



Writing Through Grief: Telling Stories to Cope with the Loss of a Loved One

by Jackie Powers

When someone loses a loved one, he or she experiences a range of emotions. Grief is often one of the most prominent feelings, and the grieving process is never easy. To help those who have lost a loved one, Beacon Hospice in Hyannis has developed a support group entitled **Mending Our Hearts, Writing Through Grief**.

Writing is an accessible art form that can empower everyone. It is free and can be done anywhere, anytime, alone, or with others. One does not have to know how to spell to write.

The goal of Beacon Hospice's support group is to create a safe and supportive environment in which to write one's stories, feelings and memories. Members gain confidence in this healing tool and integrate it into their grief work.

Writing connects members with themselves. Through the writing process, they can access their innermost thoughts, fears, hopes and dreams. Writing and sharing their story with others externalizes the feelings, so that members understand they are not alone and their grief experience is normalized.

Taking this journey with others is a healing process. In Chia Martin's book, **Writing Your Way Through Cancer**, she explains, "Writing is a tool for integrating physical, emotional and spiritual healing." Writing in a group that is supportive and safe can be affirming and encouraging.

There are guidelines in the writing groups, one of which is confidentiality. All that is read in the group belongs to the author. As listeners, members do not take ownership of another's story. Members are also discouraged from giving advice or criticizing, but they can comment on what they remember, or how it relates to their own experience. All are invited to read what they have written, but it is a choice.

Stories in the group are all honored. Some are stories of joy and memory. Others are stories of pain and loneliness. Some are stories of lost dreams. And some are stories of new dreams and of hope. All stories are welcome and all help members in their healing process.

Listening is also an important part of the healing process. It helps take oneself out of one's own thinking and allows one to recognize the similarities in the grieving process that each member shares.

Members often say that they thought they were "going crazy" until they heard other members expressing similar thoughts and ideas in their stories. The group becomes a safe community to tell stories of sadness and pain in a society that avoids these uncomfortable emotions.

In the group, members learn that they can continue a relationship with their loved ones who have died, using letter writing, creating memorial rituals, and bringing in pictures to support their stories. One member began writing on a daily basis to her spouse who had died. Usually, she wrote just a paragraph a day in her journal, telling her husband about her day, while she sipped their favorite variety of tea.

One member wrote about her fear of driving long distances. This was the role her deceased spouse always played. After she wrote that story and shared it with the group, she began to plan what she needed to do to take care of this fear. She planned a trip just two hours away from her home. She booked a hotel with all the amenities so she had a destination. She mapped it out and set out on her journey. The next week when the group met, she wrote about the journey and her success. As the group supported her, they were encouraged to challenge their fears and recognize new possibilities in their own lives.

Writing through grief in a group can help members realize that everyone experiences loss in their lives. Those who have lost a close relationship, a friendship, a job, a beloved pet, a home, or a limiting aspect of their health have felt grief.

As members tell stories, they feel connected instead of isolated and alone. Their grief is normalized and they begin to recognize they have the power to write new chapters of their lives. Through writing

and sharing, members find they can be survivors instead of victims of their grief.



Summer House III, by Suzanne M. Packer

For more information about
Mending Our Hearts, Writing Through Grief:
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Beacon Hospice, Inc.

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