

UCF Forum

8-5-2015

We All Grieve in Different Ways on Different Days

Traci Evison
University of Central Florida

 Part of the [Communication Commons](#), and the [Family, Life Course, and Society Commons](#)

Find similar works at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/ucf-forum>

Information presented on this website is considered public information (unless otherwise noted) and may be distributed or copied. Use of appropriate byline/photo/image credit is requested. We recommend that UCF data be acquired directly from a UCF server and not through other sources that may change the data in some way. While UCF makes every effort to provide accurate and complete information, various data such as names, telephone numbers, etc. may change prior to updating.

STARS Citation

Evison, Traci (2015). We all grieve in different ways on different days. UCF Today, 2015-08-05. Retrieved from <https://today.ucf.edu/we-all-grieve-in-different-ways-on-different-days/>

This Opinion column is brought to you for free and open access by STARS. It has been accepted for inclusion in UCF Forum by an authorized administrator of STARS. For more information, please contact STARS@ucf.edu.



We All Grieve in Different Ways on Different Days

By Traci Evison
UCF Forum columnist
Wednesday, August 5, 2015

Over the course of the past 2¹/₂ years I found myself in a position I never dreamed possible: Three of my immediate family members died.

Although not all of their deaths were the same, each one was painful to me and deeply felt in its own way.

Nothing about the human condition prepares you for the death of someone you love, no matter the circumstances. Even if you lost a pet, had friendships end, lost a job or even experienced failed romantic relationships, there is no comparison because there is a finality and totality about death that cannot be undone. I believe the human mind is just simply not made to grasp the concept of death ahead of time. Even in cases when you actually know it is coming.

I have learned through my grief journey that those of us who remain living after the loss of a loved one have a rough road ahead of us. But with time and hope, please know that things will get better.

My grief and trauma experience began with my sister's death in March 2013. She was one of the people I loved most in this world, and she died of suicide. I was also an unplanned witness to her death. I went over to her house that day to check on her because she hadn't been to work in several days, and I knew she was going through a tough time.

She ultimately took her own life with a handgun about five feet in front of me. I remember hearing someone screaming before police and paramedics arrived. I know now that the person screaming was me, and I was the one who dialed 911.

Just nine months later my father died in January 2014. With Alzheimer's disease already advancing and his body breaking down from age, he was still there for me as much as he could be in the months following my sister's death. The distance between Orlando and Kansas separated us, but he called me almost every day for months until he became too sick and had to be hospitalized.

It didn't matter to me that he told the same stories over and over, or that the sequence of events didn't always match up. We were supporting each other through our grief. He loved me, but he was fading. Conversations would last an hour or more at a time. Although I saw his death coming, it did not make it any easier.

My grandmother died most recently in June at the age of 99. Despite her Alzheimer's and other physical complications, I can only hope to inherit some of her genetics and tenacity. Although her death has been difficult the past few weeks, I have felt some sense of peace amidst the sadness.

I do wonder if I am beginning to get the hang of this thing called grief.

There were many days when I found myself experiencing emotions completely opposite of other family members, so it made it extremely difficult to be there for one another. My conclusion is that we all grieve in different ways on different days, and there really is no right or wrong way to grieve.

This is why I believe it is so important to have a support system outside of immediate family to help shoulder the burden during the grief process. If you do not have such a support system going into a loss, developing one in its aftermath may just save your own mental wellbeing. I know it did for me. I am thankful for the helpers that appeared along the way at just the right times. And I want to let them know with a smile, that I am OK.

While I cannot say one thing in particular was the best or helped the most, I can say that many things combined during the last couple years saw me through my grief and trauma journey. I also have many family, friends and coworkers who genuinely care about me. Following is my list of the basic behaviors that got me through.

- Keep moving. Your muscles and joints will begin to ache and stiffen if you do not get out of bed or off the couch.

- Seek counseling or support groups. UCF has a wonderful Victims Services unit and an Employee Assistance Program to locate grief and trauma counselors. I called both of them, and so did family members. I also went to two different support groups.
- Pets. If you do not have one, get one. My two cats have been through everything with me. Pets require you to take care of them, even on the hardest days when you think you can't even take care of yourself. The comfort and affection you receive from a pet is invaluable during the grief journey.
- Children. If you are not a parent, seek opportunities to be around kids. Children offer a genuine, positive outlook on the world and they communicate without bias. I spend time with a friend who coaches kids' basketball and I recently began teaching Sunday school.
- Feel. Allow yourself time to feel your emotions. Several friends have accompanied me to "egg" events, first suggested by a counselor. These events consist of us throwing perfectly good eggs – hard – at a variety of targets. It is more than satisfying to hear the splat of an egg breaking amidst yelling, crying, laughing, whatever works for you in the moment.
- Socialize. This likely is the complete opposite of what you want to do, but give yourself some time, and then begin socializing. I started by joining a few committees at work, attending church services and a community book group within the last year. Next up, skydiving perhaps?
- Hope. You have to remember that there is always hope and things will get better. It may not happen overnight, but I can say with certainty that it will happen.

My outlook on life has shifted – for the better – as a result of what I've been through. I won't forget the past, but I don't have to stay there.

Instead, I can simply look forward to living, laughing with friends, watching cardinals and blue jays swoop in for birdseed in my backyard on warm summer days, and singing my favorite songs at the top of my lungs.

Traci Evison is a benefits coordinator in UCF Human Resources. She can be reached at traci.evison@ucf.edu.