



FAITH & HOPE HOSPICE & PALLIATIVE CARE

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Epilogue

Bereavement Newsletter

May/June 2020

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Needs of Grieving Veterans

Sarah Girling, MSW

Veterans are a very special group of people in our country. These brave men and women have put their lives on the line for their nation and have fought to keep freedom and independence a privilege throughout our day-to-day lives. At end of life, there are different issues that veterans face in terms of grief that is different than the average person for various reasons.

Unresolved grief is very common among veterans due to their time in the military and possibly, combat. Veterans usually have a history of being involved in various traumatic situations that comes from being in a war. Not everyone will have the same response but trauma is something that has lasting effects, even at end of life. *(continued on p. 4)*

Book Recommendation

Peace at Last: Stories of Hope and Healing for Veterans and Their Families

by Deborah Grassman

Grassman's 25 years of experience working with veterans provides a strong foundation for this book that explores the impacts of combat, military culture, stoicism, trauma, and "warrior's wisdom." These can have profound effects on life, death, and grief. These strengths and burdens go on to affect the veteran's families and society. Grassman uses true stories from the veterans that she has served as well as her own candid insights and personal journey as the foundation of this book. The content is applicable to veterans, their families, caregivers, and non-veterans. The book concludes with a list of resources that can help with healing.

Endorsed by Donald Schumacher, Psy.D., former President and CEO of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, Thomas Edes, M.D., Director of Home and Community-Based Care, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, the book earned 4.7 and provides a better understanding and appreciation for veterans and their families, even of themselves.

Published 2009; ISBN: 0918339723

A Note From Your Bereavement Services Coordinator

The past few months have been dominated by COVID-19, social distancing, and facemasks. The number of new cases and deaths continue to rise. This disease has cut across all segments of society. As I write, one of my co-workers is hospitalized due to COVID-19. It's likely that you or someone you care about is also directly affected by the COVID-19 as well.

This edition of *Epilogue* was slated to focus on veterans and their families in honor of Memorial Day. We are proud of the service and sacrifices made by veterans, their families, especially those soldiers who gave the ultimate sacrifice. Faith & Hope Hospice recognizes the unique needs of veterans, which is why we've obtained Level 1 We Honor Veterans certification. We are dedicated to providing the highest level of care to veterans and their families through hospice care and into bereavement.

We could not ignore the pandemic though. It's having too much affect on the world. We do have several articles on veterans in this issue and several topics, like complicated grief, that apply to veterans and COVID-19.

Know that throughout this period of crisis, the Faith & Hope Hospice team is here for you. I'm happy to talk with you or just listen if that's what you need. Our Spiritual Coordinators are also available for a prayer or spiritual insight during this crisis.

With deepest sincerity,



Reid Jacobs, APHSW-C, MSW, CT
Bereavement Services Coordinator



“Honor to the soldier and sailor everywhere, who bravely bears his country’s cause. Honor, also, to the citizen who cares for his brother in the field and serves, as he best can, the same cause.” - Abraham Lincoln

Grieving During a Pandemic

Grieving a death is difficult at the best of times. COVID-19 only adds to that. Here are a few resources that address coping with the challenges of the current pandemic.

- COVID-19 and the Grief Process by Psychology Today
<https://bit.ly/2jxehg6>
- Taking Care of Your Mental Health During Coronavirus
<https://whatsyourgrief.com/mental-health-and-coronavirus>
- 7 Tips for Reducing Feelings of Isolation
<https://modernloss.com/7-tips-for-reducing-feelings-of-isolation>
- How To Support Someone Grieving When You Can't Be With Them
<https://whatsyourgrief.com/how-to-support-someone-grieving-when-you-cant-be-with-them/>

Grief Explored: Complicated Grief

Grief comes in many forms; there's no timeline for grief and no right way to grieve. These are the messages that I try to communicate to all of my clients. Grief is not an illness and feeling profound loss, sadness, and crying spells are not a sign of weakness. Neither is the sense of conflicting, complicated feelings. Grief is complicated. So, does that mean all grief is complicated? Not exactly.

The term *Complicated Grief* is being considered as new diagnosis by the American Psychological Association, the group that decides what is and is not a mental illness. Choosing to define some types of grief experiences as a mental illness is contentious for bereavement and mental health professionals. This is because, like I stated above, grief is complex, often messy and has no timeline. We don't want the misconception that grief is a pathology to take root.

However, there are some people whose grief goes beyond what might otherwise be expected. For a small group of mourners, between 5%-10%, their grief becomes so severe, so profound and unrelenting, that it crosses over to become a recognizable mental condition. There are no agreed upon criteria for a diagnosis of complicated grief. There are a few clear indicators, including:

- Unescapable yearning
- Frequent thoughts/images of the deceased
- Overwhelming feeling that life is meaningless

These three are the major signs, but a person with complicated grief may also experience emotional numbness, bitterness over the loss, avoiding the reality of loss, and difficulty moving on with life. Most of these are very similar to "regular" grief. The main difference is time. No, there is no timeline for grief, but the intensity of grief tends to decrease within 6-12 months for most people. This doesn't mean they are done grieving within a year, rather they are able to reengage with life, return to their normal activities, and effectively function in

life as feelings of grief subside and no longer occupy their thoughts.

Generally, this occurs within 6-12 months after a death. If the intensity remains or life continues to feel meaningless, it may indicate complicated grief. The 6-12 month timeframe is squishy and not agreed upon. Because complicated grief lasts beyond this timeframe it is sometimes referred to as *Prolonged Grief Disorder*.

Some types of deaths or relationships put someone at a higher risk of complicated or prolonged grief. These include:

- Death of a child or romantic partner
- Sudden/violent deaths (such as suicide, military casualty, or COVID-19)
- Deaths that occur in a hospital's ICU
- Close, dependent relationship with the deceased
- Weak support systems
- Previous diagnosis of depression, anxiety or PTSD
- Other major stressors

What to do?

First, know that you are not alone. Even though complicated grief is rare, 10% of all grieving people is a lot of people. You are not deficient or weak.

Second, if your grief is severe, ask for help. This may come from a friend, a spiritual leader, counselor or bereavement coordinator. You don't have to know if your grief is complicated to get help. And you don't have to wait 6-12 months to ask for help either. Getting support earlier in the grief process can reduce the risk of developing complicated grief.

~

As always, know that the team at Faith & Hope Hospice is here for you.

If you want to talk to someone about your grief, or if you suspect that you or a loved one has complicated grief, please call us at 818-559-1460.

Veterans are one of the populations that have a difficult time with talking about their traumatic experiences from combat. Whether it is from not being able to talk about their experiences with anyone other than those in the military or bottling up heavy emotions to be strong, it might make caring for a veteran difficult. Veterans have a history of not receiving the proper mental health treatment during war or after returning home. Hence, the reason why many have not been able to grieve properly for their fallen comrades because they never learned how. Military members rely on their stoicism to help them cope with combat and that frame of mind blends over into receiving medical care. They do this by not letting their caretakers or care team know when they are in pain, refusing certain treatments, or refusing pain-relieving opioids that could trigger PTSD symptoms.

PTSD is a common phenomenon in this community. Signs of PTSD in terminally ill patients include, flashbacks, nightmares, being easily startled, feeling a loss of control, & existential crisis. Being aware of these signs could help caring for your loved one that is a veteran easier to manage. Veterans tend to have feelings of guilt that is amplified by their end of life diagnosis. Caring for someone that is carrying not only physical pain because of their terminal diagnosis

but also emotional pain may even cause physical distress. As a caregiver, you can help by letting them know that you are there to listen to anything that they would like to get off their chest, without judgment. Respecting the veteran's wishes to refuse medication and to not be open about their trauma can be a difficult concept to accept. Being mindful of their wishes and giving them space to process their situation while also letting them know that you will be there for when and if they are ready could go a long way. It helps to create a relationship of equality and trust that many veterans might not have received from their time in the military or after transitioning back to civilian life.

Veterans are among the strongest people that we will ever come across from their bravery to their willingness to sacrifice a part of themselves for their loved ones. Honoring that sacrifice by giving back to your veteran through compassionate care during their end of life journey is a truly rewarding experience. The end of life journey is never simple but by knowing the signs of what to look for and how to help your veteran cope will truly make a difference.

Bereavement Services Available

Despite COVID-19, we continue to provide our full range bereavement services, although all in-person support has moved to an online format. In addition to this bereavement newsletter & our periodic mailings, Faith & Hope Hospice also provides:

- Resources via email
- Phone-based support
- Resources
- Referrals
- Annual Patient Memorial
- Web-based counseling for individuals and families

Contact Reid at **818-559-1460** to request these services.

To all those who have served,
we are truly grateful.

For those whose lives were sac-
rificed for our freedom,

We remember you.

Keeping America the land of
the free and the home of the
brave.

We honor you.



Before Marching and After

By Thomas Hardy

(in Memoriam F. W. G.)

Orion swung southward aslant
Where the starved Egdon pine-trees had thinned,
The Pleiads aloft seemed to pant
With the heather that twitched in the wind;

But he looked on indifferent to sights such as these,
Unswayed by love, friendship, home joy or home sorrow,
And wondered to what he would march on the morrow.

The crazed household-clock with its whirr
Rang midnight within as he stood,
He heard the low sighing of her
Who had striven from his birth for his good;
But he still only asked the spring starlight, the breeze,
What great thing or small thing his history would borrow
From that Game with Death he would play on the morrow.

When the heath wore the robe of late summer,
And the fuchsia-bells, hot in the sun,
Hung red by the door, a quick comer
Brought tidings that marching was done
For him who had joined in that game overseas
Where Death stood to win, though his name was to borrow
A brightness therefrom not to fade on the morrow.

It's taken the world by storm in the worst way possible. It dominates the news. It's impacted everyday life for literally billions of people around the world. And it's most likely affecting the way we grieve.

Already, people automatically assume that any death is from COVID-19. This can lead them to a dismissive attitude when a death is from any other cause. "At least it wasn't COVID," you might hear people say. This dismissive attitude and minimizing of grief are a form of disenfranchised grief. This is a type of grief that is generally not recognized or is minimized, for example the death of an ex-spouse or death of a pet. (Learn more about Disenfranchised Grief in our July/Aug 2019 edition of Epilogue at www.faithandhopehospice.com/epilogue) Some people may feel guilty for grieving when so many others are being affected by COVID-19. Your grief, no matter the cause, is real and valid. The death of someone in your life, no matter the cause, is profound.

The nature of COVID-19 is having a dramatic effect on grief and bereavement that will be felt for years to come. It's also increasing the risk for complicated grief for everyone experiencing a death at this time. (See our article "Grief Explored" on page 3 for more on complicated grief.) COVID-19 can trigger complicated grief in a number of ways:

- Guilt of not being present in the final days due to lockdowns at skilled nursing and assisted living facilities, or travel restrictions
- Stunted bereavement rituals, such as attending funerals, as many mortuaries are strictly reducing the number of attendees
- Sudden, unexpected death from COVID-19

- Increased stress from financial loss due to an inability to work
- Inability to physically comfort loved ones due to social distancing
- Prevention of cultural or religious death traditions, such as sitting Shiva or ritual bathing of a body by the surviving family members

It's also likely that existing support for mourners will be taxed or pushed to their limit due to the sudden rise in the death rate.

Please know that leaders in the community and professionals in the field of grief and bereavement are actively seeking ways to address these new issues – from finding new ways to continue death rituals (like Skype for funeral services), looking back to lessons from previous crisis (like the AIDS epidemic) and increasing the preparedness for those supporting the bereaved.

The bereavement team at Faith & Hope Hospice is taking active measures to prepare as well. We are attending trainings on how to best provide care during and after the crisis. We are collaborating with other hospices and bereavement professionals across the country. We're also staying abreast of the rapid, daily changes. Our efforts and services will continue to evolve to meet the needs of our clients and our community.

This is a challenging time, but team at Faith and Hope Hospice & Palliative Care is here for you. We remain committed to supporting you through your grief, no matter the cause.

COVID-19 poses a unique set of challenges for children, and their families may struggle to support them. To learn more on supporting grieving children during this pandemic I spoke to children's grief specialist, Karrie Filios, MA, MFT, LPC. She shared that adult's own anxiety and grief response affect a child's coping.

According to Filios, "helping the parent or adult caregiver cope helps the child cope." That's because children pick up the energy of the adults around them. They look to the adults in their life for how to respond and cope. Seeing a calm adult helps the child remain calm too. There's also the requirement for self-care. An adult cannot support someone else if their basic needs are not being met.

Peer support groups are helpful for children and adults. During the time of social distancing, most support groups have gone on hiatus or moved to an online format. These web-based alternatives remain helpful for adults, but not so much for kids. As Filios states,

"Kids work by playing. They don't do process work like an adult utilizing talk therapy, as they often have a language to express what they are experiencing, expressive arts and play therapy are much more effective." It's also important for kids to have the opportunity to expel their energy. 15-30 minutes of physical activity, like jumping jacks, dancing, tag and other playful exercises

This is all a learning process, and I encourage you to try. You don't have to be perfect or have all the answers. It's your willingness to try that matters. To reframe Maya Angelou, children may not remember exactly what you said, but how you made them feel. Your efforts and genuine attempts to support your children will remain with them for a lifetime.

To read the full interview with Ms. Filios, including ideas for constructive play and expressive arts, visit our blog at: faithandhopehospice.com/blog

Movie Recommendation

Top Gun

(1986) PG | 1h 50min

Action, Drama

Starring: Tom Cruise, Kelly McGillis, and Val Kilmer

This 1986 classic depicts life as a member of the highest tier of fighter pilot in the US Air Force. We follow Maverick (Tom Cruise) as he joins and forms his identity as a Top Gun. Through his experience, we get an understanding of military culture and how this can clash

with civilian life. We see the sheer joy of a soldier in his element and the profound impact of grief caused by a non-combat casualty.

Top Gun depicts life on a military base, the machismo and competition of its residents, as well as the strong, plutonic bond between peers. While this is clearly Hollywood's take on the subject, Top Gun still provides insight into military culture and grief. It's also immensely entertaining.



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Faith & Hope Hospice and Palliative Care seeks to be the premier provider of hospice, palliative, and bereavement care in Los Angeles County and the surrounding areas.

Our goal is to improve the quality of life for people facing life-limiting and terminal illness, the people important to them, and our community at large by utilizing an interdisciplinary, holistic approach.



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