

GOOD GRIEF

A Newsletter for the Missouri Palliative
& Hospice Care Bereavement Community

SUMMER 2023



Photo: Matthew Komatsu (<https://longreads.com/2019/03/11/after-the-tsunami/>)

A Phone Line to Heaven

– By Chaplain Scott Rash, MDiv, BCC

Itaru Sasaki needed a way to process his grief. So, he built an unconnected telephone booth on his property that overlooks Ōtsuchi, Iwate Prefecture in Japan. Here he made one-way phone calls to his cousin who died of cancer earlier that year, communicating his continued love and longing for the cousin and friend he missed dearly.

Little did he know the impact his phone booth would have on his community after the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami that killed over 15,000 people in the Tōhoku region, including over 1,200 people in Ōtsuchi, Sasaki's hometown. Recognizing people's need to acknowledge the continued relationship they felt with the loved ones they lost so suddenly, Sasaki opened his wind phone to the public. Since then, over 30,000 people have visited the wind phone as a way to put words to their grief and retain a connection with those they have lost.

Psychologist Dennis Klass and others have explored what is known as continuing bonds theory, the idea that grievors must learn to hold on to their deceased loved one before they can engage in efforts to let go. The relationship doesn't end simply because the person has died. Rather, healthy grieving finds ways to honor this relationship, enabling the griever to continue the bond while moving forward in a life without the physical presence of the deceased.

Itaru Sasaki was giving expression to the continuing bond he felt with his deceased cousin without knowing the intricacies of the clinical theory developed by Klass and others. Other wind phones have been erected around the world further affirming Sasaki's initial idea. At least one wind phone exists in the Kansas City area at Lake Olathe in Kansas.

You and I work against ourselves and our grief when we try to move on and let go of a person, a relationship, with whom our heart invites us to remain bonded. Letter writing, journaling, photo albums, and talk therapy are ways to honor and strengthen the continue the bond with the deceased.

To learn more about the role of continuing bonds in the process of grief, reach out to one of Missouri Palliative & Hospice Care's trained and compassionate grief counselors. ■

WELCOME

OUR BEREAVEMENT STAFF

Ron Bortorff, LCSW | Counseling
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WANT MORE INFORMATION?

Call the
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or visit online at

www.missouri-hc.com

Good Grief is published quarterly to provide information about Missouri Palliative & Hospice Care's Bereavement Program and to provide support through the grieving process.

MPHC grief counselors are available for support through phone calls, personal home visits, and individual counseling.



Letters to Lost Loved Ones

– By Megan Nelson, LMSW

As the weather gets warmer many of us look forward to the long days of summer and the joy that this time of year holds. Weddings, graduations, summer vacations—they are all things to look forward to, but they can also be events that remind us of our lost loved ones. Grief can sit heavy in our hearts as a voice whispering “I wish they were here to see this.”

For many, letter writing can be an effective tool in managing grief. A letter to a lost loved one can include anything, including upcoming events or activities you’re looking forward to, even emotions surrounding your loss, including regrets or things that had been left unsaid.

There is no right way to write these letters, and according to **The Center for Growth**, the purpose of these letters is to help release some of the emotions surrounding your grief.

It can take several letters before you become comfortable with the process, but Lene Holm Larsen in their article **Letter Writing as a Clinical Tool in Grief Psychotherapy**¹ (2022) states letter writing can “help facilitate self-disclosure, promote exposure to what is avoided, confront unfinished business, and encourage continuing bonds.” It’s also okay to seek guidance from a trained grief counselor if you need direction with your letter writing, or if you need someone to help you understand the emotions surrounding your loss.

While the loss of a loved one can be devastating, the meaning of that connection does not have to disappear. Letter writing can help you help maintain that connection in a therapeutic way, keeping their love and impact alive in your heart. ■

1– *Letter Writing as a Clinical Tool in Grief Psychotherapy*, OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying, published online February 13, 2022.



photo: aaron-burden—unsplash

Our Bonds With The Living

By Chaplain Dean Fitzsimmons, MA



I would like to address a fairly recent phenomenon in part triggered by COVID. When a family member is providing care for a loved one in their home (and occasionally in a facility), the care requires the patient and family to withdraw from their spiritual community and connections. From one who views the spiritual as critical for the wholeness of both patient and caregiver, it seems to me that this distancing can produce a spiritual lethargy that can live on after the death of their loved one. Even COVID has caused once-faithful church attenders to withdraw to their homes to watch a live-streamed church service—not wrong in itself, but it doesn’t replace vital spiritual community.

I believe community is important in every aspect of our lives, particularly regarding our spiritual health. Reconnect with your church community. Reestablish the spiritual disciplines you once practiced. If you are alone, I particularly want to encourage you to begin—or begin again—attending a church where the Word of God is proclaimed, and spiritual growth through community is valued and practiced. I have seen this (re)engagement with others renew a person’s sense of purpose and transform their lives as they allow a faith community to produce new connections and relationships never anticipated nor thought possible. *Carpe diem!* ■

RECOMMENDED READING:

Understanding Your Grief: Ten Essential Touchstones for Finding Hope and Healing Your Heart (Second Edition)

– Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D. | Companion Pres (2021)

Understanding Your Grief helps you understand and befriend your painful, complex thoughts and feelings after the death of someone loved. Befriending grief may sound counterintuitive, but your grief is your love for the person who died, and like that love, it’s also natural and necessary. Perhaps above all, *Understanding Your Grief* is practical. It’s built on Dr. Wolfelt’s Ten Touchstones—basic principles to learn and actions to take to help yourself engage with your grief and create momentum toward healing. ■

From: www.amazon.com/Understanding-Your-Grief-Essential-Touchstones/

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