

HSCD

Grief-Companion

Handbook

JoAnn Soccato: “Companioning the sacred journey is about recognizing the sacredness of and uniqueness of each moment. It is about cultivating attention to each moment, creating intention, learning how to show up fully for our lives”



Hospice Society
OF CAMROSE AND DISTRICT

Wolfelt: The Tenets of Companionship the Bereaved

1. Companionship is about **being present to another person's pain**; it is not about taking away the pain.
2. Companionship is about **going to the wilderness of the soul** with another human being; it is not about thinking you are responsible for finding the way out.
3. Companionship is about **honoring the spirit**; it is not about focusing on the intellect.
4. Companionship is about **listening with the heart**; it is not about analyzing with the head.
5. Companionship is about **bearing witness to the struggles of others**; it is not about judging or directing these struggles.
6. Companionship is about **walking alongside**; it is not about leading or being led.
7. Companionship means **discovering the gifts of sacred silence**; it does not mean filling up every moment with words.
8. Companionship the bereaved is about **being still**; it is not about frantic movement forward.
9. Companionship is about **respecting disorder and confusion**; it is not about imposing order and logic.
10. Companionship is about **learning from others**; it is not about teaching them.
11. Companionship is about **curiosity**; it is not about expertise.

Wolfelt: My Principles of “Companioning” the Bereaved

Outlined below are twenty principles that undergird my work with bereaved persons and families. My hope is that you will challenge yourself to write out whatever supports you in your own work with the bereaved.

For the Companion Counselor...

1 Bereavement, grief, and mourning are normal experiences; however, they are often traumatic and transformative.

2 The helping process is understood as a collaborative, companioning process between people. The traditional medical model of mental health care is understood to be inadequate, and a complicater to mobilizing the resources of the bereaved person. As a companion, i try to create conditions that engage people actively in the reconciliation needs of mourning.

3 True expertise in grief lies with (and only with) the unique person who is grieving. Only he can be the expert of his grief. The companion is there to learn from the griever and to bear witness to and normalize his grief journey.

4 The foundation upon which helping the bereaved person takes place is in the context of an encouraging, hope-filled relationship between the counselor and the bereaved person. The widely acknowledged core conditions of helping (empathy, warmth and caring, genuineness, respect) are accepted as essential ingredients in working with bereaved people and families.

5 Traditional mental health diagnostic categories are held as limitations in the helping process. The concept of “gardening” as opposed to “assessing” better describes efforts to understand the meaning of the death in the bereaved person’s life. I strive to understand not only the bereaved person’s potential complications of the grief journey, but also individual strengths and levels of wellness.

6 The counseling model is holistic in nature and views bereaved people as physical, emotional, cognitive, social and spiritual beings. Each person is unique, and seeks not just to “be,” but to become.

7 The undergirding theoretical model is systems-oriented and sees the bereaved person as being impacted by interdependent relationships with persons, groups, institutions and society.

8 The focus of companioning the bereaved person is balanced between the past, the present and the future. Learning about past life experiences (particularly family of origin influences), and the nature of the relationship between the bereaved person and the person who died helps me understand the meaning of the death and the grief and mourning process for this unique person.

9 A bereaved person's perception of her reality is her reality. A “here and now” understanding of that reality allows me to be with her where she is instead of trying to push her somewhere she is not. I will be a more effective helper if i remember to enter into a person's feelings without having a need to change her feelings.

10 A major helping goal is to provide a "safe place" for the bereaved person to do the "work of mourning," resulting in healing and growth. A bereaved person does not have an illness i need to cure. I'm a caregiver, not a cure-giver!

11 People are viewed from a multicultural perspective. What is considered "normal" in one culture may be perceived as "abnormal" in another culture. On a shrinking planet, my caring and concern must be global in its perspective.

12 Spiritual and religious concerns and needs are understood as central to the reconciliation process. To be an effective counselor, i must be tuned into helping people grow in depth and vitality in their spiritual and religious lives as they search for meaning and purpose in their continued living.

13 Men and woman are seen in androgynous ways that encourage understanding beyond traditional sex role stereotypes. Artful companions understand that bonded relationships can exist beyond the bounds of traditional male-female partnerships acknowledged only by marriage.

14 The overall goal of helping the bereaved is reconciliation, not resolution. As companion, i have a responsibility to help the bereaved person not return to an "old normal," but to discover how the death changes them in many different ways. Traditional mental health models that teach resolution as the helping goal are considered as self-limiting and potentially destructive to the bereaved person.

15 Right-brain methods of healing and growth (intuitive, metaphoric) are held as valuable and are integrated with left-brain methods (intentional, problem solving approaches). This synergy encourages a more growth-filled approach to bereavement caregiving than do historical mental health models (primarily based on left-brain methods) of caregiving.

16 "Complicated" mourning is perceived as blocked growth. The "complicated mourner" probably simply needs help in understanding the central needs of mourning and how to embrace them in ways that help him heal. Most people are where they are in their grief journeys for one of two major reasons: 1) that is where they need to be at this point in their journey; or, 2) they need, yet lack, an understanding, safe place for mourning and a person who can help facilitate their work of mourning in more growth-producing, hope-filled ways.

17 Helping avenues must be adapted to the unique needs of the bereaved person. Some people are responsive to group work, some to individual work, and some to family systems work. Many people are best served, in fact, by seeking support from lay companions who have walked before them in the grief journey.

18 There is a commitment to using educational, primary prevention efforts to impact societal change because we live in a "mourning-avoidant" culture. I have a responsibility to inform other people throughout the world of the need to create safe places for people to mourn in healthy ways.

19 There is a responsibility to create conditions for healing to take place in the bereaved person. The ultimate responsibility for eventual healing lies within the person. I must remember to be responsible to bereaved people, not responsible for them.

20 Excellent self-care is essential, for it provides the physical, spiritual, emotional, social and cognitive renewal necessary for the counselor to be an effective, ongoing companion in grief.

Wolfelt: Criteria for Reconciliation

- A recognition of the reality and finality of the death (in both the head and heart).
- A return to stable eating and sleeping patterns that were present prior to the death.
- A renewed sense of energy and personal well-being.
- A subjective sense of release or relief from the person who has died (they have thought of the person, but are not preoccupied with these thoughts).
- The capacity to enjoy experiences in life that should normally be enjoyable.
- The establishment of new and healthy relationships.
- The capacity to live a full life without feelings of guilt or lack of self-respect.
- The capacity to organize and plan one's life toward the future.
- The capacity to become comfortable with the way things are rather than attempting to make things as they were.
- The capacity to being open to more change in one's life.
- The awareness that one has allowed oneself to fully mourn and has survived.
- The awareness that one does not "get over grief," but instead is able to acknowledge, "This is my new reality and I am ultimately the one who must work to create new meaning and purpose in my life."
- The capacity to acknowledge new parts of one's self that have been discovered in the growth through one's grief.
- The capacity to adjust to the new role changes that have resulted from the loss of the relationship.
- The capacity to be compassionate with oneself when normal resurgences of intense grief occur (holidays, anniversaries, special occasions).
- The capacity to acknowledge that the pain of loss is an inherent part of life that results from the ability to give and receive Love.

WARNING: these criteria are intended to help you explore the mourner's Divine Momentum toward reconciliation. Not every person will illustrate each of these criteria; however, the majority of the criteria should be present for the person to be considered beyond "ENCOUNTER" with the new reality. Many bereaved persons will attempt to convince themselves and others that they are further along in the healing process than they really are. As a companion, you can support the mourner on the path to healing by remembering the mantra: "No reward for speed; Divine Momentum; not attached to outcome."

Wolfelt: Misconceptions About Grief

"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I —
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference."
Robert Frost

As you journey through the wilderness of your grief, if you mourn openly and authentically, you will come to find a path that feels right for you, that is your path to healing. But beware—others will try to pull you off this path. They will try to make you believe that the path you have chosen is wrong—even mad, and that their way is better.

The reason that people try to pull you off the path to healing is that they have internalized some common misconceptions about grief and mourning. And the misconceptions, in essence, deny you your right to hurt and authentically express your grief. They often cause unrealistic expectations about the grief experience.

As you read about this important touchstone, you may discover that you yourself have believed in some of the misconceptions and that some may be embraced by people around you. Don't condemn yourself or others for believing in these misconceptions. Simply make use of any new insights you might gain to help you open your heart to your work of mourning in ways that restore the soul.

Misconception 1:

Grief and mourning are the same thing.

Perhaps you have noticed that people tend to use the words "grieving" and "mourning" interchangeably. There is an important distinction, however. We as humans move toward integrating loss into our lives not just by grieving, but by mourning. You will move toward "reconciliation" not just by grieving, but through active and deliberate mourning.

Grief is the constellation of internal thoughts and feelings we have when someone we love dies. Think of grief as the container. It holds all your thoughts, feelings and images of your experience when you are bereaved. In other words, grief is the internal meaning given to the experience of loss.

Mourning is when you take the grief you have on the inside and express it outside of yourself. Another way of defining mourning is "grief gone public" or "the outward expression of grief." Talking about the person who died, crying, expressing your thoughts and feelings through art or music and celebrating special anniversary dates that held meaning for the person who died are just a few examples of mourning.

It is essential to openly and honestly mourn your life losses, expressing your grief outside of yourself. Over time and with the support of others, to mourn is to heal.

WARNING: After someone you love dies, your friends may encourage you to "keep your grief to yourself." If you were to take this message to heart, the disastrous result would be that all your thoughts and feelings would stay neatly bottled up inside you. A catalyst for healing, however, can only be created when you develop the courage to mourn publicly, in the presence of understanding, compassionate people who will not judge you. At times, of course, you will grieve alone, but expressing your grief outside of yourself is necessary if you are to slowly and gently move forward in your grief journey.

I think it's so interesting that many native cultures actually created vessels—usually baskets, pots, or bowls—that symbolically contained their grief. They would put these vessels away for periods of time, only to bring them out on a regular basis to help themselves mourn.

Another way to think about what these cultures were instinctively doing was dosing themselves with their grief. I often teach that grief must be embraced little by little, in small bits with breaks in between. This dosing helps you survive what would, if absorbed in its totality all at once, probably kill you.

When you don't honor a death loss by acknowledging it, first to yourself and then to those around you, the grief will accumulate. Then, the denied losses come flowing out in all sorts of potential ways (e.g., deep depression, physical complaints, difficulty in relationships, addictive behaviors), compounding the pain of your loss.

Misconception 2:

Grief and mourning progress in predictable, orderly stages.

Probably you have already heard about the "stages of grief." This type of thinking about dying, grief and mourning is appealing, but inaccurate. The notion of stages helps people make sense of death, an experience that is usually not orderly or predictable. If we believe that everyone grieves by going through the same stages, then death and grief become much less mysterious and fearsome. If only it were so simple!

The concept of "stages" was popularized in 1969 with the publication of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's landmark text, *On Death and Dying*. In this important book, Dr. Kubler-Ross lists the five stages of grief that she saw terminally ill patients experience in the face of their own impending death: denial; anger; bargaining; depression; and acceptance. However, Kubler-Ross never intended for her stages to be interpreted as a rigid, linear sequence to be followed by all mourners. Readers, however, have done just that, and the consequences have often been disastrous.

As a grieving person, you will probably encounter others who have adopted a rigid system of beliefs about what you should experience in your grief journey. And if you have internalized this myth, you may also find yourself trying to prescribe your grief experience as well. Instead of allowing yourself to be where you are, you may try to force yourself to be in another "stage."

For example, the responses of disorganization, fear, guilt and explosive emotions may or not occur during your unique grief journey. Or regression may occur anywhere along the way and invariably overlap another part of your response. Sometimes your emotions may follow each other within a short period of time; or, at other times, two or more emotions may be present simultaneously. Remember—do not try to determine where you "should" be. Just allow yourself to be naturally where you are in the process.

Everyone mourns in different ways. Personal experience is your best teacher about where you are in your grief journey. Don't think your goal is to move through prescribed stages of grief. Your grief is unique. That word means "only one." No one ever existed exactly like you before, and no one will ever be exactly like you again. As part of the healing process, the thoughts and feelings you will experience will be totally unique to you.

Misconception 3.

You should move away from grief, not toward it.

Our society often encourages prematurely moving away from grief instead of toward it. The result is that too many mourners either grieve in isolation or attempt to run away from their grief through various means.

During ancient times, stoic philosophers encouraged their followers not to mourn, believing that self-control was the appropriate response to sorrow. Today, well-intentioned but uninformed relatives and friends still carry on this long-held tradition. While the outward expression of grief is a requirement for healing, overcoming society's powerful message (repress!) can be difficult.

As a counselor, I am often asked, "How long should grief last?" This question directly relates to our culture's impatience with grief and the desire to move people away from the experience of mourning. Shortly after the death, for example, mourners are expected to be "back to normal."

Mourners who continue to express grief outwardly are often viewed as "weak," "crazy" or "self-pitying." The subtle message is "Shape up and get on with your life." The reality is disturbing: Far too many people view grief as something to be overcome rather than experienced.

These messages, unfortunately, encourage you to repress your thoughts and feelings about the death. By doing so, you may refuse to cry. And refusing to allow tears, suffering in silence, and "being strong" are often considered admirable behaviors. Many people have internalized society's message that mourning should be done quietly, quickly and efficiently. Don't let this happen to you.

After the death of someone loved, you also may respond to the question, "How are you?" with the benign response, "I'm fine." In essence, you are saying to the world, "I'm not mourning." Friends, family and coworkers may encourage this stance. Why? Because they don't want to talk about death. Thus, if you demonstrate an absence of mourning behavior, it tends to be more socially acceptable.

This collaborative pretense about mourning, however, does not meet your needs in grief. When your grief is ignored or minimized, you will feel further isolated in your journey. Ultimately, you will experience the onset of "Am I going crazy?" syndrome. Masking or moving away from your grief creates anxiety, confusion and depression. If you receive little or no social recognition related to your pain, you will probably begin to fear that your thoughts and feelings are abnormal.

Remember—society will often encourage you to prematurely move away from your grief. You must continually remind yourself that leaning toward the pain will facilitate the eventual healing.

Misconception 4:

Tears of grief are only a sign of weakness.

Just yesterday morning I read a lovely, personalized obituary in my local newspaper. The obituary described a man who had done many things in his life, had made many friends, and had touched the lives of countless people. He died in his 60s of cancer. At the end of the obituary, readers were invited to attend his funeral service and were instructed to bring memories and stories but NO TEARS. I nearly choked on my Cheerios.

Tears of grief are often associated with personal inadequacy and weakness. The worst thing you can do, however, is to allow this judgment to prevent you from crying. While your tears may result in a

feeling of helplessness for your friends, family and caregivers, you must not let others stifle your need to mourn openly.

Sometimes, as you can see from the obituary I describe, the people who care about you may, directly or indirectly, try to prevent your tears out of a desire to protect you (and them) from pain. You may hear comments like, "Tears won't bring him back," or "He wouldn't want you to cry." Yet crying is nature's way of releasing internal tension in your body, and it allows you to communicate a need to be comforted.

While data is still limited, researchers suggest that suppressing tears may actually increase your susceptibility to stress-related disorders. It makes sense. Crying is one of the excretory processes. Perhaps like sweating and exhaling, crying helps remove waste products from the body.

The capacity to express tears appears to allow for genuine healing. In my experience counseling mourners, I have even observed changes in physical expression after crying. Not only do people feel better after crying, they also seem to look better. Tension and agitation seem to flow out of their bodies.

You must be vigilant about guarding yourself against this misconception. Tears are not a sign of weakness. In fact, your capacity to share tears is an indication of your willingness to do the work of mourning.

Misconception 5:

Being upset and openly mourning means you are being "weak" in your faith.

Watch out for those people who think that having faith and openly mourning are mutually exclusive. Sometimes people fail to remember those important words of wisdom: "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted."

Above all, mourning is a spiritual journey of the heart and soul. If faith or spirituality are a part of your life, express it in ways that seem appropriate to you. If you are mad at God, be mad at God. Actually, being angry at God speaks of having a relationship with God in the first place. I've always said to myself and others, "God has been doing very well for some time now – so I think God can handle my anger." Grief expressed is often grief diminished.

Similarly, if you need a time-out from regular worship, don't shame yourself. Going to "exile" for a period of time often assists in your healing. If people try to drag you to a place of worship, dig your heels in and tell them you may go, when and if you are ready.

When and if you are ready, attending a church, synagogue or other place of worship, reading scripture, and praying are only a few ways you might want to express your faith. Or, you may be open to less conventional ways, such as meditating or spending time alone in nature.

Don't let people take your grief away from you in the name of faith.

Misconception 6:

When someone you love dies, you only grieve and mourn for the physical loss of the person.

When someone you love dies, you don't just lose the presence of that person. As a result of the death, you may lose many other connections to yourself and the world around you. Sometimes I outline these potential losses, or what we call "secondary losses," as follows:

Loss of self

- self (“I feel like part of me died when they died.”)
- identity (You may have to rethink your role as husband or wife, mother or father, son or daughter, best friend, etc.)
- self-confidence (Some grievors experience lowered self-esteem. Naturally, you may have lost one of the people in your life who gave you confidence.)
- health (Physical symptoms of mourning)
- personality (“I just don’t feel like myself...”)

Loss of security

- emotional security (Emotional source of support is now gone, causing emotional upheaval.)
- physical security (You may not feel as safe living in your home as you did before.)
- fiscal security (You may have financial concerns or have to learn to manage finances in ways you didn’t before.)
- lifestyle (Your lifestyle doesn’t feel the same as it did before.)

Loss of meaning

- goals and dreams (Hopes and dreams for the future can be shattered.)
- faith (You may question your faith.)
- will/desire to live (You may have questions related to future meaning in your life. You may ask, “Why go on...?”)
- joy (Life’s most precious emotion, happiness, is naturally compromised by the death of someone we love.)

Allowing yourself to acknowledge the many levels of loss the death has brought to your life will help you continue to “stay open” to your unique grief journey.

Misconception 7:

You should try not to think about the person who died on holidays, anniversaries and birthdays.

As with all things in grief, trying not to think about something that your heart and soul are nudging you to think about is a bad idea. On special occasions, such as holidays, anniversaries, wedding dates, the day the person died, your birthday, or the birthday of the person who died, it’s natural for your grief to well up inside you and spill over – even long after the death itself.

It may seem logical that if you can only avoid thinking about the person who died on these special days—maybe you can cram your day so tight that you don’t have a second to spare, then you can avoid some heartache. What I would ask you is this: Where does that heartache go if you don’t let it out when it naturally arises? It doesn’t disappear. It simply bides its time, patiently at first then urgently, like a caged animal pacing behind the bars.

Do doubt you have some family and friends who may attempt to perpetuate this misconception. Actually, they are really trying to protect themselves in the name of protecting you.

While you may feel particularly sad and vulnerable during these times, remember—these feelings are honest expressions of the real you. Whatever you do, don’t overextend yourself during these times. Don’t feel you have to shop, bake, entertain, send cards, etc. if you’re not feeling up to it.

Instead of avoiding these days, you may want to commemorate the life of the person who died by doing something he or she would have appreciated. On his birthday, what could you do to honor his special passions? On the anniversary of her death, what could you do to remember her life? You might want to spend these times in the company of people who help you feel safe and cared for.

Misconception 8.

After someone you love dies, the goal should be to “get over” your grief as soon as possible.

You may already have heard the question, “Are you over it yet?” Or, even worse, “Well, you should be over it by now!” To think that as a human being you “get over” your grief is ludicrous! You don't get over it, you learn to live with it. You learn to integrate into your life and into the fabric of your being.

We will talk more about this important distinction in Touchstone Nine. For now, suffice it to say that you never “get over” your grief. As you become willing to do the work of your mourning, however, you can and will become reconciled to it. Unfortunately, when the people around you think you have to “get over” your grief, they set you up to fail.

Misconception 9:

Nobody can help you with your grief.

We have all heard people say, “Nobody can help you but yourself.” Or you may have been told since childhood, “If you want something done right, do it yourself.” Yet, in reality, perhaps the most compassionate thing you can do for yourself at this difficult time is to reach out for help from others.

Think of it this way: Grieving and mourning may be the hardest work you have ever done. And hard work is less burdensome when others lend a hand. Life's greatest challenges – getting through school, raising children, pursuing a career – are in many ways team efforts. So it should be with mourning.

Sharing your pain with others won't make it disappear, but it will, over time, make it more bearable. By definition, mourning (i.e., the outward expression of grief) requires that you get support from sources outside of yourself. Reaching out for help also connects you to other people and strengthens the bonds of love that make life seem worth living again.

Misconception 10:

When grief and mourning are finally reconciled, they never come up again.

Oh, if only this were so. As your experience has probably already taught you, grief comes in and out like waves from the ocean. Sometimes when you least expect it, a huge wave comes along and pulls your feet right out from under you.

Sometimes heightened periods of sadness overwhelm us when we're in grief – even years after the death. These times can seem to come out of nowhere and can be frightening and painful. Something as simple as a sound, a smell or phrase can bring on what I call “grief-bursts.” My dad loved Frank Sinatra's music. I have grief-bursts almost every time I hear Frank's voice.

Allow yourself to experience grief-bursts without shame or self-judgment, no matter where or when they occur. Sooner or later, one will probably happen when you're surrounded by other people, maybe even strangers. If you would feel more comfortable, retreat to somewhere more private, or go see someone you know will understand, when these strong feelings surface.

You will always, for the rest of your life, feel some grief over this death. It will no longer dominate your life, but it will always be there, in the background, reminding you of the love you had for the person who died.

Keep in mind that the misconceptions about grief and mourning explored in this chapter are certainly not all the misconceptions about grief and mourning. Use the space provided in *The Understanding Your Grief Journal* (p. X) to note any other grief misconceptions you have encountered since the death of someone loved.

When surrounded by people who believe in these misconceptions, you will probably feel a heightened sense of isolation. If the people who are closest to you are unable to emotionally and spiritually support you without judging you, seek out others who can. Usually, the ability to be supportive without judging is most developed in people who have been on a grief journey themselves and are willing to be with you during this difficult time. When you are surrounded by people who can distinguish the misconceptions of grief from the realities, you can and will experience the healing you deserve.

Sidebar:

Realistic Expectations for Grief and Mourning

- You will naturally grieve, but you will probably have to make a conscious effort to mourn.
- Your grief and mourning will involve a wide variety of different thoughts and feelings.
- Your grief and mourning will impact you in all four realms of experience: physically; emotionally; socially; and spiritually.
- You need to feel it to heal it.
- Your grief will probably hurt more before it hurts less.
- Your grief will be unpredictable and will not likely progress in an orderly fashion.
- You don't "get over" grief; you learn to live with it.
- You need other people to help you through your grief.
- You will not always feel this bad.

Sorrowing Metaphors:

The Coffee Cup



Consider a cup of hot, black coffee. You are that cup of coffee. Life comes along and picks up a sugar cube. The sugar is a loss. Life drops the loss, without permission, into the coffee. Sorrow then comes and stirs the sugar into the coffee. Once dissolved, the sugar cannot, in any practical sense, be removed. It has permanently become bound with the water. The whole cup is altered, not just a part of it, not temporarily, but forever. It is changed, not better, not worse, just different. This is loss/grief – it forever changes us and can never be removed from our story.

Caterpillar, Cocoon, Butterfly

A caterpillar crawls slowly up the trunk of a tree. The caterpillar is you and I before a loss. Pleasant or unpleasant, we understand the rhythms of life. She eats, climbs twigs, poops, and hangs out with other caterpillars.



One day, without any intention, will, or desire, the caterpillar has an instinct to weave a cocoon around herself. This is the moment we learn of a loss. Sorrow comes and wraps around us to contain us. The caterpillar did not ask for this, nor can she avoid it. So it is with loss.

For the caterpillar to survive the disassembling of her physical body, she must be protected and held. It is similar for us in grief. Sorrow knows that some losses have the power to fracture life, that we will be immersed in chaos. So that we do not fling apart into the universe, sorrow wraps around us, contains us in our fragmentation.

Inside the cocoon the creature slowly comes apart, turning into a pile of genetic goo in the bottom of the cocoon. Our lives also may feel this way after a significant loss. We might feel lost, that the ground has been shaken under our feet. It may feel that life is coming apart, and so it is. This will continue for some time – months, maybe years. It can be frightening, dark, and lonely.

In time, as winter passes, life begins to rebuild the caterpillar, one molecule at a time, from the genetic goo. Eventually she is completely remade – metamorphosis. She will now need to emerge for she will suffocate in the cocoon if not birthed. So too the griever. Gently, over time, life remakes us in our sorrow. In our loss some things are left behind, never to be reclaimed. In transformation we have new possibilities, new insights and depth that we could never have known before the pain of the loss. Now we must emerge back into the world if we are to survive.

Both coming apart and re-growing in the cocoon can be painful and filled with moments of anxiety and uncertainty. And then we emerge... We might peek out the bottom, look at life and the world around us and say, "hmm, not yet, not quite yet. The time will come, though, when our soul nudges us to discover who we are becoming, with what creature metamorphosis has gifted us.



The newly formed butterfly sits on a twig for the first time. She went into the cocoon with 12 legs, eating leaves. She emerges with four legs, wings, and must suck nectar to live. And there's no instruction manual. What does she want more than anything as she sits drying in the sun? to go back – to who and what she was before, before the loss. she did not ask for this, does not want it. And yet, to live this new creature must dry her wings and launch into the world to learn how to be different.

Life will ask both the butterfly and the griever this question: are you willing to be in the world differently? Are you willing to move forward without him/her/it that was lost? If the answer is "no" then the creature and the griever will both die. If "yes" then new challenges and new possibilities arise.