

Grief Paper

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In this paper I will be discussing some of my grief and loss experiences in my life. In verbalizing my losses in writing I realized I had some great losses besides losing loved ones. Before this class, I hadn't really thought of those things I had experienced as losses. I merely looked at them as trials of life to bear up under. Now I understand with the loss there is an accompanying grief element to work through. I have lived long and loved well. It was actually difficult to choose which losses of loved ones to write about, since all are dear to me. At this point in my life, I have as many relatives now on the other side (heaven) as I still have with me in my present life.

My first loss I wanted to talk about is the loss of my paternal grandfather. I chose to talk about my grandfather first, because in reality he was my first major loss at age fifteen. His name was Walter Hollis and was born in 1901. He was a gentle, kind, and fun-loving man. He loved God and was a gospel singer with a beautiful tenor voice, who travelled to various churches in that ministry. He sang on the radio in the 1930s in a band called the Hawaiian Serenaders. One of my ethnicity influencers was Pittsburgh, my hometown, was multicultural and diverse. Hawaiian music was popular in Pittsburgh during the 1930s. My grandfather played guitar, Hawaiian ukulele, tenor guitar, and steel guitar. My mother was Croatian and played the accordion that she learned from her family, and my dad played guitar and steel guitar that he learned from my grandfather. My father taught me to play guitar and tenor guitar after my grandfather passed away. The legacy of various types of music and instruments was passed down to me. My grandfather took an interest in my singing, and started to develop me as a singer. He would play guitar for me, and I started singing in church at a very young age. He taught me many of the old classic hymns, but the last song he taught me was, *Till the Storm Passes Over*. Our pastor

approached us and asked if we could do our song one week early. We told him we were ready, and I sang that Sunday. Singing that song with him smiling and playing guitar for me, is a beautiful memory in my mind. My grandfather passed away, and went to be with the Lord that week. I would have missed the last opportunity with him, if our song was not moved up.

My coping with his death was difficult, because his passing was a sudden heart attack while jogging with my father. I was numb from the shock, and in denial. He was only sixty-four, and to be honest I was very angry at God for taking him so soon. I had an opportunity at age sixteen to go to Nashville to record, and had he lived he would have accompanied me. He took an interest in my singing like no one else did. Later my coping turned to realizing that he not only gave me a gift of music and singing, but influenced my love for the Lord. My “continuing bonds” with him are throughout my life evidenced in my singing, guitar playing, and involvement in the worship teams at the various churches we attended through the years (Worden, 2022, p.5). His legacy of music was passed on to me and my father.

One of my family of origin influencers that I want to mention is that we love music, and at every family gathering we would sing and play guitars. I grew up harmonizing at age five. The last song that my grandfather taught me was a gift, because it speaks of how during a storm the Lord is there. The words say, . . . *hold me fast, let me stand, in the hollow of Thy hand, keep me safe, till the storm passes by*. My grandfather’s death was the first true storm of my young life. My grandmother requested for the funeral that I sing that song. However difficult the request considering my own grief, this was a mourning strength of my family. We comforted each other through song at funerals, and it was not unusual for her to ask me. That’s what we did. For me personally it was a mourning deficit, because I got choked up during one part of the song and had to pause for a moment, but then continued. For a while, I thought I had let my grandmother

down. She later told me the song had touched her, and the people at the funeral. Even though, a mourning deficit, the truth remains that when we are weak, He is strong. God used my faltering song to bring comfort to my grandmother and others. Another continuing tie is that in the storms of life I have held on to the words of that song, and it has brought me faith and comfort (Worden, 2022).

The second major loss was the death of my grandmother, Sarah Viola Hollis. She died one year after my grandfather, and was only sixty-four. Strange that now turning sixty-five, I realize I have lived longer than both my grandparents. My grandmother had complicated mourning, and I believe would have benefited from grief therapy (Worden, 2022, p.137). Gram never recovered from my Pap's death. I heard her cry calling out his name, and she would hold his wallet and watch in her hands. She stayed home from church that Sunday. Going to church had become hard for her, because she always went to church with my grandfather. On return from church, my aunt Dawn and I found her in her chair dead with a cup of tea still in her hand. Hers was a peaceful death, and I coped with the death by realizing that she was now re-united with her beloved Walter.

One of my family of origin influencers I discovered was that my family were split over whether to have an autopsy or not. In the case of my grandfather, since his death was in a public park, the autopsy was required. My father felt we should have an autopsy to discover her cause of death. My uncle vehemently disagreed, and in his words did not want his mother's body cut open and mutilated in that way. He had been to Vietnam and had seen friends blown apart. Later in life I wondered if that played into his feelings on the matter. I had never seen my family so divided. My father was the eldest and executor of the estate, so they did do the autopsy.

One of the mourning deficits was as that the disagreement about autopsy caused a divide in my family, and we all felt it. I don't think my uncle ever forgave my dad for the autopsy. My uncle was also upset that my grandfather had left his cabin with surrounding land to my father. Although he left the other siblings land as well, since my dad was eldest, he was given the cabin. My father had helped my grandfather build the cabin. The deficit of mourning remained the friction in the family caused by the death of my grandparents, and dividing of the assets from the will. Everyone wanted the house to remain in the family, so my aunt Dawn bought the family home with some of her proceeds from the estate. One of the problems with the house was that after she lived there a few months, my aunt thought it was haunted. I blame this on ethnicity influencers. Even though my Nana(great-grandmother) was a Christian, she dabbled in things that were common in the UK in her era. In England, seances were common, reading tea leaves, and use of Ouija boards were all popular pastimes. My Nana spoke with a British accent and was influenced by her upbringing in England being a first-generation immigrant. I remember as a child being chased out of the kitchen as they discussed behind closed doors with hushed voices, Nana's ghost friend that would follow her around. This legless ghost, was supposedly a friend of my great grandmother who promised to try and reach her if he ever died before her. He died by being runover by a train, and lost his legs. I never witnessed the ghost, but many of my aunts and uncles did. Many people saw this ghost including a number of people at a bus stop who witnessed it follow my great-grandmother as she cut through a cemetery opposite the bus stop, on her way to work as a nurse. The mourning strength for me and my family is to understand the blood of Jesus has authority over all of the things in our generational line. I believe a mourning strength is to know as the bible states in 2 Corinthians 5:8 that, "to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord". For me, I knew my grandmother's house was not haunted by my

grandmother. She was with the Lord whom she loved and trusted. However, I do wonder if this was some demonic spirit that had attached itself to my great-grandmother. Sad that my family though Christian did not understand their authority in Christ.

My third loss was my father's sister my aunt Edith June. Of all my father's sister's she was the most vivacious, fun-loving one. When my grandmother died, she became the matriarch of the family, and held the extended family Christmas gathering of forty relatives at her home. Edith June was talkative, always singing fun songs to us when we were kids, and made the best barbecue spare ribs on the planet. I still have her spare rib recipe written in her hand that I laminated for a keepsake remembrance (Worden 2020, p.102). This memento along with other recipes I have of hers was a coping strategy for me. I look back and realize I learned so much from her about cooking, godliness, generosity, and hospitality.

My loss with Edith June was an ambiguous loss (Boss, 2021, p 3). She had a stroke at a young age of early fifties and loss the ability to speak, read, and write. Sometimes people regain the ability after a stroke to re-learn the things they lost, but my aunt never did. Her aphasia with damage in her brain affected her personality and communication. No longer could I discuss the Bible, recipes, family problems, or plans for the future. My mourning deficit was that she was alive, and yet she was in many ways was gone. I couldn't properly mourn. I would go to visit and she was still sitting in her same chair cuddling her little dog, but the aunt I knew wasn't really there. It was like she was trapped inside herself. If she could have been able to read or write out the things in her mind then we could connect. Sign language doesn't work either with this brain injury. My family of origin influencer is that they all have high blood pressure, unregulated diabetes, and being over-weight were co-morbidities that are in my family and contributed to the stroke. Her ethnicity and lower socio-economic status played a part in not getting the proper care

initially that might have helped in the reversal of symptoms. A coping strategy was that with my other aunts, (her sisters) and I would go visit as a family. We decided as a family to support her in this way, because it was easier to keep a conversation going with all of us that she could listen and feel a part of. Going alone was more difficult with only a one-sided conversation. The damage to her brain was so extensive that she was only a shell with most mental faculties gone. Everything that made my aunt an individual was gone. One mourning strength is that I had worked through some of the mourning process, and prepared myself mentally for her actual death while she was still alive. Worden (2022) refers to this as an anticipation of the loss or one that you know is inevitable so you grieve and work through the loss before the person dies. Twenty some years later when her actual body died, I mourned, but I felt I had lost her years ago with the stroke. I know it's selfish, but she was the mother to me that my mother was not. When she had the stroke, I lost my major support and role model. Another mourning strength is realizing that I would not know what is to be a godly woman without my Edith June in my life. She taught me so much about life, relating to people, and modeling giving of oneself to others, that my mother due to her own problems, was not able to teach me. Another mourning strength is knowing in heaven she would be whole again, and be re-united with the still-born daughter that whenever she spoke of, even years later, would cause her eyes to tear up and voice to catch. My continuing bond with my aunt Edith is making her recipes, singing her fun bible songs to my grandkids, and hosting parties emulating her kindness and generosity.

My fourth loss is about my move from my hometown to New York City. Before this class, I would not even have known this was a loss in my life. Now, I see it clearly. In Pittsburgh I was surrounded by trusted family and friends of many years. The coping strategy I employed was family first. I was helping my daughter fulfill her dream. We had both prayed about it, and

felt the Lord was calling us to New York City. My daughter was only fifteen when NYC Ballet wanted her to come to their ballet school to learn the Balanchine technique to become a professional ballerina. At fifteen, it was out of the question to let my daughter go alone, and live in the Julliard dorms as the other girls her age were doing. I didn't anticipate the grieving process or the loss of my support system of family and friends. Nor did I realize how lonely I would be without my husband only coming on weekends, and retiring from the nursing job I loved. The ethnicity factor was that I had gone from a small all white church congregation to David Wilkerson's church at Times Square that was multiculturally diverse. This was a welcome change for me and it enlarged my vision. My family of origin stayed in Pittsburgh for their entire life and knew no other life. Many of this family came to visit us during the first few years after the initial move. After their first visit obligatory visit to New York City, they rarely came again. One mourning deficit was the fact that my identity had changed so drastically. I was no longer working in nursing. The activities from the church like the woman's bible study and prayer group that I was accustomed to were in Pittsburgh. I had prayed with those same ladies for years and we had developed a deep trust. The new church in NYC I loved, but it was just too large. I joined a small group and it was a hundred people. Even though I loved the preaching, I really didn't know anyone personally. My daughter through friends found a smaller church that started slowly to become a new church family. This new church had the same diversity in ethnicity we were looking for, but also had small groups that were around ten people. My mourning strength was adjusting to this move by forming new relationships and friendships by hosting a small group of my own. My friend Christy and I, who I had met at church, decided to lead a small group for young mothers. I auditioned for the worship team, yes in New York it was an audition, and made the team. I began to form friendships with the twenty-somethings that I sang with. The

new church involvement was an avenue God used to change my mourning of Pittsburgh into an acceptance of my new life in the city of New York. My daughter started a Bible study and small group with the ballerinas she worked with at New York City Ballet. The girls needed a mother figure to talk to, because many of their mother's lived in another state. The girls lived in the Julliard dorms and had no parental guidance in person, only speaking to their parents by phone. So, some of the girls came to talk to me about their parent's divorcing, eating disorders, and fears about the future. The strengths began to out-weigh the deficits and New York slowly started to become home.

My fifth loss was after a year of moving to New York City 9/11 happened with all the chaos and fear that accompanied the attack. We were living in Manhattan on the Upper West side, and we could smell the jet fuel and see the smoke rising from lower Manhattan. Some of my daughter's ballet friends who lived in the Julliard dorms would go on the top floor of their building for quiet time in the morning and witnessed the jet flying into the tower. My coping strategy was that I tried to call my husband for support in Pittsburgh, but couldn't reach him. Cell phone lines were jammed. The city shut all the tunnels and bridges down. No one in, and no one out. The island felt cut-off from the rest of the world. My next thought was the safety of my daughter at school. I opened the door of the apartment to rush to get my daughter from school, and I saw her exit the elevator with seven of her friends from school. The school in the emergency situation had sent students who lived outside of Manhattan home with those who lived in the city. The kids were stranded in Manhattan without their parents able to reach them. The the next hour I spent on the phone assuring the distraught parents that I would take care of their kids. I had no food in the house so I took my daughter and two others to the corner grocery store that was a madhouse of panicked shoppers grabbing things off the shelves. The lines were

horrendous. I always kept cash in a dresser drawer for emergencies, so I was able to get in the five-item cash express lane. I gave each girl five items and got in and out of the store quickly. My coping strategy was hypervigilance, and focusing on my responsibility of taking care of my daughter and the other children in my care. We didn't know if there would be another attack. Plus, I had all these young girls looking to me for assurance, so I had to keep it together. After the tunnels, bridges, subway, and train service re-opened and the girls went home to their parents, I breathed a sigh of relief. Mayor Giuliani encouraged everyone to not give in to fear. No one went to work, so my daughter and I went to Central Park. My mourning strength was to get outside for a walk with my daughter, and try to resume a sense of normalcy. Central Park was packed with people but was eerily quiet. It felt like a giant outdoor funeral home. As we walked through the park, I met the eyes of other people, who looked as traumatized as I felt. We found comfort in each other, and total strangers would talk to us about what happened. A mourning deficit was seeing the fear on everyone's face at the park, but it was also a strength in that, we didn't feel as isolated together in the park. Boss, (2021) spoke of mourning together, as a nation, after the attack. In Central Park that day, we were all mutually mourning, and there was a strength in that. Every person in the park that day were individually grieving, and yet we were all grieving together as well. My family of origin taught me to trust in the Lord, and I leaned on him heavily. My grandfather's song came to my mind and I envisioned my daughter in the palm of the Lord's hand. You don't know you can rise above in trials until you are faced head-on with one. There was one occasion where I felt an ethnicity divide. I remember as we walked through the park the next day after the attack, seeing a group of about ten angry Muslim men gathered around a park bench shouting at one another in Arabic and waving their arms around as they spoke. As we passed by, they looked at us and I felt vulnerable, not knowing if they were

sympathizers with the terrorists. I wasn't alone in my thinking. No one knew who to trust. Why were they shouting and so angry? I remember thinking I am a white American woman, and being afraid, aware of the racial tension. After my husband was able to enter the city, we decided to walk down to the Trade Center Towers to see the devastation. Nothing prepared us for what we saw. The devastation was more far-reaching than we had imagined. At the sight of the attack, huge crowds gathered. It was another together, unified mourning time (Boss, 2021). However, it was different than at Central Park where the atmosphere was quiet and solemn. Here at the sight of the attack there was a charged atmosphere of anger. Grief takes on many forms. Anger and a sense of collective retribution pervaded the atmosphere. I heard many people swearing. Some under their breath others loudly. Some of us were crying and praying. Every anniversary of 9/11, I remember everything afresh. Trauma does sear something in your brain to make it feel like it just happened. I know I worked through the mourning process somewhat. As a reminder, I bought the thick Remembrance book with the photos of those three thousand souls lost in the attack. Would I had moved to New York had I known the attack would happen- absolutely not! And yet, my daughter and I know the Lord led us to go to New York. A mourning strength was knowing God was with us and taught us so much about ourselves, and trusting Him in whatever circumstances we find ourselves. With the Lord, we were more resilient than we knew. The experience brought my daughter and I closer than we already were, because we had survived it together.

My sixth loss is losing my menses and going through the change of life. This loss seems small in lieu of other losses, but yet it was a difficult one for me. I had hoped for oodles of children, but the Lord only saw fit to bless us with two. After the birth of my daughter, without the use of birth control I was never able to conceive again. We tried, but with no success. In my

family of origin, I had four siblings. To me, this was a perfect number. With my ethnicity and hometown in the 1980s couples we knew had an average of between two to four children. A sore spot in our marriage was me wanting to adopt, and my husband feeling we should just take care of the two the Lord gave us. I think the loss of my period represented the closing of a door I didn't want to shut. I knew a woman from church who became pregnant at the age of fifty. Although others felt sorry for her, she was my hero. Secretly I had hoped it would happen to me, but my husband would have had a heart attack at the mere thought. My coping strategy was to pursue adoption. At first my husband agreed to adopt twin girls from Russia. His sister had adopted two siblings, a boy and girl, from Russia. Unfortunately, the girls were adopted out from under us, by another couple. I still think about those girls and hope they are well.

Another mourning deficit through the loss of menses were the symptoms that accompanied menopause. I had mood swings, hot flashes, insomnia, and weight gain. In my family of origin, I asked older female relatives how their menopause experience was. All of them said they got a little warm at times, and had been relatively uneventful. Mine was not the case. A coping strategy was to get on medication. The roller coaster of emotions along with anxiety was only helped with getting on the lowest dose of estrogen. This made a huge difference in my overall health and well-being with a side benefit that estrogen is beneficial in warding off osteoporosis and cardiovascular disease. Another of my mourning strengths was realizing I would soon be a grandparent, and be able to nurture my grandkids someday. Being a mom and nurturer was my first calling, and being a grandmother was my second. God is good, and have been blessed with three beautiful grandchildren.

My final loss has to do with the miscarriage of one of my grandbabies. It was a heightened loss, because I grieved the loss of my grandchild, and grieved for my adult son and

his wife (Worden, 2022, p.229). My coping strategy was to tell myself there was probably something wrong in the development of the baby. Sam, my daughter-in-law had lost the baby at the end of her third month just after making a formal announcement on Facebook. A mourning strength for us was that they had named the little girl Charlie and had given her a funeral service at the ocean. It brought comfort to acknowledge her short life. A mourning deficit was that I grieved, and continue to grieve what life might have been with this child. What would her personality have been? I know this is selfish, but would she have resembled me? Would she have liked unicorns like her sister? I can't believe I'm crying as I write this. Another mourning deficit is that I grieve for Raine, my granddaughter, and Charlie's older sister. Raine has stuffed animals she keeps putting under her shirt to pretend being pregnant. She understands that mommy carried Charlie in her belly. Raine is five years old, and was excited about having a baby sister. Anytime her cousins are over and have to leave, she cries inconsolably. I know she feels the loss not having a sibling. She is lonely in that way. Another mourning strength that my son and I both experienced was seeing Charlie in heaven with my father, who died the year before, around the same time. His was in a dream, mine was in my mind's eye. One of my mourning strengths is praying for my family. It has only been fifteen months, and I pray for Sam to be able to conceive. So far Sam has not been able to, but I continue to pray that she doesn't fear losing another baby.

In Romans 12:15 it mentions that we are to mourn with those who mourn. An ethnicity factor different from my own was crying on the phone after Charlie's death with my in-law Tina Aquino who is Filipino. The Filipino culture is wonderful, expressive, and inclusive. I always say you will never feel alone if you are blessed to be a part of a Filipino family. What I didn't understand is how they mourn. I have never heard someone wail in grief before. My ethnicity of reserved British people was stoic and grief was expressed quietly with a hushed reverence. Tina

wailed for a long time. I was crying, but she was wailing. I now know through experience there is a difference. I felt tied to her in grief if that makes sense. I am still trying to understand it myself. The bond has become stronger between us in grief. Being a disenfranchised grief makes mourning more difficult (Worden, 2022, p.3). I keep it to myself, and don't talk about it with friends. I know this is a mourning deficit, and I know that people who love me feel I should just move on. My daughter is done having kids with two of her own. Sam wants to keep trying to get pregnant while attempting to adopt as well. They would like a toddler, so the age difference for Raine would not be so far apart. To their surprise they found out it is difficult to adopt a toddler. Who knew that would be a roadblock? Most people want infants, so the system is more set up more for that.

Through my losses in life, I have learned some things about grief and loss. However, I am thankful that because of this class, I was able to put into words and realize the grief and loss I have walked through. I have learned through experience that as Christians we do not grieve as the world grieves without hope. Yet, we do grieve. It is strange, but I think I didn't feel the total freedom to grieve. I am not sure if this was due to the fact of knowing I had the hope of heaven. I realize through this class that I had not allowed myself to truly grieve some of my losses. It makes me wonder if other people in the church experience something similar. Even in lieu of hope, we have to give ourselves the freedom to grieve fully. Christians need to be in touch with their emotions and feelings, or we are not being authentic in our loss.

Another huge learning curve for me was understanding the idea of anticipating a loss before it happens, and grieving through the journey of death. (Worden, 2022). In other words, a person can grieve while someone is still alive knowing their death imminent. Each person's grief

work is done between them and the Lord, or between them, the Lord and the therapist. It's personal and yet it is universal. We are all human and we all grieve losses.

I also learned that you can grieve in a communal grieving with others as we did in Central Park after 9/11 (Boss, 2021). However, this knowledge didn't change the fact that I was grieving personally, the loss of my nation as a safe impenetrable fortress as I once knew it. Somehow grieving mutually made me feel a part of something bigger than myself. I remember hearing people say as New Yorkers we pulled together after 9/11. To cope, we cooperatively gave of ourselves. We and others from church, brought huge containers of water down to the attack site for the workers that were searching around the clock for survivors. We met in groups and prayed for people's loved ones to be found. We took part in prayer stations that were set up through YWAM (youth with a mission) near the Battery. I remember well, how open New Yorkers were to receive prayer right on the street in front of others, without embarrassment. To be honest, I have never cried so much writing a paper. Does this mean I am still working through my own grief over losses? I suppose so. It does make one appreciate life, and to love the ones God has given us to love. No one is guaranteed a long life. I learned that experiencing loss is a gift. A gift in that it has a way of making a person re-evaluate and realize what is important in life.

In conclusion, losses although the most difficult thing in life, are common to man. Even though common, they are individual and personal. Losses are part of life. As I become older the multiple losses weigh on me. Through the pandemic over the last few years, I have had many acquaintances die. Our home-coming queen from high-school, the gifted guitar player on the worship team from church, and a friendly man who worked at the hardware store in our neighborhood are just a few of the losses I'll mention. People you may not know as well as

family, and yet you are acquainted with them. Even those losses of acquaintances can accumulate and weigh on you. I think of some of these people often, and realize once more that they are no longer with us in this life. Worden (2022) spoke of the accumulation of losses, or multiple losses make a “bereavement overload” which is difficult to bear up under (p.133). After the pandemic, I found this to be very true. I take comfort in knowing relationships the Lord gives are everlasting, since He is a relational God. My recovery process will no longer be about closure. Instead, I will create “continuing bonds” with that person, and I will always take with me parts of who they were with those “continuing bonds” throughout my life (Boss, 2021, p.5)

References

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