

*My 7 Biggest Losses*

Cassady Hymes

Alliance graduate School of Counseling

MFT 603: Marriage and Family Enrichment

Professor Tesia Wells

April 26, 2023

Upon taking this course, I felt as if I couldn't help others with their own grief because I had never truly experienced loss and grief before but once in my life. After several books and classes later, I have come to the realization that loss and grief is broad, it's messy, it's uncertain, and it's ambiguous. Grief looks different to everyone and how people process it, is different and unique to their age group, culture, ethnicity, relationship, and so many more factors contribute to what the process of grief looks like for an individual. My seven major losses are unique to me and my own experiences, they are something that I have grieved over, changed over, and felt heartbreak from. There are some similarities in how I coped with the pain of my losses and there are some differences depending on factors like my age and what in particular I lost. My seven losses will be evaluated in chronological order because it makes sense to me to connect the coping mechanisms with my age and growth.

The first loss I faced was actually pretty heavy and it affected my childhood and my family dynamics. My brother was always the kind of kid that had many behavioral issues, he was constantly kicked out of school and getting in trouble for underage drinking and smoking. Early on he was diagnosed with ADHD and another disorder and by 15 years old the psychiatrist told my mom he will probably grow up to have Antisocial Personality Disorder. When I was in the third grade my 17 year old brother broke his probation and was sentenced to 7 years in federal prison. This was a devastation to my whole family because he really didn't deserve that, he really just needed help and guidance but being a young black man in Texas in the early 2000's didn't help his case. I was hurt and confused why my only sibling wasn't coming home and my parents really didn't tell me much except that he went to prison. I have always been a sensitive kid and that continues into adulthood, so many of my coping strategies involved crying. This happened a lot at school and I'm not sure if my teachers cared but no one asked me why I was sad at school

all the time. After my brother went away I actually found really healthy ways to cope considering I was only 8 years old. My brother had a girlfriend at the time, who is now the mother of his children, and I spent a lot of my time with her and she kind of became my sister. We would go on vacations together and call each other all the time and when I got a little older she took me to visit him in prison. He had this ipod shuffle that had like 3000 songs on it, so to connect with him I would listen to all those songs constantly. For me, I suppressed many of the feelings I had about my brother going away because I felt like my parents or any of my family never gave me the space to express it. They never talked about it with me or each other around me and so many of my tears happened behind closed doors or not at all. Since my family never expressed how they felt or even talked about what happened, I never learned how to properly grieve or even understand that my saddened feelings were grief. All and all, Cassidy from 8-14 years old did a pretty good job at finding her own morning process even though her family did not help at all. My sister in law really carried me through my grief and we mourned together, we always found ways to connect with my brother and would write letters to him every single week without missing a beat. The biggest deficit in my morning process was not being able to talk to my parents about it, when I knew that my mom was hurting, I mean that was her first and only son. It kind of set the tone for what me and my parents' relationship would be like for the rest of our lives which was mutually agreed on that we don't talk to each other about anything. Despite my pretty healthy coping strategies and strengths within my personal grieving process the loss of my older brother, only sibling, father figure, bestfriend, and favorite person, I had a really difficult time for all of those years and it didn't help that my parents moved me out of my childhood home in Texas, away from my whole family, and all my friends.

Which brings me to my next loss: losing access to my childhood home, family, and friends. In 2010, my parents told me we were moving across the country from Dallas, TX to Las Vegas, Nevada and two weeks later we were in a Uhaul leaving for good. This move made me extremely upset because I didn't want to leave the state my brother was in, it was already hard enough to visit him and I knew moving would make it that much more inaccessible. I hated everything about Las Vegas and quite frankly I still don't appreciate many things from there, that's why I chose to go to college in the furthest state possible and I haven't been back since. I had a lot of resentment towards my parents and their reasonings as to why they moved us out of Texas, now I have come to accept it and I understand it but it was still extremely difficult. Some coping strategies I used during this time was going back to visit Texas any chance I got, I would spend every winter and summer break there until I graduated college. Going back to visit did help the pain of moving away from my family, because I was still able to connect with them and gained a sense of home and comfort whenever I would go back. Strengths in the way I dealt with my mourning was the fact that I could go back every holiday and spend time with my family and get back to my roots. It was nice going back to Vegas and everyone knew I am that Texas girl and it's my home. Unfortunately, since I felt like I didn't fit in or belong, I did things to try and fit in and was influenced to make really poor decisions. When thinking about what I was going to write for my seven losses, I was contemplating writing about the loss of my innocence because there are some things that I heavily regret and it does make me extremely sad when I think about it. If there were 8 losses, it would be my 8th, because I do grieve my innocence and I feel living in Las Vegas influenced that and I get sad about what I put poor 14-16 year old Cassidy through.

My next loss was actually the saddest day of my life, like it was something straight out of a cartoon show, and it was the day my childhood dog got euthanized. My dog's name was

Calamity yet she was anything but a Calamity, she was a rescue and ended up being the sweetest and dumbest dog I had ever met. Everyone loved her, even my grandma came to be fond of her and she's like deathly afraid of dogs. The day it happened, I was driving in the car with my highschool boyfriend, and it was pouring down rain and I got the call from my mom. She told me Calamity needed to be put down and asked if I would like to meet her at the clinic. I was so upset at the question because that's my dog so of course I need to see her. We turned around quickly and I ran inside that clinic in the pouring rain through the parking lot. I held my dog and cried for like 15 minutes in front of a bunch of strangers but I didn't care because she was my best friend and Calamity was very used to my tears in her fur. I personally didn't want to keep my dog's ashes because I thought that was weird, so I just kept her collar because it still had her fur on it and it made me happy. It has been 5 years since Calamity passed and I am just now feeling ready to get another dog, honestly I just felt like she was so awesome any other dog just wouldn't live up to her but I do miss having a companion and I know there are a lot of things I would do differently with my next pet. When it came to mourning Calamity I felt guilty about the way I treated her, I wished I had taken her on more walks and put her on a better diet. Positively, I always reflect back on the impact she had on my life and how she was there for me in my darkest little teenager moments. Those thoughts often run through my mind and make me excited to find another companion.

This next loss for me, is when I learned what grief is, how it felt, and that it wasn't pretty but instead, grief for me, looks like a complete mess. I remember this day so vividly, it was the morning after my birthday and I was in the cafeteria with my roommate, when I received a text from an old friend that read, "Christina was murdered last night, her boyfriend shot and killed her and then shot and killed himself." Now at first I kinda laughed in shock at the message, I

thought she got hacked or was joking, like those words in that sentence made no sense to me when I read it. It took about ten minutes of us texting back and forth to understand that our best friend was no longer alive. I got up from the table without saying a word and called my mom and told her what happened. Christina was like my mom's second daughter because she used to live with us. We were devastated over the phone and cried together and I didn't care if everyone was looking at me, I didn't care that I was on the ground in the middle of the floor. However, my roommate thought I might care later so she picked me up and took me to her car and she just drove and drove until we got to this little lake. God heard my words that day cause I spent about 30 minutes screaming at Him for taking away my best friend in the most horrific way possible. That night they were actually having a night chapel on campus and I felt like it was a gift from God so I went and worshiped and cried my little heart out the whole hour, but honestly, without that I'm not sure what I would have done that night. What really helped me cope with the loss of my best friend was going back to Las Vegas and being around her family and our friends for that week leading up to her funeral. Me, Milynn, and Christina were like the three amigos, so that week me and Milynn really never left each other's side. We went to go make T-shirts for her, and in her memory I got the same tattoo she has on her chest. After the funeral her friends threw a party in her honor cause Christina was definitely a party girl, they decorated the house in all her pictures and made some amazing food to share and talk over. There were lots of tears and stories shared throughout the house that night and that really helped all of us cope that day. Milynn and I vowed to always share our memories of her with each other and we have been doing that since 2019. What was really difficult for me to get over about her death was really two things: how it happened and when it happened. Christina was a very skittish girl when it came to actual scary things and the thought of a gun pointed to her head makes me sick to my stomach cause I can

only imagine how scared she was. I had many occurrences where I would face extreme anxiety thinking about my best friend getting shot in the face, it truly disturbs me. The other factor that was hard to deal with was the fact she died on my birthday and that was the date on our shirts, the grave, and everything else associated with her death. I knew that every year on my birthday I would be sad and honestly I haven't really celebrated my birthday since. On the positive side of how I dealt with my mourning process, I had so many pictures of me and Christina and it helped to look at them and think about the awesome life she led and all of our crazy memories. My birthday just passed a month ago and I did cry on my birthday thinking about her, I honestly didn't think I would but I still get sad about it sometimes. Overall I'd say my coping strategies have been working pretty well and as the years go by, the pain lessens but her memory or spirit doesn't go away.

The following summer after the incident with Christina, another one of my very close friends passed away. Her name was Jazarae and we had been really good friends from 6th grade all the way up to like my junior year of highschool. I'm from Texas and it's really hard for me to be against guns but after this death I pretty much had a hatred for them. My friend Jazarae committed suicide by gun fire that day and it once again shattered me and Milynn. The three of us got really close over middle school and high school because Milynn and Jazarae dated that whole time. I remember they would walk to school with me every single day and we would go to the skating rink every single weekend together. When it came to grieving, I didn't really have any good coping skills with this loss because I was still very much dealing with the loss of Christina. What did help was social media because even though I couldn't process my emotions out loud, I was able to find a community online who loved her and we all talked and shared memories together. I was really close to Jazarae's mom and so we kept in contact after it happened and

really comforted each other through it. I also use to have many suicidal ideations but after my friends death, I really became an advocate on social media for mental health awareness and suicide which helped me heal a lot. Some strengths in my own personal grief would have to be the fact that I was able to not let this death break me but make me stronger in my own mental health, because I really did realize that suicide isn't the answer and most of life problems can be solved in some way or fashion. The deficiency in my own personal grief was that I kind of dissociated from the pain of losing Jazarae because I just feel like my body or mind couldn't handle it.

In January of 2020 I met a guy who I fell madly in love with and our love honestly felt like a fantasy. Towards the end of our relationship we would joke about how we had the world's best honeymoon stage because it felt like rainbows and butterflies all the time. We were constantly around each other or on the phone with each other and since we were both the romantic type we would always go on these extravagant and intimate dates that just made us fall in love so much more deeper. I gave my mind, body, and soul to this guy and when we broke up I felt as if I had lost my whole world. It's still hard for me to come to terms with this thought, but he was not the world's best boyfriend, he didn't always treat me the best and for some reason I put him on this pedestal even higher than God and couldn't identify one flaw in him. I put him as my God and acted as if he was my husband when in reality he was barely my boyfriend. I had many bad coping skills when it came to this breakup and I did not handle it well at all. Honestly, I'm still trying to process it and fully grieve because even though I have now met an amazing man who loves God, serves the Lord everyday, treats me with respect, and loves me the way I always wanted to be loved, I have trouble connecting with him fully because the thought of my ex pops into my head a lot. It's not as bad as it used to be but it's still pretty often(for reference,

me and my ex Parker broke up December 2021). Some of the coping strategies I employed to try and deal with the loss of my ex included, numbing and denial. For two weeks right after the break up I just pretended it didn't happen and dissociated myself from the pain. I also made the mistake of trying to get over Parker by being with other people and I ended up hurting two really nice men who didn't deserve it. My strength in this personal grief was that I learned to draw closer to God, I promised Him that I would never put anyone above Him and to never treat a man like my husband unless he has chosen to enter into that sacred covenant together. The deficit in growing through my own personal grief was the fact that I made a lot of mistakes in my hurt and I still don't think I have processed through all my grief.

The next loss was my Great Uncle Randy who died of bad health and old age in November of 2021. Most of my childhood I spent everyday at my grandparents house and uncle Randy lived there as well. They would pick me up from school and I would hang out with them by helping them run errands or sitting out with them on the back porch while they smoked a cigarette and told me stories of the past. Many people in my family did not like my uncle Randy besides me, and my grandma. In the year 2000 my uncle came to visit my grandparents from Indiana and he never ended up leaving. They felt like he did nothing with his life and was just freeloading off of my grandpa. I never felt this way because he was a good person but had lots of trauma from the war and from his drug addiction. His health was always extremely bad and I remember since I was six years old they were saying he wouldn't make it another year. I was on a school trip to Kansas, Missouri and had just landed when I got the call from my grandma that Uncle Randy had passed away. I was extremely upset and I decided to cope by breaking the generational curse of not speaking about anything that's going on in the family. I stayed on the phone with my grandma for my whole hour and half bus ride into Kansas and we really poured

our hearts out to each other for the very first time. I also decided to talk to my brother about it, because I know he never was extremely fond of my uncle because our grandpa was basically his father figure. However after talking to my brother he did tell me he was actually pretty sad about it and did actually shed some tears about it. This was very healing to hear because again my brother and I sharing emotions has never really happened but I needed the comfort at the time and I was gonna demand it out of my family. I believe in my own personal grieving process. I handled it pretty strongly. I think we were more worried about my grandma and I didn't think she would live soon after he went, but she's holding up pretty well, so we will see. In the past I wasn't always great at reaching out to her, but now I call her at least once a month to check in and make sure she is handling the loss and grief well.

Learning about grief therapy has actually been extremely helpful in my own healing and I have become more open and comfortable when it comes to talking about death and grief. This class made me extremely uncomfortable in the beginning because I really had no interest in talking about grief with other people or my future clients. I think the most important point I have learned about grief is that it's not about trying to move on or close the door on a loss, it's more about finding ways to move through the grief. I think this is especially important for counseling when I know that clients will say that they don't know how to get over their loss, and I can reassure my client that they do not have to get over their loss and it's okay to be sad and hurt. Another thing I found very useful when learning about grief was understanding that grief affects different age groups in different ways. I know now that when I am working with clients who are dealing with loss, it's important to consider their age group and the things they are going through in just that sense. Lastly, I thought it was really important to understand ambiguous loss because not everyone is going to lose someone the natural way like old age or sickness. There will be

people we come across as therapists who have someone missing, murdered, or maybe the person they were having an affair with passed away and they aren't socially aloud to grieve that loss.

There's so many different kinds of ambiguous loss and I believe that most losses are ambiguous, it's the job of the therapists to affirm the clients loss and to give them a space to grieve.