

# WHAT DOES RECOVER MEAN?

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It's hot and already I am beginning to pray for the return of winter. The days of summer have grown old and tired and I'm weary of hurting. Grief has followed me forever, or so it seems and it is no longer a useful companion. When can I release the pain in search of the promise? How long must I hurt? Is grief measured in days, weeks, months, years or lifetimes? I'm thirsty and I need a drink of hope.



Grief has been a tornado, a volcano, a blizzard and a holocaust in my life. It came, unbidden and has never left. How many decades does grief take to find its own place within the scheme of our life? How many heartaches must be survived? How many hurts must be endured before we learn how regulate the flow of pain that always threatens to engulf us? Can we ever reach recovery?

Grief has become a familiar companion and I understand its peaks and valleys, its rolls and rhythms. It is safe, familiar, not nice, but understandable.

It is SO hard to let go of the hurt and anger and bitterness. It is SO hard to let of the KNOWN (even if it hurts us terribly). It is hard to search into the UNKNOWN, especially if we don't know what we are looking for! Sometimes, when all we think we have left of our love is our sadness, we don't want to give up our grief for fear of giving up our loved one.

We can never return to the LAND OF MAKE BELIEVE, where everything lives happily ever after. Sometimes we get caught in viewing the world in terms of what we no longer have. We keep mental lists of the things we will never know or experience. We keep track of all we have lost. Grief doesn't seem to fit in the summer cycle of life, but it is here, as always, searing my soul and robbing my heart of its joy.

Where is the shade? Where is the relief for my burnt memories? Where are the answers to my countless prayers? Where is the HOPE in a world gone dark with despair? Will I perish here in the desert of my grief?



Yet, just as the grass turns yellow with the heat, I have discovered my grief is beginning to fade. It is fading into a feeling of complete nothingness. But nothingness is not acceptable either! I fear losing everything when I cannot recall anything. When I can no longer bring HIS face to my mind or the sweet scent of HIM to my being, then I am afraid. When the tears are few and far between and I can recall the events of his death without racking sobs or even a heavy sigh, then I grow afraid of the emptiness.

It no longer hurts to look at the scrapbooks or to finger the lace of a child's blanket edge. My arms no longer ache when I hold someone else's baby and my breath stays even when I hear HIS name called across a playground. I no longer search waiting lines, looking for his face and I no longer pick up the phone to call her with the latest news of our life. I no

longer have his shoes on display and the necklace sometimes does not get worn. What is happening to me? Has the summer sun melted my grief or burned it away? Has enough time passed so that I might be “getting over it” as so many have wished for me? What is happening when the sun sets upon the pain of grief and the coolness of night descends upon the withered heart of grief? Is this emptiness? Is this RECOVERY?

If being empty is what recovery is all about, I’m not sure I want to be “recovered”. Sometimes I think I fear the emptiness of no memory more than the pain that memories bring.

We have been told that we must allow our grief to “fade” but I am not sure I know what that means. We have been told to “reinvest our emotional energies” into new interests, people, places, things. We must “reconstruct” our life, “transforming the relationship we had with our loved one” into a less painful reminder of the past. We have been encouraged to “release”, “reconnect”, “reconcile”, “reunite” and “reform”. I don’t want to “re” anything! The only “re” I want to do is Remember.



I want to remember without the pain. I want to remember without the hurt and the sadness and the grief. I want the MAGIC WAND to wave my loved one back to me so I can Re-embrace him with all of my being. Re-connect? Yes, but how about Rewind the tape and let me play once more in the summer sun with him, storing away more memories that now must sustain me in my sorrow?

Grief has been with me a looooong time now and I thought it might never change. I thought it would never leave, but now, in the warmth of the end of summer, I can see the changes my journey has lead me through. I no longer weep at the sound of the ice cream truck's bell. I no longer ache when I hear the rush of laughter or catch a familiar tune on the wind. I can fly a kite with complete joy and once I even caught a fish, without his help with the worm. It was a triumph and a despair all at the same time.

I have learned to “let go”, “move on”, “release” and “recover”. Again and again, as the seasons changed, so did I and so did my grief. Some months, some seasons, some years were easier than others. Some still defy explanation. The sun has warmed even the coldest places in my heart and surely I must be “recovered” now.

Maybe it is the word “recover” that is out of place in the summertime sun and in the world of grief. Recovery is a medical word, used to describe the absence of previous symptoms, distress and pain. Recovery is a word we can use when describing the passing of the signs and symptoms of the chicken pox or when we get the cast removed from an arm that had been broken.

Then, once form and function have been restored, we can speak of being RECOVERED in the medical sense of the word. We are no longer bothered by the symptoms of whatever ailment we fell victim to and the influence of whatever medical difficulty we experienced is minimal if any.



But grief is something other than a collection of signs and symptoms. In the medical sense, pain may be one of the first signs that something is wrong. In the emotional and psychological realm, pain is a sign that something IS. For many bereaved, pain is one of the first signs of returning emotions. As we begin to “defrost” from the initial numbness of grief, we begin to hurt. The return of emotions can be regarded as progress, not a sign that something is wrong, but rather a sign that something is alive again.

We cannot get over grief. We cannot recover from the pain of a loved one’s death. We can, however, get THROUGH grief. I like to think in terms of HEALING, an ongoing process of learning to live with what we’ve got instead of what we wanted. We can choose how we wish grief to influence us. We can carry bitterness and anger or we can choose to remember the light and the love. Each day we have the choice again and again. So, HEALING seems to be a more honest word, a word of realistic expectations and of HOPE.

Some say the path to healing begins when we learn to say good-bye. GOOD-BYE? Good-bye to what? To whom? Good-bye to our loved one? I think not! I can say good-bye to the life we lived together, but never, ever to the memories and the moments of the life we shared! I can pick and choose how those memories affect me and just knowing I have choices is the beginning of the healing process.



Darkness cannot and does not last forever. I just thought it did.



Live your grief with all the passion you once lived your life. Even the shadows have something to teach us. Even the pain tells us something. Experience the hurts, acknowledge the pain, let the tears flow. If we can allow ourselves to experience and express the painful and deep emotions of grief, then we may gradually become aware that the well of hurt is not quite so full. The intensity and the duration of the pain have changed as we have lived it. When once we hurt continuously, perhaps now you are discovering a few moments of respite from the searing heat. Perhaps now you may even discover an entire day without a painful memory. Perhaps smiles come more easily when the memories flood in. Perhaps you have learned to cry and laugh at the same time.

So, in these moments of searing sun and faded memories, search for new ways to remember the LIFE, not just the death. Insist upon remembering the joys of your loved one's life. You do have memories of love and laughter, of hopes and dreams. You do not have to have been born to have been loved.

I have come to know that in letting go of the hurt, I have gained all the wonderfulness that was my loved one's life.

When we completely understand that we did not lose our loved ones, healing is possible. They died, but the love we share between us can never be destroyed.

Let the joy of your loved one's life seep up through the layers of hurt to emerge into a single moment of light. Grief isn't a seasonal song. It's a lifetime song, but it doesn't have to be a sad song forever.



Don't be so afraid that you will forget that you hold on too tightly to the pain. Just as you still remember the summer times of your youth, rest assured you will never forget the melody of the love you shared. The heart always remembers.