one.

You're tired of feeling that way.

That's where this short-read book (about 30–45 minutes) comes in. You'll find some easy-to-follow steps here that you can take today that will lead you to feel grateful and happy again.

By finding a way to honor your loved one who has died, you will find yourself able to feel grateful for the time you had together but also for the present that is teaching you so much about yourself and your capacity to love.

This book will assist you understand your personal grief better and includes a workbook, actionable ideas, and exercises that can help you get the forward movement that has to happen at some point.

This book is for you if you're willing to keep an open mind about new possibilities to help yourself and try out proven tools to feel grateful.

CHAPTER 1

What is Grief and Grieving?

When it comes to grief, we are all beginners.

Although we all know death is a part of life, we're good at hiding the unavoidable from ourselves.

When we lose a loved one, we're often not prepared—how could we be? No one has taught us that each grieving process is unique or how we can support each other with an open heart and compassion.

Grieving is different for everyone. Some bounce back quite fast or find their bearings easier. Others need a bit more help and support. No one mourns the same way as another.

“Grief is the natural reaction to loss of any kind.”

— John W. James, Russell Friedman,
Grief Recovery Handbook

In the summer of 2013, my mother died at the age of 83. Some friends and family members told me she was at peace now, she had had a full life, she was lucky that she hadn't had to suffer, and I should be grateful for all of it.

My heart heard their message: No need to grieve. No need to be sad. I should just get on with my life.

Although I had helped many people navigate through difficult life challenges and had experienced dramatic losses in the past, nothing prepared me for the sadness that accompanied the days, weeks, and months after my mother's death.

All of a sudden, I felt like I had forgotten who I was, and with my mother gone, no one was there anymore to remind me.

Since I had no support to find my way through this challenging terrain, I turned to what I already knew. I created little rituals to honor my mother, I painted a lot as a way to express and transform what I was feeling, and I shared my sad feelings only with people who I trusted to listen and not shy away from them.

By taking actions such as these, I discovered that my pain and sadness moved in a new direction. I was able to release the ifs and should-haves and felt a much greater sense of peace and balance. Rather than feeling consumed by grief whenever I thought of my mother, I was able once again to think of her with a gentle smile on my face.

What I learned from my own experience is that grief doesn't follow a straight line or a set of stages that one can work through, and then everything is okay again. Grief can be chaotic, and it doesn't follow any rules.

Your grief and your journey are unique to you.

I also discovered that we have to stop judging which type of griever or grief is worthier of our attention and love. What do I mean by that?

The following question (or a variation of it) is one that I have been asked by several people.

Which grief is more difficult to deal with?

- A mother who lost her child?
- A senior who lost their pet companion after 20 years?

Our society tells us that the loss of a child is the biggest loss one can experience. If we categorize grief into different levels of severity, however, we don't give ourselves or others the permission to fully express their feelings and help them find healing.

Like I said in the beginning, everyone experiences grief in their own unique way. Grief doesn't differentiate that we experience a divorce, the loss of a pet, a child, or our parents. Grief just is and

will be different for everyone and every relationship that has been affected by death.

We have to open our hearts fully to a non-judgmental state if we want to help ourselves and others. We cannot continue to categorize grief. Everyone who grieves a loss is worthy of our attention and compassion.

Open Heart Exercise

- Close your eyes and take a deep breath. Now open your heart to the love that your loved one instilled in you. What would unconditional love look like to them? Open your heart to his/her love.
- Take a piece of paper or your journal, and write down what unconditional love meant to you and your loved one.

Is my grief normal? I still hear their voice; am I crazy?

These are often the first two questions I'm asked when I have an initial free call with someone who is grieving. This is followed by all the physical, mental, and spiritual questions a griever might have.

You might encounter sleeplessness or be just in shock over the news. A feeling of living in an unreal world can occur. One of my clients described it as living in a big water bubble. Everything seemed out of focus, voices were muffled, and the most ordinary tasks were a heavy burden.

This state can also be caused by yearning for your loved one. It can cause you to see and hear things; you may feel the presence of your loved one clearly.

The experience of all this is normal. We're still very much tuned into the energy of our loved ones, especially if we have lived with them. So, we hear, feel, and see them (with our inner eye) as being next to us.

At the end of this chapter, you will find a link to a questionnaire that will give you more insight into the normal side of grief and the answers to the questions above.

Death is nothing at all.

I have only slipped away to the next room.
I am I and you are you.
Whatever we were to each other,
That, we still are.

Call me by my old familiar name.
Speak to me in the easy way
Which you always used.
Put no difference into your tone.
Wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow.

Laugh as we always laughed
At the little jokes we enjoyed together.
Play, smile, think of me. Pray for me.
Let my name be ever the household word
That it always was.
Let it be spoken without effect.
Without the trace of a shadow on it.

Life means all that it ever meant.
It is the same that it ever was.
There is absolute unbroken continuity.
Why should I be out of mind
Because I am out of sight?

I am but waiting for you.
For an interval.
Somewhere. Very near.
Just around the corner.

All is well.
Nothing is past; nothing is lost
One brief moment and all will be as it was before
How we shall laugh at the trouble of parting
when we meet again!

— Henry Scott-Holland, 1847-1918,
Canon of St. Paul's Cathedral, London

This poem by Henry Scott-Holland describes the feeling I had after my mother died very well. I read it at my mother's Ceremony of Life before we scattered her ashes into the lake she loved so much.

When I read it out loud at the ceremony, I felt deeply connected to her. Having our family and her closest friends there to witness this moment brought me even closer to her, and it became a healing experience.

Sometimes our words need to be heard by others to resonate within our soul and start the healing process.

Unbroken Continuity Exercise

- Think of your loved one, and read the poem by Henry Scott-Holland out loud to yourself or in the presence of a dear friend.
- When you come to the line Call me by my old familiar name, add all the names that your loved one was called by: birth name, nicknames, love names, etc....

Are there any stages of grief?

You might have searched the internet to find help with your grief. I imagine you found an article or two about the 5 stages of grief by Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, a Swiss-American psychologist.

Kübler-Ross worked with the terminally ill and conducted a study

on their feelings about death and dying. She concluded that most of her patients went through similar stages when being confronted with the news of their terminal illness.

1. Denial: “I’m not sick. This is a misunderstanding.”
2. Anger: “Why me? It’s not possible!”
3. Bargaining: “If I change my life now, I can still get better.”
4. Depression: “I don’t care about anything. I’m going to die soon anyway.”
5. Acceptance: “It’s okay. I’ll make the best of the time that I have left.”

Unfortunately, her study of the *5 Stages of Grief for Death and the Dying* was then used to describe the feelings of griever and has caused more harm than good over the last fifty years.

“Kübler-Ross originally saw these stages as reflecting how people cope with illness and dying,” observed grief researcher Kenneth J. Doka, “not as reflections of how people grieve.”

— Doka KJ (2016). *Grief Is a Journey: Finding Your Path Through Loss*. Simon and Schuster. p.6

Your grief doesn’t follow any stages.

Your grieving is very personal.

Unfortunately, we're not taught in school how to grieve or where to get help. We probably know better how to help someone who is having a stroke or a heart attack, even if it's just to call 911. Helping ourselves or someone else navigate through grief can be a challenge.

How we grieve and find a way through it is often driven by the resilience that we've built over a lifetime and our support system. You'll be able to strengthen your resilience as you walk your unique grief journey towards healing.

“Is My Grief Normal?” Questionnaire

- Below is a link to a questionnaire called Is My Grief Normal?
- Have a look and find out what the common reactions to grief are. Where are you at?

Is my Grief Normal Questionnaire:

HealingForGrievingHearts.com/questionnaire

You might be able to just click the link in your Kindle app to get to the questionnaire. If that doesn't work, copy and paste it into your browser.

Summary: What is Grief and Grieving?

- We're beginners when it comes to grief.
- Our grief is unique and sometimes chaotic.
- Compassion means that we open our hearts to others without judgment or categorization.
- Sometimes our words need to be heard by others to resonate within our soul and start the healing process. Your grief doesn't follow any stages. You grieve in your own unique personal way.

“And when the work of grieving is done,
The wound of loss will heal
And you will have learned
To wean your eyes
From that gap in the air
And be able to enter the hearth
In your soul where your loved one
Has awaited your return
All the time.”

— John O'Donohue,
To Bless the Space Between Us: A Book of Blessings

Chapter 2

Honoring is Healing

“Just because you feel lost doesn’t mean that you are. Sometimes you just have to relax, breathe deep, and trust the path you’re on.”

— Lalah Delia

Sharing stories of your loved ones help you honor them.

By honoring your loved ones, talking about them, you’re extending your relationship with them to this new part of your life. They are not here in person anymore, but they are still here with you—living in your heart.

Honoring them will give you a feel of connection that you thought was lost. This feeling will help assist your healing.

To be able to step into the healing path you need to find back to your resilience.

When we’re overwhelmed with grief, our resilience weakens, and we might feel we don’t have the strength to help us through this challenging time. One of my clients rediscovered her resilience through art therapy and was able to honor her loved one in a new way.

Honoring means to share their story. Your resilience will help you find the right words and your healing can continue.

Memories Honor the Relationship

Our senses can trigger deep sadness.

Many of us experience flashbacks or sadness when a song is played unexpectedly on the radio, when we smell a particular perfume—my mother’s Chanel No. 5 perfume still gets me every time—or when someone mentions the name of our loved ones.

In those moments, we often turn inwards, not sharing what we feel, or try to find a quiet space where we can release the tears that started to build up the moment we encountered the trigger.

I have found that naming it helps me. I immediately say to myself or whoever is there with me: “I just smelled my mother’s perfume. Wow, that was odd to experience the smell so suddenly without any warning. It makes me sad.”

Later that day, I will share my experience with a friend or my spouse. Sharing helps me to bring it out into the open so that it can’t fester in the dark of my troubled heart. Plus, a new conversation about my mother will follow, and a few laughs will be had as we reflect on the fact that she always used the perfume; it was her lighthouse beacon. Always detectable from miles away.

Death takes a part of our dreams with it.

A few years ago, we had this brilliantly sunny day after a snowfall. The air was crisp. Sunshine flooded everywhere and everything. Little stars sparkled on the frozen leaves of the bushes.

The whole atmosphere reminded me of skiing in the Swiss Alps with my college boyfriend. He was funny, smart, handsome, and the best teacher, helping me improve my skiing skills. (smile)

One winter, we were in the mountains with his friends. He wanted to show off and claimed that his girlfriend had learned so much from him that she could take on the steepest hill on the mountain. Had I not been in love with him and wanted him to be proud, I would never have agreed to go down that steep hill. (smile)

He had always told me to put my whole weight on my skis so that I would have the best control over them. That day, I did just that and made it down the hill in one piece. To this day, I tell myself sometimes: “Push your whole weight down on the ground for best control.”

Over time, our relationship changed, and we split up but stayed good friends. He was tragically killed in a motorcycle accident just before his 25th birthday.

Losing my friend was devastating.

My grief was deep and unexpectedly painful. I only realized then that I had always imagined him being in my life as a trusted friend. Even though we had broken up, I had still seen him as a part of my future, and now that future vision of our continued relationship was impossible. That feeling stayed with me for a long time.

On many sunny snow days, I remember him, his jokes, and his advice to firmly plant my feet on the ground.

My love for him and our friendship will always have a special place in my heart, and I'm grateful that he was and continues to be a part of my life's journey.

- What triggers your memories—a scent, music, a phrase, or a special place?
- Who is on your mind today?

Sharing our stories is a part of the healing process.

Memories keep that special place in our hearts for our loved ones who have died. Feeling grateful for the time together can be celebrated through these shared stories.

Have you downloaded the free PDF workbook?

Here is that link again

HealingForGrievingHearts.com/grateful

Thinking of You Exercise

- Think of your loved one and recall one of the stories that you shared.
- Then call a good friend and tell them, too.

The more we share our memories, the more we step into our inner strength and find gratefulness for the time we had with them.

“You gave me a forever, in all the numbered days.”

— John Green, *The Fault in Our Stars*

Honoring Your Loved One Will Activate Your Resilience

“I can be changed by what happens to me.
But I refuse to be reduced by it.”

— Maya Angelou

Psychologically, resilience is defined as an individual’s ability to adapt to stress and adversity.

Some factors that make someone resilient include:

- a positive attitude
- optimism
- flexible thinking
- the ability to regulate emotions
- the ability to see failure as a form of helpful feedback
- belief in oneself
- the ability to take responsibility for one’s life
- the ability to seek good relationships
- acceptance of self, others, and life

Resilience Exercise

- Take your journal, and write down which of the above traits are yours, too. Are any of yours missing from the list above? What helps you to overcome difficult situations? What are your typical action steps when you try to solve a problem?
- Build your own resilience list. What are your traits that help you through difficult times?

Even after misfortune, resilient people are blessed with the ability to change course and carry on.

This does not mean that you just have to think positively, and everything will fall into place. Resilience is much more than that.

After a tragedy, like an illness that changes a career, one might be very realistic and deal with their new situation by adjusting to the available possibilities.

Another person might go on and pursue a dream they didn't think was worth taking seriously before the tragic event.

A third will find new meaning because they believe in a better future.

“Resilient people don't walk between the raindrops; they have scars to show for their experience. They struggle—but keep functioning anyway. Resilience is not the ability to escape unharmed.”

— Hara Estroff Marano, *Psychology Today*

We form resilience over a lifetime.

In reality, we have considerable capacity for strength, although we might not always be aware of it. Feelings of loss and grief can overshadow our ability to be resilient.

That is where a helping hand from a friend or a therapist can come in. They will remind you of your resilience, your strength, and your abilities. They will help you overcome the sadness that overshadows you.

Others can show you the strength that you've built over a life time.

“... resilient people seem generally to find comfort in talking about or thinking about the deceased. They can feel happy or at peace by doing so...”

— George Bonanno, *The Other Side of Sadness*

By talking and remembering your loved one, you add comfort to your difficult journey. You will experience that your relationship is not completely gone. Or even that some part of it is still alive. Your relationship is still evolving through you.

How Cathy Found Her Resilience

Cathy is in her early fifties. She lives with her husband and dog in an urban area in the US and works from home as a virtual assistant.

Cathy had lost her mother. It had been a long and winding journey through the caregiving stages.

Although Cathy had known that her mother's death was imminent and she had had the time to tell her mother how much she loved her and how much it meant to her that her mother had looked out for her, especially during difficult times, she was not prepared for the grief that followed. She felt a part of her had died with her mother.

After two years of finding herself questioning everything in her life, she reached out to me after hearing about my work from a friend. The free call that I offer to those in mourning was our initial contact.

We talked for over an hour, and by the end, both of us felt she was on her way to figuring things out by herself.

Two months later, she called me again and said that the time had come to dig a bit deeper into her grief and her difficulty making decisions for herself.

We met online through Skype and started out using a creative art

therapy process to look a bit deeper into her own biography. (Online sessions work well when a client is too far away or when we face other challenges to meeting in person.)

Cathy needed to be able to reconnect with her resilience and her strength that had slipped away because of the lingering deep grief.

The painting that she created with two colors showed us the many ups and downs of her life. After she was finished, we sat down, and she told me about her life while referring to the created symbols and color splashes on the paper.

She shared through her tears about other losses in the past, and through smiles, of funny times. She talked about the feelings that came up while she painted and realized that she had always been able in the past to support others and herself during difficult times. We talked about her mother and the kind of influences she had in Cathy's life. Her mother had been a difficult person to be around when Cathy was a child. Cathy learned to navigate these challenging times by building strong resilience through humor and optimism. Two traits, Cathy said, she learned from her godmother.

Cathy created a second painting, choosing a color for her mother and one for herself. In that painting, it became clear that Cathy was grieving for the little girl (herself at around 11 years old) that didn't feel loved and supported by her mother.

This wasn't the end of our work together, but it was an important turning point to recognize that her resilience was her own and not

her mother's. And that Cathy hadn't lost it when her mother died. She realized that the time had come to find a way to forgive her mother for her inadequacies when Cathy was a child. At the same time, she felt grateful to have had a loving relationship with her mother during her adult life.

Memories of our loved ones and our own life story help us to discover the resilience we have or have gained. Creative art therapy processes help to make these visible when words are missing or inadequate.

Does sharing memories help and comfort you?

Do you find that sharing memories comforts you? If not, try to start with little steps to activate your resilience. Talk about your loved one and share the stories that made you laugh or be furious. I still tell people about my mother's great ability to drive me up the wall with her questions about my love life. (smile)

If you feel like you cannot hold on to the positive memories or the memories are lost, find a friend or family member. Let them share their stories about your loved one. This will help you both.

Honoring Your Loved One Exercise

Follow the link below (copy and paste if necessary) to the free PDF workbook with prompts to help you honor your loved one.

Link to free PDF workbook:

HealingForGrievingHearts.com/grateful

Summary: Honoring is Healing

- Honoring your loved one means sharing their story.
- Memories can be triggered by scents, music, special places, or dates.
- Sharing memories with a friend will help you heal.
- Honoring your loved one will also activate your resilience.
- Resilience can be overshadowed by grief and pain.
- Your resilience can be activated by changing your thoughts.
- Your relationship with your loved one is still evolving.
- Move towards gratefulness by sharing your memories.
- Creative art therapy processes make feelings visible when words cannot.

Chapter 3

Emotion is Energy

“Rock bottom became the solid foundation
in which I rebuilt my life.”

— J. K. Rowling

This short chapter will give you an overview of how emotions play a role in our everyday lives and how we have learned to keep them in check so that they don't overwhelm us or others.

When we're grieving, these self-regulating behaviors may be difficult to control. A short example will show you what I mean by that. But first....

What are emotions anyway?

Emotions are responses to significant internal and external events like situations we are in or people that are with us. Emotions include anger, disgust, fear, sadness, happiness, surprise, etc.... They can be short-lived like anger or long-lived like sadness.

Emotions can be expressed through facial expressions and evoke mental reactions.

Just try it out: Make an angry face and then switch to a happy face. Does one make you feel different than the other? Or during your next trip to the grocery store, if the cashier gives you a bored hello, make eye contact and send back a big, happy smile and see how their demeanor changes. I'm sure you have experienced that before.

Our behavior can change how we feel.

We have the capability to self-regulate/control our thoughts, behaviour, and emotions. This does not mean that we'll be happy all the time or that it will shield us from pain. By self-regulating, we increase the ability to accept our emotions and redirect them in difficult circumstances to help us cope with the situation we are in without damaging our reputation or abandoning our goals.

Emotional self-regulation helps us to move forward and find new goals or adjust them to our new situation. An inner peace comes with it. That peace is fueled by self-compassion, gratefulness, and mindfulness.

Emotions carry energy. Think of a moment when you got so angry that you wanted to scream but had to control yourself and didn't. How did it feel to keep that angry energy inside? Did you find another way later on to realise the energy?

Sometimes we keep our emotions bottled up inside us for too long and find ourselves in a situation where that emotional energy is released in an uncontrolled way.

When my mother died, my self-regulation was shut off some days. I would snap at my husband for no good reason, and even worse, I snapped at my brother during the celebration of life for my mother.

My mother was slowly dying, but I didn't understand that at the time. I was on the other side of the Atlantic and was shocked when my brother called me the day just before my mother died to let me know that her time had come.

I could have jumped on a plane and been there with her if I had only known earlier. My emotions were all over the place. I felt inadequate and frustrated, and I was deeply saddened that I had let my mother down, hopeless that I had missed my chance to hold her one last time.

While all these emotions ran through me, I still had to go to work and prepare for the time I would be out of the office to attend my mother's celebration of life.

I can't even remember what my co-worker said to me to trigger an emotional reaction, but I totally lost it at one point. I shouted something not very nice and ran to the bathroom to cry my eyes out. Afterward, I felt embarrassed, and I'm still grateful that my co-worker understood that my overwhelming sadness had caused the outburst and had nothing to do with her.

When and where do you feel safe to show your emotions? Some of us firmly believe that showing our emotions isn't acceptable. These beliefs have formed over our lifetimes.

Sometimes, we're not even aware of these beliefs. And yes, circumstances may dictate that we self-regulate what we express. We shouldn't yell at a co-worker even if they make us very angry. Hopefully, we've learned more constructive ways to cope with anger and frustration in the workplace. In situations like this we need to self-regulate, control our emotions, to keep us and those around us safe.

When we're grieving, our self-regulatory switch isn't always on or is only partly on—like my example just showed—and we may lose control over our emotions in a situation where we'd usually keep our calm. You might yell at your children or give your co-worker a word or two. That outburst will most likely be followed by sincere regret nearly immediately afterward.

When it comes to your feelings of sadness and despair, do you have a place where you can share freely?

Reach out to your friends, first to the ones that you trust and know will be open to listen and not judge or compare what you feel to anything else. They may not always know what to say or may say the wrong thing, but in your heart, you understand that they love you.

If that doesn't provide enough or the right kind of support, don't give up. Reach out to your community. Look for grief support groups in your area. Give one a try. Or you might prefer to talk to others through an online forum or a Facebook group.

Finding Support Action Steps

- Write down the names of the first three friends who come to mind that you can talk with about your loved one and your grief and feel safe. Sometimes, the person who comes to mind first isn't even a close friend but someone you know you can trust.
- Research the support groups in your community or in a bigger city nearby; write their information down.
- Google grief forums, grief support groups online, and grief support Facebook groups.
- Find a place where you can share what you're going through right now, the good days and the bad days. Other grieverers will understand you. Hearing their loving comments will bolster your resilience, support emotional self-regulation, and motivate you to help them in return.

We're social creatures and can help each other through these difficult times.

Summary: Emotion is Energy

- Emotions are responses to significant internal and external events like situations we are in or people that are with us.
- We can help ourselves by self-regulating our emotions.
- When we're grieving, our self-regulation can be diminished.
- We can teach ourselves to feel more at peace by supporting ourselves with self-compassion, gratefulness, and mindfulness.
- Find a friend or a support group, a safe harbor where you can express your emotions.
- We are social creatures and can help each other.

“Your soul knows the geography of your destiny. Your soul alone has the map of your future, therefore you can trust this indirect, oblique side of yourself.

If you do, it will take you where you need to go, but more important it will teach you a kindness of rhythm in your journey.”

— John O'Donohue,
Anam Cara: A Book of Celtic Wisdom

Chapter 4

Accepting is Movement

Accepting your feelings, questions, confusion, or helplessness will help you to move towards gratefulness and a more peaceful outlook.

This chapter gives answers to questions that I'm asked a lot by clients as they move through the grief process.

- I'm afraid to start crying. What if I never stop?
- It has been a year since my loved one died, and I don't know what to do with their possessions. What can I do?
- I'm watching old videos of the two of us together every night or spend hours going through our photo albums or images on my phone. Is that normal?
- I can't bear to look at images of my loved one. The pain is just too great.

Are those questions you've asked yourself? Jump ahead to the question that interests you the most. There is no right or wrong way to create art or read a book. (smile)

I'm afraid to start crying. What if I never stop?

“Tears are like rain. They loosen up our soil so we can grow in different directions.”

— Virginia Casey

Do you fear that you won't be able to stop crying?

When you're grieving, the pain is so overwhelming at times that you can't control the tears. You're doing yourself a disservice if you try to hold them back all the time.

Tears form when your body is overwhelmed with emotions, and it doesn't matter if they are happy, loving, or sad. The emotional energy that forms inside you is looking for release.

Some people can't or don't cry at all, and that is okay. They may release that sad energy in another way, or perhaps they just feel numb, everything inside them drying up. Then others have a laughing fit when they are told sad news, even if it is about someone's death.

I'm not making that up. My brother and I experienced that when we were little.

We were playing with our friends in my brother's room when my father came in. He had red-rimmed eyes and was obviously sad. He told us that our grandmother had died.

We five children, ranging in age from seven to ten, didn't know how to react. I can't remember who started to laugh, but suddenly, we all started to have a laughing fit, and my father left the room quietly. Later when my brother and I realized what had happened and what it meant, we started to cry, too.

I have since heard of adults who have laughing fits at funerals or when they are told of the death of a loved one. Emotional energy finds its unique way of expressing itself in each person.

Crying helps you let the sadness and the love you feel flow. If you're afraid you won't stop crying, some easy steps can help you calm yourself.

Sometimes our crying turns into heavy sobbing.

Our bodies weaken, and we may lay down on the floor in our living room or on our bed. We turn ourselves into a little ball like a small child. This is called the fetal position.

We feel safe in that protective posture.

If you're in that posture sobbing for a long time and you start to feel like you might never be able to get up again, bring your attention to your breathing.

- Breathe in for a count of three.
- Breathe out for a count of three.

- Do that one more time.
- Turn on your back, and let your legs and arms fall to your sides.
- Now take two more deep, slow breaths for a count of three.

By bringing your attention to your breathing and moving your body into a new position, the intensity of your crying will change and calm.

The next step is to get yourself into a sitting position.

When you finally get off the floor or your bed, go and drink a lot of water. Crying dehydrates us, and you need to care for your body during this difficult time.

What happens when we turn into this little ball of sadness is that we regress. We go into a state of self-soothing like a child. We're recreating the safe space that we had in our mother's womb.

As a child, we had our parents, a sibling, or other family members who would help us out of a difficult place with loving words and a hug.

Now we're adults, and we need to know how to find a way out of it by ourselves unless we have a friend or family member by our side who can help us. This is where breathing comes in. By moving and concentrating on something else, we give our brain and soul a new message of healing.

Let the tears flow, drink lots of water, and breathe.

If you feel overwhelmed and sob several times a day and find that a little movement and breathing attention doesn't help at all, it might be time to seek outside help. It can be a friend, a support group, your family doctor, or a therapist. Please take care of yourself. You don't have to do it all by yourself.

Self-Care and Grateful Journal Exercise

- Breathe.
- Practice regular self-care, like taking a hot bath or a warm shower.
- Start a grateful journal: Focus each day on three things that you are grateful for. It can be the sunshine, a warm coat on a winter's day, or a friend who called you. Shifting your focus to the pieces in your life that are positive will help in your healing process.

**It has been a year since my loved one died, and I don't know what to do with their possessions.
What can I do?**

“Note to self: every time you were convinced you couldn't go on, you did.”

— Unknown

When my mother was diagnosed with dementia and had to move into a nursing home, going through her possessions, and deciding what to keep and what to give away was up to me.

She was still alive but wasn't able to help us with that task at all. But we knew what she might still want to have around her. This fact made it easier.

Because her whole household had to be liquidated, I decided to hold a yard sale by invitation only because I hoped that her everyday possessions would help some young people start their own households. Only a few people came, and I was sad to see that her beloved collection of high-quality cooking pans and other items weren't important to others.

Then at the end of the day, a friend came to choose some pieces for a flea market she regularly attended as a seller. We had agreed she could take what was left from our yard sale.

However, I wasn't prepared to hear her comments on everything she thought she could or couldn't sell at the flea market. It was devastating to realize that my mother's belongings had no value to anyone else.

Then my friend picked up four teacups. They had a blue pattern and a gold rim, and I knew how much my mother loved them. They had been a part of a special collection of little things that my mother bought for herself. She displayed them in a glass vitrine

like in an art exhibition. These teacups weren't used that often because they were ones used only for special occasions. My friend picked them up and looked at them from all sides before putting them in her box, saying, "They will sell well. People like this kind of stuff."

That's when I lost it. The sadness overwhelmed me. I started to cry heavily, and both of us were shocked by the intensity of my sobbing.

She immediately apologized for her remarks and moved to take the teacups out of the box and leave them with me. But I insisted that she take them after I calmed down.

My brother had to work that day and couldn't be there but came by in the evening. I told him about the silly incident with the teacups. We both cried about the fact that we had to give away almost all my mother's belongings that we knew carried so much meaning for her.

The next day, I got a call from my brother. He had contacted our friend, and the teacups were now at his place for me to pick up before I traveled back to Canada.

When he told me, I started crying again, and I was so grateful that he'd saved the teacups. They are now in my home and are used seldom, just like my mother did, but with love when I do use them. My mother died many years ago, and I'm grateful that I still have that little keepsake of hers.

What can you do to feel more comfortable when giving away your loved one's possessions?

I advise my clients to have three boxes ready. Most likely you will have three piles.

- One box for items you want to donate.
- One box for items you want to keep.
- One box for items you're not sure yet if you want to donate or keep.

After you have gone through everything, bring the boxes with the items to donate to the appropriate charities.

After three months, have another look at the two boxes that stayed in the house.

Get a new donation box, and from the other two boxes, put items in it that you now find you can donate. Continue this process every three months with the sorting system until you only have the pieces that are so meaningful to you that you can't give them away.

This task is difficult—so give yourself time.

Possessions Action Steps

- Make a list of your loved one's possessions in your journal that you would like to give to friends and family.
- Make a list of charities you trust.
- Get the three boxes, and start sorting.

I'm watching old videos of the two of us together every night or spend hours going through our photo albums or images on my phone. Is that normal?

“There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you.”

— Maya Angelou

We want to hold on to what we have lost. We want to relive the moments and feel the love or the sadness that accompanied those moments.

One of my clients told me that she would do very well during work hours, and she was able to ignore the photos of her late husband on her phone during the day, but when she came home in the evening, she couldn't hold back scrolling through the images and reliving those moments. She said, “It made me feel happy again but also very lonely at the same time.”

She felt it wasn't a healthy habit because, after a while, she realized that she would cancel dates with her friends so that she could have time to go through the images instead. It had become her daily ritual. But she also recognized that she isolated herself by doing so.

She grew concerned about her behavior, and that was why she got in touch with me. She had never gone to a therapist before

and explained to me that she felt art therapy and a hands-on approach would help her more than “lying on a couch and talking to the ceiling.”

When I told her we would first approach her past and work through her biography, she became distraught. She told me that this was what she had been doing all along, and it hadn't helped her at all.

I explained to her that what she was actually doing was living in the past, reliving every good and bad moment with her loved one and getting stuck there.

I explained how our work would be different. By looking at her full life up until this point, we would be able to find the nuggets of strength and resilience that she had built over her lifetime, and that those would help her move out of her evening cycle.

Her soul needed to find its way back to her strength so she could engage with others and feel safe stepping away from the behavioral loop she was stuck in.

When we're in distress, we start to create situations that feel safe and we can control.

Look at your own behaviors:

- What do you favor?
- What do you avoid?

- Have you developed any rituals like my client?
- What do you do to avoid challenging situations?

Avoiding people who drag you down is healthy. But isolating yourself and just sitting with your own inner voices is not. (Don't worry, talking to yourself isn't bad—I do it all the time. It's unhealthy when it becomes the only form of communication in your life.)

In one of our sessions, she painted her life with two colors. She was able to take a step back and tell her life's story in a profound and empathetic way. She came to realize that she had endured so much in the past and had always found a way to move forward. She remembered that as a child, she would spend hours in front of the TV to avoid difficult discussions with her parents or face the distressing news of her parents' divorce.

Looking at the images of her marriage every night was like her TV time as a child. She was stepping away from the challenging present to live a fantasy life, or as she put it, “the life of better times.”

The first step, we agreed, was to break her habit and to invite a trusted friend, one whom she knew wouldn't judge her, to her evening photo-viewing session.

She told me afterward that it was such a pleasant evening. While they looked at the images, they both started to share their memories and had many good laughs and as many tears. But she

said that she was surprised how uplifted she felt afterward, having been able to share the images and memories with her friend. She felt like a weight had lifted from her heart, and she felt grateful for the life she had shared with her husband.

This was the first step out of her loop of pain and sadness, starting to share memories with others and getting in touch with the present again.

When you're grieving, you often look back and would like to relive your life with your loved ones. You want to make it better, take back some of the words you said, let them know more often how much you loved them, and how grateful you were for their presence.

When we only look back, we are in danger of becoming depressed because we can't change what has happened. When we try to live our future and imagine what we would have been able to achieve together, we're in danger of becoming anxious because our loved one isn't there anymore to support us.

The only place we can find healing is in the here and now. The present, this very moment, is our friend. Staying in the now can be difficult. We loop in and out of thinking about the past or the future. But we can become mindful by taking a deep breath and feeling this moment that is full of potential.

Healing Meditation Exercise

Follow the link below (copy and paste if necessary)
to a healing meditation.

healingforgrievinghearts.com/blue-light-meditation-jst

And then the other side to dealing with images of your loved ones can be painful as well.

I can't bear to look at images of my loved one. The pain is just too great.

“The way you look at things is the most powerful force in shaping your life.”

— John O'Donohue, *Anam Cara*

Only after our loved ones have died do we realize how many images of them we have in the house or on our mobile devices. We stumble over them everywhere.

One of my clients, let's call her Linda, lost her husband suddenly. He suffered a massive heart attack at work and died on the way to the hospital.

The day before, the whole family had been over for a visit, and they had taken many family photos while they went for a walk at the beach.

Linda was still in that uplifted mood from their family day when she got the call from his workplace and had to rush to the hospital. For the longest time afterward, she wasn't able to look at those images. She put them away, but they came up over and over in our sessions when she talked about her husband. These images were a trigger for her to relive that weekend with the family and the devastating call that soon followed.

Linda got in touch with me two years after her husband died. Her main concern was that she wasn't sleeping well, and it had started to impact her work and business performance.

Linda had a great support system of friends and family, but she felt their patience with her was wearing thin, and she didn't want to depend on them anymore.

When I work with a client, I listen deeply to their needs and determine what they are capable of taking in at that very moment. Their path is more important than my knowledge as an art therapist. From the start, I knew that the family photos from that happy beach walk were key to her healing, but Linda wasn't ready to hear that or act on it when we first met.

We worked through the Healing for Grieving Hearts program that I created years ago and adapted it to Linda's needs. One of the

art processes brought forward all the many obstacles that she had encountered in her life and how she had been able to find a way through them. In other words, she came to better understand the foundation of her own resilience.

I saw her change over a short period of time from a woman who had been beaten by life to a woman who was still mourning her loss but also showed her delightful humor and shared many uplifting stories of vacation adventures with her late husband.

When I suggested to Linda that the time had come to look through all the photos from that happy family beach day and choose the one that depicted her late husband the best and bring it to our next session, she only hesitated a short moment before agreeing. I knew this was difficult for her, so I stayed in extended email contact with her during the week we had between sessions. I encouraged her and made sure that she brought a photo to our session. And she did.

She told me how she worked through this challenging task: She printed most of the photos and laid them out on the floor. Then she took each one into her hand and tried to relive that moment while asking herself which was the one that told the best story about her husband.

The photo she brought showed the whole family that had been present that day. Her husband stood on one side and looked toward everyone else with a big smile. I asked her to write a short paragraph about him with his family. She took her time until she

was satisfied with it. After that, we created a short digital story.

To do this, I filmed the image of the photo while she spoke her text out loud. After three takes, she was happy with the outcome of the short video.

We both cried when we watched the video on my laptop. She felt grateful that she had been brave to go through this vital step of her healing.

Like with every art piece created during my art therapy sessions, I asked her not to share her digital story with her family or friends right away.

When you create something in a therapeutic setting, you should treat that piece like an entry into a private journal. You wouldn't take screenshots of your diary and post it on social media, would you? (smile)

I advise my clients to do this because every piece has a special meaning for them. By sharing it with others, that meaning could be destroyed or tainted by comments or opinions that are so freely shared on social media. Please keep your journal entries to yourself until you feel that you can take comments from friends and family members.

Digital storytelling is a powerful method to honor your loved one. I learned about it half a year after my mother had died. I always try to include this step with my clients if at all possible, because it was key in my own healing process.

I shared my digital story about my mother with family members and two close friends on the second anniversary of her death. I needed that long to be able to share it with the other people who loved her, too. Reactions were mixed, but I was prepared for that, and because time had passed, I wasn't hurt by it.

Fun Fact: The video had lived from the start on my website. But it's a bit hidden, so not many people have seen it over the years. I also disabled comments on YouTube so that I don't have to deal with any comments that could hurt my feelings. Know your own boundaries and take self-care measures. (smile)

Create Your Own Digital Story

Create your own digital story. Follow the link below (copy and paste the link, if necessary) you'll find a short step-by-step guide inside the free PDF workbook.

healingforgrievinghearts.com/grateful

Summary: Accepting is Movement

- Crying is important to balance your emotional energy.
- Let the tears flow, drink lots of water, and breathe.
- Start a journal for all you're grateful for.
- Be gentle with yourself when sorting through your loved one's possessions.
- Have a look at your own behavior: What do you favor? What do you avoid? Have you created rituals that keep you stuck in the past? Are you avoiding challenging situations?
- Share your memories with a trusted friend—gratefulness for the life you shared will follow.
- The only place we can find healing is in the here and now.
- Art therapy processes can help to navigate grief and honor your loved one.
- Know your own boundaries and protect yourself.
- Accepting your feelings will help you move towards healing—and grateful.

“Open your inner listening ears and hear
the soft voice of your soul:
I am always with you.”

— Jacqueline Steudler

Chapter 5

Love is the Answer

“Your courage is the light on your path to healing.”

— Jacqueline Steudler

Love is the answer. Can it be that easy?

Love has brought you to this book. Love is what fuels the gratitude of having been a part of your loved one’s life.

In this chapter, I want you to give yourself permission to love. If this was a romantic relationship, depending on where you are in your journey, perhaps not yet with a new partner but to keep your love for yourself and others alive. I want you to remember that you and your soul’s ability to love is still here.

Your love for your loved one will never die. It will change over the years, but you know that they will always have a special, loving place in your heart.

This chapter also completes your journey from grieving to grateful—or perhaps starts it. (smile)

I’ve included rituals at the end of this chapter that will help you

feel the connection and gratitude for your loved one.

I love walks at the beach, and I have a favorite beach in Cape Breton, Nova Scotia. Last fall, I was walking along that beach and experienced a calmness I hadn't felt in a long time.

It's a stony beach with lots of beautiful rounded stones. Each stone called out to me to take it home. I was able to resist and took only one with me. (smile) The sound of the rocks being moved by the gentle waves had a soothing effect.

I sat down, taking it all in, and then noticed hundreds of broken shells. The shells still looked beautiful, even in their broken state. I felt that they were a good metaphor for your broken heart after a loss.

When you lose someone, you feel the missing pieces in your heart. Some lost parts are more significant than others. Some pieces are memories, wishes, and plans that we cherished with our loved ones. Some are the physical closeness, the kisses, the hugs, and the laughter. Each missing piece has left a hole. You can't imagine that you will be able to mend—ever.

Lots of these shells still had the shape and structure of the original shell. The wholeness and beauty of them were astonishing.

Even when you lose someone so close to your heart that it shatters, you are still here. You will have to adjust to the new situation, your new reality. But you as a person are still here. Yes, this experience will change you. You might not feel the same

anymore, but don't despair. You will be able to evolve and grow into a new version of yourself.

Remember that you, your soul, and your ability to love are still here. They hold you together, even if it doesn't feel like it at the peak of your grief.

Trust in the process to find peace inside your broken heart and understand that what love shattered can be mended by love again.

Love is the answer.

Looking at Love Exercise

- Have a look around you, and think of all the people in your life.
- Who do you love?
- Has your love for them changed because you lost a loved one?
- Just sit with these two questions for a moment. Write their names in your journal, and add any feelings you have as you are thinking of them.
- Has your love for them changed?
- Has it been diminished because you're grieving?

It might have changed because grief has changed you, and your love might have become even stronger because you have been reminded that life can end.

You can't sugar-coat the fact that we all die one day.

Is love the answer?

Yes, it is. You're still capable of loving. You're still worthy of being loved back.

You have grieved and are grieving so deeply because of the love you felt and continue to feel.

Acknowledge that you're a new person who has gone through a harrowing journey but are coming out the other side. The other side has new colors, new sounds, new connections, new plans for you, and I hope, a deep feeling of gratefulness.

You might still be on the journey to the other side of grief. No matter where you are on the path, you have left your old self behind. Love and grief have transformed your outlook on life.

But they also have made you aware of how deeply you can love and feel.

This isn't the end of the road. This is the beginning of a new chapter. A first step into your new life. Surround yourself with the people who you love and trust. They will be happy to help you.

Love is the answer.

How can I express the love I felt? How can I honor what my loved one meant to me?

Love can be expressed through rituals.

We have rituals in our everyday lives. Some simple rituals include brushing our teeth before we go to bed, reading to our children at bedtime, making our beds in the morning, calling our parents on Sundays, going for a walk before breakfast, keeping a gratitude journal, writing in a diary, etc....

Rituals give our lives shape and a feeling of stability and continuity. They can mark special days in our lives as well and are a part of celebrations like birthdays, weddings, graduations, funerals, ceremonies of life, and achievements.

They have their roots in religion, but we use them all the time in our everyday lives and celebrations.

The rituals I want to introduce you to are meant to form a bridge between your inner feelings and the outside world that sometimes seems disconnected by your loss. By opening your heart to these rituals, you will connect to your loved one in a “spiritual,” way and honor their life.

Rituals give us a sense of connection and can bring us to a new understanding of ourselves. While you’re reading through the following ideas, you might be inspired to create your own unique rituals. Go for it!

If you're a skeptic, just give one a try, and be open to a new experience. The following rituals are a starting point. I encourage you to listen to your heart and create what you need most.

Rituals can be created and performed alone or with others. Adults and children of all ages can participate in your rituals.

Ribbons of Gratitude Ritual

Go for a walk alone, with a friend, or your family. Perhaps you could choose a path that your loved one liked most or your own favorite walk. Think of a tree that you can visit along your walk that would be a wonderful place to hold a little ritual.

Take some colorful ribbons and scissors with you. (Please use fabric ribbons and not plastic ones.) Choose your tree, and hang the ribbons on it, one person after the other. Take your time.

- Hang one ribbon that represents your love for the person who has died.
- Add another ribbon as you include a wish for yourself or your family/friends.
- Add another to express your gratitude for this day together or...
- Hang as many ribbons as you wish. You could share your thoughts out loud or just hang your ribbons in silence on the tree.

You can also perform this ritual by yourself if you feel more comfortable doing so.

I have done it by myself and with my family, and both rituals had their own unique calming feels to them, even when the tears were streaming.

Candle Remembrance Ritual

Another very simple ceremony is having a bowl with sand on your table at an anniversary or holiday celebration. Everyone at the table gets a candle. They light it and put it into the sand. While doing that, they think of the person who has died and share a short story or anecdote.

Being able to share a ritual like this will support your healing. You're not alone. Invite one person or many together who are open to sharing and supporting you.

Rituals are important.

They help us heal while staying in the present moment. They allow us to give our feelings a voice, and by creating them, we give our soul permission to deeply connect with what we have lost.

Healing is not about forgetting. Healing is acknowledging that we had dreams and takes stock of hopes and wishes. Through creating experiences and rituals, we heal and find a new purpose.

Rituals help us to be grateful for the time we had with our loved ones.

Ritual Action Steps

- Make a list of people whom you would like to invite for a ritual.
- Do you have any rituals that you already perform or have performed? List them.
- When would be a good time to add a ritual to your life?

Summary: Love is the Answer

- The broken parts of your heart remind you of the love you shared.
- You will have to become comfortable with your new reality.
- You will evolve and grow into a new you.
- Remember that you, your soul, and your ability to love are still here.
- Grief has made you aware of how deeply you can love.
- Love and grief can be expressed through rituals.
- Rituals give our lives a feeling of stability and continuity.
- Healing is not about forgetting.
- Rituals help us to be grateful for the time we had with our loved ones.

Chapter 6

Grateful is a Feeling

“There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.”

— Albert Einstein

Moving from grieving to grateful doesn't mean that you'll be fine by just thinking positive thoughts.

It's an active process of changing the way you think. A dynamic movement of taking gentle steps to lift the layers of your grief and having a loving look at what is hidden beneath them.

My intention is to provide actions like journaling, rituals, storytelling, and more to help you peel back the layers so that you may step back into your strength and uncover your resilience.

This doesn't mean that your sadness will be gone forever. You will always miss your loved one, but your feelings will move into a gentler state. You might realize after a while that a smile forms first when you think of your loved one before tears form.

Throughout this book, I have given you steps to move your feelings from grieving toward grateful. Like I said in the introduction, this path isn't easy to take, but here you are at the end of this book. I hope that all the action steps, creative ideas, stories of others, and the workbook will help you on your healing journey.

Never forget that your relationship with your loved one isn't over; it still continues and is fueled by your love and gratitude.

Take good care of yourself on your healing path,

Jacqueline

“If we want our species to survive, if we are to find meaning in life, if we want to save the world and every sentient being that inhabits it, love is the one and only answer.”

— Albert Einstein
from a letter to his daughter Lieserl

Bonus Chapter

The Healing Power of the Arts

“Art is when you hear a knocking from your soul... and you answer.”

— Terri Guillemets

Throughout this short book, I have mentioned art therapy and the art processes I have used with my clients.

This chapter will give you some insights into art therapy and the healing power of the arts in general.

Our souls respond well to music, colors, movements, and stories. And the hands-on approach of making art can help you step into a state of flow—explained more in this chapter—where your brain experiences a break from your overwhelming emotions of grief.

This bonus chapter is for you if you want to know more about art therapy and the possibility of it helping you as you move from grieving to grateful through art interventions.

The arts have always been a part of my life.

Music, writing, dance, paint, and brushes—many brushes. (smile)

Being creative helps me relax and heal when life throws challenges my way.

What do I mean when I say the healing power of the arts?

- Art has been proven to help the recovery process during and after serious health issues like a stroke or cancer.
- Art does heal. Scientists have found that appreciating creative works can boost the immune system.
- Getting visually creative is great for those who are struggling with language and communication.
- Art-making connects directly to your inner wisdom and knowledge.

“Art-making is a sensory experience that can actually lead to changes in mind and body, exploring both positive and negative feelings through image-making.”

— Cathy Malchiodi, Psychology Today

My Own Experiences

When I was little, I cherished my recorder, a small flute, that accompanied me everywhere I went.

My mother told me once:

“You would come home from school, say hello, and then disappear into your room to play your recorder. I knew at that point that something had happened at school that was difficult for you. After about half an hour, you would come out of your room and tell me all about it.”

I have no recollection of that. I only know that I often came home and couldn't wait to play my recorder.

“Art is coming face to face with yourself.”

— Jackson Pollock

My other love involved brushes, markers, paint, pens, paper, and fabric. I was able to spend hours painting, drawing, and inventing new dresses for my dolls.

Then I grew older, and I started to write poems—you did that too, right? (smile) —containing all the teenage angst you might imagine.

Dance, theatre, and singing followed.
In the end, I pursued painting.

My friends weren't surprised when I decided to train as an art therapist so I could use the arts to help others find their strength

and navigate through challenging times.

Every time I feel down or sad, I look to these outlets that have helped me get through life when it felt difficult to cope. Making art has become my go-to place to heal.

Singing My Way out of Fear

A few years back, my spouse got sick.

It was a difficult time. (He's doing fantastic now.)
What did I do leading up to his big surgery?

I sang all day until he looked at me with this strange look of sadness. Only at that moment did I realize how inappropriate it must have felt for him.

I realized that I always sing to myself when I am in distress. It calms me down and helps me find my center.

You can imagine he found my coping strategy difficult to understand at first.

Do you have a song that calms you down when you are stressed?
Listen to it now.

Art-Making to Overcome a Loss

“Art does not reproduce what we see;
rather, it makes us see.”

— Paul Klee

When my mother died in 2013, I was stranded in overwhelming grief that seemed unbearable at times. I only realized after a while that I had my own healing power in my studio. I took all my knowledge as an art therapist and used art to express my feelings and start my healing process.

Starting was super hard at first.

Then I took a digital storytelling workshop, and although my intention was just to learn the process, I chose my mother as the main character in the story.

This expression of our relationship and visually sharing the memories helped me heal.

(I talked about digital storytelling in Chapter 4.)

What makes art such a powerful healing tool?

“Art allows the unspeakable to be spoken.”

— Anonymous

We all think in images.

What do I mean by that? If I tell you to think of a tree, you probably immediately see a tree in your mind.

If ten people are in a room and I tell them to draw a tree, what do you think will happen? We will have ten different trees on paper. Each of us is unique. Our thoughts are images shaped by our life experiences.

Art therapy is a process where you connect to your soul's voice and your personal images that live inside you and give them shape, color, and attention. By doing so, you'll find new answers to your questions and a new healing path that you weren't able to see before; you will rediscover your resilience and strength—the resilience that was hidden behind all those layers of loss and pain.

When we are in distress, we can express our feelings better with colors and shapes and bring those images to the surface.

With painting or any kind of art-making, we are stepping into a dialogue with our feelings, and the hands-on creation starts the healing process.

You might also have experienced when you immerse yourself in a creative task that time seems to stand still, and you're surprised when you stop and realize that two hours have already passed without you even noticing it.

This is called flow. It's a state where our brains find the space for a little mini-vacation from all our painful thoughts and where we find refuge to restore our drained energies.

Being in the flow, also known as being in the zone, is a mental state where we are immersed in an activity. We're focused and fully involved in the process of the activity.

Flow can happen when you're preparing a meal, making art, renovating a part of your home, cleaning your car or home, or working out. Any one of these activities can bring you to a state of flow. What do you like to be immersed in?

You might think that it is too hard to paint or draw. Just take a piece of paper, and start a doodle with a black marker. Get yourself a box of crayons or colored pencils, and start filling in the doodles with color. Have fun, and just go with the flow. (smile)
When words are missing or feel inadequate, the creative art process will support us to express what is blocked in our hearts, minds, and souls.

To heal on the deepest levels, we need to hear and acknowledge what's in our hearts, minds, and souls. Art-making does that. It opens the door to those profound parts of ourselves and our gratitude for everything that lies inside us.

Take good care on your healing path,

Jacqueline

If you haven't downloaded your free PDF workbook yet.

You can find it at

HealingForGrievingHearts.com/grateful

Bonus Chapter Summary:

- Art has been proven to help in the recovery process during and after serious health issues like a stroke or cancer.
- Art does heal. Scientists have found that appreciating creative works can boost the immune system.
- Getting visually creative is great for those who are struggling with language and communication.
- Art-making connects directly to your inner wisdom and knowledge.
- Being in the flow, also known as being in the zone, is a mental state where we are immersed in an activity.

Acknowledgment

I would like to thank my family and friends for their support in helping me to move forward on my own grieving journey. I'm grateful for the time I was able to spend with all my loved ones who are already gone. I thank my mother for always believing in me and teaching me that humor and a positive outlook will help overcome difficult times.

I thank Pam Brossman for sharing her knowledge and giving me a loving push to finish this book and my editor, Jamie Brydone-Jack, for her support to make my words clear.

Thank you to all my clients for letting me be a part of your healing journey. Your bravery always impresses me. Thank you, reader, for picking up this book and having the courage to take new steps towards healing and gratefulness.

About Jacqueline Steudler



Growing up in Switzerland, Jacqueline Steudler always had a creative project going. After working for ten years in the school system as a teacher, she realized she needed a new direction for her compassion and empathy for others. She trained as an art therapist and opened her art therapy practice in 2000 near Zurich, Switzerland.

Jacqueline worked with children and adults in groups and in one-on-one sessions. With the help of School Psychology Services, she implemented a program for children with war trauma.

In 2003, she visited Nova Scotia and met her Canadian spouse. The long and winding road as an immigrant in a new country with a new culture has shaped her respect and understanding of others even more. She knows what it feels like to start over, build new connections, and reinvent her life in more ways than one.

Jacqueline has worked with Autism Nova Scotia and the Art Gallery of Nova Scotia. She has facilitated art-based community development projects through grants from the 4Cs Foundation in various communities and schools.

Other projects she has been involved with include Lunch and Learn sessions at the local hospital, the IWK Health Centre; workshops for recreation professionals; the Bayers Westwood Family Resource Centre; and the Northern Shared Chronic Pain Services. Jacqueline facilitated group art therapy for L'Arche residents in Halifax and members of the Epilepsy Association of the Maritimes.

Since 2014, she has helped women navigate through their unique healing process after the death of a loved one. She presented her program "Healing for Grieving Hearts" at the 2015 Canadian Art Therapy Association's annual conference and has published an article about her work in *Resilience, Recovery & Art Therapy*.

She finds calm and inspiration in her wild garden or on a walk in the woods. Jacqueline loves to read, and being creative in her studio fuels her soul.

*Take good care,
Jacqueline Steudler*

Testimonials

from the Healing For Grieving Hearts program

“I wish, I had done the program sooner!!! I really thought that I didn’t need help facing my pain, but I was really just very good at distracting myself.”

— S. from Colorado

“Jacqueline is a kind and loving soul and her programs come from the heart allowing her to help others through her own experience with loss.”

— J. from Nova Scotia

“Before I started the Healing for Grieving Hearts Program with Jacqueline, I was sure that I would not work in my business again. But now, that I am more at peace with J’s passing, I have decided to explore the possibilities again of how I can serve others with my gifts and skills. Thank you Jacqueline!”

— C.R. from Arkansas

“Jacqueline’s Healing for Grieving Hearts program was an oasis in my life at a time when I was grieving two losses: the loss of a beloved pet, and the loss of a significant relationship (through conflict, not death). Jacqueline’s caring presence and guidance, together with the exercises she created for me, formed a very safe space to voice and explore my difficult feelings. I loved how the exercises helped me get out of my head, and into the truth in my heart. Through the program I found peace and clarity, and a renewed sense of direction in my own life”.

— K. from Nova Scotia

It’s Your Time to Heal

Thank you!

I appreciate you and I'm happy to give back.
Please reach out to me if you have any questions
or would like to connect.

Take good care,
Jacqueline

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