

'The Healing Power of Love and Grace ~

from Woundedness to a New Wholeness'

At the time of my daughter's birth in 1983, I felt I had finally gotten my life to where I wanted it to be. I had the daughter that I had always wanted, I was happy, and I was 'on my way.' That all changed in a split second **the night of Kristen's death, Sunday, July 21, 1985 ~ when I was horrifically 'disconnected' from life** and the hope of living that life with joy.

To me, having my life together meant that my mind, body, and spirit were all in 'sync.' Despite the normal concerns of living, a quiet inner peace created balance for me. I felt connected within myself, as well as with others. It was as if energy flowed freely throughout my body. Although sometimes partially blocked by past issues coming to the forefront, overall the freedom of that flow was uninterrupted ~ at least until I heard those **gut-wrenching words, "Kristen is dead."**

Inner chaos was upon me! It was those words, as well as many others, that snapped and **literally destroyed the bridges between my mind, body, and spirit ~ bridges that would take many years to painfully rebuild piece by piece.**

Losing Kristen was the most devastating experience of my life. I knew my life would never be the same. I felt that inner peace shatter before me ~ never again to have that same feeling of oneness and wholeness.

My inner 'shatteredness' and chaos was not only fueled by Kristen's death, but also by what had occurred prior to 'letting go' of her earthly presence. Minutes before Dan and I made the decision to turn off the machines sustaining Kristen, our parish pastor came in to 'comfort' us. Little did I know how his presence and words would impact not only my spiritual life, but also my grief journey for the next several years.

Having been raised Catholic, I had great respect for the women and men who gave of their lives to serve God. However, one quick insensitive comment that dark night changed that drastically.

After the on-call pediatrician informed us that there was nothing they could do for Kristen, Dan and I were then faced with the decision of when to turn off the machines to 'let her go.' That's not something any parent should have to face. Yet, because we were faced with this, I felt having a priest with us to prepare Kristen for her 'journey' would help us cope presently, as well as in the future. In my mind, knowing that Kristen was blessed by a 'man of God' before her death would make things somewhat bearable.

What I had come to expect from a priest and what I got were two different things. The shattering of what I thought was a realistic expectation was what cut me off from my spiritual life force for almost a decade.

When we asked the priest to just 'be with us' while we made the decision, he immediately asked us, "Do you know how long we're going to be here? I'm meeting 3 other priests for dinner at 6:30." Dan and I could not believe what we had just heard! I can remember my first thought after he said that. In total disbelief and anger I said to myself, "You son-of-a-bitch!" We immediately told him, not asked, but told him to leave. This was at 6 p.m. **At 6:05 p.m. Kristen was declared dead.**

When I look back on that moment, **my rage was not just about the disgusting and insensitive comment. It was coming out of all the times in my life I felt abandoned and that something of value to me was being ripped from my heart.** Yet, even though my very first experience with death occurred when my 36-year-old dad died suddenly when I was 3 years old, leaving my mom and my 5 other siblings to 'survive,' **there was NOTHING that could have prepared me for the emotional intensity of losing Kristen.**

I not only lost my daughter; I lost my 'self', my inner peace, my life force. The priest totally invalidated our experience and our feelings. I felt torn apart as if a bomb had been dropped on an already shattered heart. I expected him to be there for us and he wasn't. He failed us in our time of need. And even though he has since died, I have been 'punishing' him for years for what he said. My tranquility or inner peace was shredded and replaced with turbulence and chaos.

My anger at God's human disciple and at the situation we were thrust into, kept me anchored in my grief in varying degrees over the years. I just could not understand how anyone could have eating out as a higher priority than being with a grief-stricken couple about to release their only child to God. Damn him! This was not something I was about to forget or forgive.

Over the last several years I have definitely not forgotten those damaging words. However, **through the grace of several 'spiritual awakenings,' I have been taught that forgiveness is not something you do for someone else ~ you do it for yourself.** My damning him and everyone else who had abandoned me in my lifetime was 'killing' me, as well as my relationships with my family and friends.

Since Kristen's death, my grief journey has been impacted by several other losses that have further complicated my search for pathways to forgiveness and to reconnecting my shattered mind, body, and spirit. Those losses added to my already 'boiling cauldron' of anger. It had often reached exploding levels where I would find myself yelling at my boys or others and knowing full well who I was screaming at ~ all those that had left me or betrayed me, those that had wounded

me ~ wounds that I felt would never heal. I now realize that **not forgiving myself and others kept me from moving from woundedness to creating a new and different kind of wholeness for myself.**

When I finally allowed God's love and grace to work within me, I was able to work through my anger and use all the energy I had been using to keep that anger from fully exploding towards rebuilding my inner world. That flow between my mind, body, and spirit that had been blocked by rage was now reconnecting.

I have always been aware that God loves me no matter what. My family has also given me much love. I just hadn't been allowing it to fully enter my wounded heart. After that spiritual experience, I not only was able to feel God's love and forgiveness, I was able to freely receive the love my children and husband have been offering me all this time. Before, I just wouldn't allow their love to penetrate that rage. As I experienced forgiveness, that unconditional love washed over my broken heart like a soothing salve. The process of healing was now able to continue, albeit slowly.

Intertwined with my personal growth, another facet of my healing journey is my professional work with grieving individuals. My mission with this type of work is to hopefully help prevent some of the complications I had encountered due to unresolved past family and loss issues and to what people insensitively said and did early on in my journey. Additionally, by educating others about the normalcy of grief reactions, possibly 'breaks' in their connecting world may be less severe and more open to their own healing experience through the power of love and grace.

That power is within all of us. At times, however, we just can't see it or feel it. We may feel hopeless and powerless and that nothing will be able to help us heal. We may feel destined to be wounded forever. Yes, we may have those wounds forever. But that doesn't mean that they have to stay open or fester from our rage, guilt, or fear.

The healing process is just that ~ a process. And if we give ourselves permission to fully experience that process, intense emotions and all, we may open a pathway for love and grace to enter our 'fractured hearts' and to create the hope and possibility of reconnecting our inner world. That reconnection may give us the courage to move forward from our woundedness to a new and different level of wholeness ~ a wholeness that allows us to go out into the world and be the instruments of love and light we are all destined to be.

Deb Lee Gould, Director
FOD Family Support Group
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