

A journal for the first year of grieving and beyond.

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Introduction

Grieving is often a lonely and frightening experience. Most of us have little idea of what to expect along the way, and we wonder what is normal, and what is not. This journal can be a companion and a guide as you travel through the grieving process. It can allow you take your questions, worries, and concerns out of your head, heart, and soul and expose them to the sunlight. Known as catharsis, this process can be of tremendous benefit when attempting to make sense of the devastation and anguish when a loved one dies. This journal is your personal memoir. The journal is divided into sections; these sections or themes are meant to address the concerns and struggles you may have as you work to heal and survive. The themes can be used as a guide to help you put your thoughts on paper. The writing is for you, and about you. It reflects what is in your heart and soul and is an intimate expression of your journey to heal. Let the words flow uncensored and unrestrained. Let it be what it is: beautiful, raw, rambling, unstructured, horrifying, painful, vulnerable. The words you write represent your truth, what is at your full attention at the moment.

As you journal, you may have occasion to look back and reread past entries. This may help you monitor your own progress, identify patterns and themes, and guide you toward further healing.

There is a power in putting words to paper. Hopefully this power will lead to healing and ultimately peace in your journey.

JOURNAL THEME

A CHANGED LIFE



A death has occurred and everything
has changed…
Life can never be the same again.

— FROM "A DEATH HAS OCCURRED" BY PAUL IRION

The death of a loved one abruptly changes your life.
One day you and your loved one are together; the next day you are apart.
The change is unfathomable. Your heart is stunned.
You can't believe it has happened. Yet the change has occurred,
and you can feel the dull weight of it on your soul.
Your life will never be the same.
Your loved one gave your life so much meaning and purpose.
Your sorrow is a tribute to this gift of love.

> MY LOVED ONE'S LIFE HAD MEANING. I WILL LET THIS THOUGHT GUIDE ME THROUGH THE CHANGES THAT DEATH HAS BROUGHT.

I can write about…

…a vivid, positive memory I have of the two of us.

…what my loved one's life meant to me.

…another time in my life when change was painful.

…another time in my life when change was painful.

JOURNAL THEME

Feeling unprepared



I always knew
He would die
But not…
This moment –
Not now.

– ELLEN OLINGER, IN MEMORY OF HER FATHER, HAROLD A. BORGH

As brutal as it may seem, death is an inevitable part of the cycle of life. Yet death, whenever it comes, shocks and surprises us. Can we be prepared? Probably not. It is unlikely we can ever be completely ready for the finality that death represents.

> In this moment, my loved one's death is incomprehensible. Still, I know that I would never feel there was a right time for my loved one to die.

I can write about…

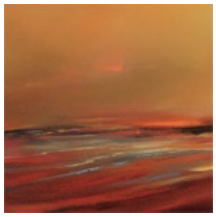
…a kind gesture someone made to comfort me.

…what it means to me to be prepared.

…the fears that I've felt since my loved one's death.

JOURNAL THEME

A LACK OF CONCENTRATION



I just couldn't concentrate…, I felt so preoccupied…like I was on automatic pilot.

– JULIANA EHRMAN, IN MEMORY OF HER GRANDMOTHER, KATHERINE IMMEL

Grief taxes all of your senses and sensibilities. Every part of your being is strained as you grapple with the emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and physical tumult in your life. With so much energy expended on grieving, your mind naturally loses its ability to concentrate and stay focused. You are preoccupied with your loved one's death – which is how it should be. "Automatic pilot" allows us to make it through the day.

In the short term, at least, all any of us may be able to do is just go through the motions of everyday living.

> MY LOVED ONE'S DEATH PREOCCUPIES MY THINKING AND DRAINS MY ENERGY, BUT I KNOW THAT IT IS NORMAL TO FEEL OVERWHELMED BY LOSS.

I can write about…

…a specific instance of being "on automatic pilot."

…something I want to say to my loved one.

…the frustration of not being able to concentrate.

JOURNAL THEME

The Right to Grieve



I was not the central person affected…
Yet I felt a tremendous sense of loss.
Did I have the right to grieve his death too?

— ELIZABETH LEVANG, IN LOVING MEMORY OF HER UNCLE, TONY RIZZO

When we care for and love someone, we are certain to feel strong emotions when that person dies. There's no need to justify such feelings because there are no limits or conditions on who can grieve or how long we can grieve.

We all have the right to our grief. Our feelings are our own and are not something that can, or should, be taken away.

> I HAVE A RIGHT TO MY GRIEF. I CARED FOR — AND MISS — THIS SPECIAL PERSON.

I can write about…

…a possession I have that belonged to my loved one.

…a strong memory I have of them.

…how it hurts when others ignore my pain.

JOURNAL THEME

Intimacy and support



Why is it so hard for people to touch a grieving person? Don't people know that we crave their hugs more than their words?

— C. RENEE ANDERSON, LOVING MEMORY OF HER HUSBAND, KEITH

We can sense when people are uncomfortable and apprehensive around us because we have suffered a loss. But we should not feel wounded by their discomfort and apprehension. Few people know how to extend intimacy to a grieving person.

Although hugs of genuine support and understanding can be a warm blanket of love when we are cold with grief, we should have compassion for those who are unsure how to support a grieving person.

I CAN GAIN THE INTIMACY AND COMFORT I NEED BY TEACHING MY FRIENDS AND FAMILY WHAT MY NEEDS ARE. I WILL OFFER HUGS AND TRUST MY ACTIONS WILL BE RETURNED.

I can write about…

…a hug someone gave me that showed their care and concern.

…my disappointment in those who have made little effort to console me.

JOURNAL THEME

The Silence of Reality



Mom died quietly in the hospital bed she had occupied for several days…When I went back to the house,…I felt overwhelmed by the silence…I did not know this home without her! The silence was unbearable.

— LEAH JONES, IN LOVING MEMORY OF HER MOTHER AND BEST FRIEND, RUTH

Silence can be overwhelming when you grieve. You hunger for the sounds of your loved one and want to retrieve and hold dear all remnants of this special person's existence.

At times your mind may momentarily trick you into believing your loved one is near. Then, reality shocks you back to the here and now. Your loved one is truly gone, and you must rely on your recollections for comfort and strength.

> THERE IS AN OBVIOUS SILENCE CREATED BY MY LOVED ONE'S DEATH. I WILL LISTEN TO MY MEMORIES TO EASE THE REALITY OF THIS SILENCE.

I can write about…

…something that reminds me of my loved one.

…what I need to fill the silence.

…the fears I have of forgetting my loved one.

JOURNAL THEME

Grieving my own way



Stand up tall to friends and to yourself and say, "Don't take my grief away from me. I deserve it, and I'm going to have it."

– FROM "DON'T TAKE MY GRIEF AWAY" BY REVEREND DOUG MANNING

It may be hard on our friends and families when we are tearful, heartbroken, and hurting for what seems to them a long time. They want us to get better, to as quickly as possible.

But their timetable need not be ours, nor their understanding of grief and loss. We are each entitled to have our own grief.

> I CAN APPRECIATE THAT MY FAMILY AND FRIENDS WANT TO SEE ME IN LESS PAIN. STILL, I OWN MY GRIEF AND WILL NOT LET ANYONE TAKE IT AWAY.

I can write about…

…a card or note of condolence I received that felt supportive.

…a coping strategy I am using to deal with my sadness and pain.

…my thoughts and reactions when others try to take away my grief.

JOURNAL THEME

Love finds a way



Instructions were wired to find a beautiful smooth stone for each missing member of the family and place them in mother's hand one at a time…When conscious, she held conversations with the person whose stone she held, or whispered a message to be given to them. Mother died with the smooth stones in her hands, secure in the knowledge that all her loved ones were with her… While our family was separated, love found a way.

– LILA "PEGGY" AZAD, PH.D.

It can be agonizing to recall the distance that separated us from our loved one. Had there been other options, we would have acted on them. Instead of berating ourselves, we can focus on the concerns and wishes we had for our loved one. We must trust that our message of love found its way to our loved one's heart.

I CAN LET GO OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT KEPT ME FROM MY LOVED ONE. MY MESSAGE OF MY LOVE CAN BE CARRIED THROUGH TO ETERNITY.

I can write about…

…a unique object or item that I have saved in memory of my loved one.

…the message of love I want my loved one to hear.

…the pain of missing my loved one.

JOURNAL THEME

Difficulty making decisions



Thirty years we had been married…The mere thought that now I had to take the reins in my own hands was frightening… Decisions, decisions, everywhere.

— MEG HALE, IN MEMORY OF HER HUSBAND

The burden of decision-making can overwhelm us in the weeks and months after the death of our loved one. We may not be accustomed to so much responsibility, or we may feel anxious about the consequences of our choices.

We need time to think and plan carefully. It may be wise to seek the advice of a trusted friend or family member.

> Although I am capable of making decisions, I can ask for help when I need more information or another perspective.

I can write about…

…a friend or family member who has been a compassionate listener and confidant.

…a decision that I have recently made and feel good about.

…my feelings of distress over having so many decisions to make.

JOURNAL THEME

Restlessness



Sleep was a luxury that eluded me night after night.

— LINDA TAYLOR WILLIAMS, IN LOVING MEMORY OF HER HUSBAND

Restlessness is a common experience following the death of a loved one. Though we crave sleep, it has a way of evading us time and time again.

Sleeplessness only compounds the stress that we feel after the death of a loved one. Still, we must trust that our body can, and will, take care of itself naturally. Over time, sleep will return.

> I WILL NOT PRESSURE MYSELF TO SLEEP. I WILL TRUST MY BODY'S NATURAL PROCESS.

I can write about…

…a place that I can go to that feels safe and secure.

…a favorite bedtime ritual I enjoyed as a child.

…the jumble of thoughts and feelings that race through my mind as I lie in bed, trying to go to sleep.

JOURNAL THEME

Drug and alcohol use



At first, I dealt with death by repressing my feelings and trying to forget my loss. This was a mistake and caused me a multitude of problems, one of which was a serious addiction to alcohol and drugs.

— KEN PUGH, IN MEMORY OF HIS LOVED ONES

We all cope with loss differently. Numbing out the pain with drugs or alcohol is a temporary solution with illusory results. The false respite will not last long. Eventually, we must accept the truth and feel our pain.

> I ACCEPT THAT DRINKING OR USING DRUGS OFFERS ONLY TEMPORARY RELIEF. I WILL DO THE GRIEVING I NEED TO DO AND SEEK OTHER MEANS TO SUPPORT MYSELF THROUGH THIS PROCESS.

I can write about…

…a personal accomplishment that is a source of pride for me.

…some avenues of support I have for dealing with my grief.

…the mixture of emotions I feel when I think about my loved one.

JOURNAL THEME

Questions of Faith



I had believed God to be a loving father.
Maybe someday I can believe in Him again.

— MARY VAN BOCKERN, IN LOVING MEMORY OF HER DAUGHTER, CATHERINE MARY

The death of our loved one can challenge our understanding and commitment to God. We may feel angry, cheated, confused, bitter, helpless, and even hopeless when we consider what has happened to us.

Suffering can test our faith and our beliefs in a loving and just Creator. We may find ourselves for the first time doubting or questioning God. Such thoughts are natural and understandable.

> I CAN QUESTION GOD AND MY FAITH. I WILL GIVE MYSELF TIME TO SORT OUT MY THOUGHTS AND BELIEFS.

I can write about…

…someone I know who has been a wise and comforting spiritual presence in my life.

…some of the other aspects of life that I also question because of my loved one's death.

…the uncertainty I feel and my need for life to make sense again.

JOURNAL THEME

Accepting reality



Many times in those first few weeks after my uncle's death I thought of phoning him. But before I even had the telephone in my hand, I would remember that he was dead.

— ELIZABETH LEVANG, IN LOVING MEMORY OF HER UNCLE, TONY RIZZO

Occasionally, the reality of our loved one's death may escape us. This is natural, for we never really expect relationships to end. But while our memory may temporarily falter, reality quickly puts us back on course. Like a compass, it can lead us along our journey to a greater sense of peace and normalcy.

> THERE MAY BE TIMES WHEN I FORGET THAT MY LOVED ONE HAS DIED. I WILL LOOK TO REALITY TO HELP ME ACCEPT WHAT IS TRUE.

I can write about…

…a hobby or activity that my loved one and I enjoyed and shared.

…how habit and memory can make it seem as if a loved one is still alive.

…the sense of regret I feel that my loved one has died.

JOURNAL THEME

The Hurt of Remembering



Don't try to destroy a beautiful part of your life because remembering hurts.

— FROM "LIVING WHEN A LOVED ONE HAS DIED" BY RABBI DR. EARL A. GROLLMAN

It may hurt to recall the life we once shared with our loved one. Sometimes we may even feel that the kind of happiness we once had can never exist again. It as if all joy is forever gone, buried in the same soil as our loved one.

Your loved one's life is part of your life. In spite of all that is happened, your life bears the indelible imprint of your loved one's spirit and being.

> AT TIMES, IT IS PAINFUL TO REMEMBER THE LIFE I SHARED WITH MY LOVED ONE. I WILL DRAW STRENGTH FROM KNOWING THAT OUR LIVES ARE FOREVER INTERTWINED..

I can write about…

…a humorous incident or story that involved my loved one.

…an aspect of our relationship that I miss.

…my worries of never being happy again.

JOURNAL THEME

Special memories and momentos



My life has been filled with a storehouse of experiences that my Mom made possible… When I look back, I say, "Thanks for the memories, Mom."

– JULIE FAXVOG, IN MEMORY OF HER MOTHER, CHARLOTTE MARGARET JOAN DOHERTY KLUG

Many sights, sounds, and smells remind us of our loved one – the lyrics to a song, a brand of coffee, a particular flowering plant. In that pang of recognition, we often find ourselves smiling or tearing up or both.

While we may miss the life we shared with our loved one, we are grateful for the simple objects and mementos that remind us of this shared life.

I MISS THE FAMILIAR PATTERN OF MY LOVED ONE'S LIFE. TODAY, I WILL THINK ABOUT A FEW OF MY SPECIAL POSSESSIONS AND THE SHARED MEMORIES TIED TO THEM..

I can write about…

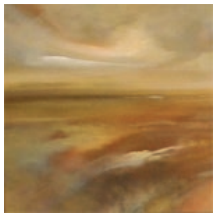
…something ordinary that reminds me of my loved one.

…the gratitude I feel for having known my loved one.

…the anguish I feel knowing that we cannot create new memories.

JOURNAL THEME

Lingering resentments



My brother and I wanted to say or do something special at my sister's funeral – a prayer or testimonial. My parents asked us not to…I can't help but wonder if our grieving process would have been different if we had been allowed to share in this service.

– PASTOR MIKE ZYLSTRA, IN LOVING MEMORY OF HIS SISTER, MARY

Funerals and memorial services are often a time of significant distress for families. Working to manage the stress and strain is honorable, but if resentment is the result, an airing of our feelings is in order. By expressing our feelings in a positive way we can free ourselves from the past and move toward forgiveness.

> IF I HAVE ANY LINGERING RESENTMENTS, I WILL TELL MY FAMILY. I CAN CHOOSE NOT TO HARBOR ANY BAD FEELINGS.

I can write about…

…an amusing memory of our family that makes me laugh.

…my need to feel understood and respected.

…how I feel when I'm expected to keep others happy.

JOURNAL THEME

Will I survive?



Why? Why? How can one have this much pain and still be alive?

— JOYCE BARGA, IN LOVING MEMORY OF HER SON, CHRISTOPHER LEE

Our loved one's death is a challenge to our will and an unwelcome invitation to doubt ourselves. Will we be able to survive? How much can we bear, and for how long?

Regrettably, there are no boundaries to our pain and no answers as to when the hurt will subside.

For now, we must take small steps, one day at a time.

> No one can tell me how long this pain will last.
> For now, I will find others to share my burden and take a day at a time.

I can write about…

…another time in my life when I felt scared and uncertain of my future.

…what it will mean to "survive."

…wanting to have an end to the emotional rollercoaster.

JOURNAL THEME

The family's grief



It was rough telling the other children that their older brother was dead. They so loved and adored him…It's been hard to deal with my grief and theirs too.

— ANONYMOUS

It is tough to deal with our own feelings of vulnerability and uncertainty, much less help our friends and family, especially the children, cope with their grief at the same time.

We can set an example by our own behavior. Encouraging openness and honesty is important right now, as is respecting everyone's right to grieve in their own way. Finding ways to unify and strengthen the family will help to bring healing.

I will model openness and honesty in my grieving and allow my family to grieve in their own way. I will work to strengthen my family so that we can heal.

I can write about…

…an activity or event that is a family tradition.

…something positive our family can do to bring us together.

…how tired and discouraged I feel when my family is hurting.

JOURNAL THEME

Life on hold



Joe and I had been married for quite some time… Now I feel like I'm alone, with little left to look forward to. Quite honestly, I'd rather just die too. My whole life is on hold.

– "MRS. JOE," IN MEMORY OF HER HUSBAND AND LONGTIME COMPANION

When a loved one dies, the comfort and familiarity of our old life is pushed aside and replaced with feelings of loneliness and emptiness. Some of us would almost rather die than try to create a new life alone. All our dreams, hopes, and plans for the future may have evaporated with the death of our loved one. For the time being, our life seems to be on hold. While dying may sometimes appear to be an answer, more that anything we just want our old life back.

I CAN DESCRIBE AT LEAST ONE ASPECT OF MY LIFE THAT POSITIVELY POINTS TO THE FUTURE. I WILL FOCUS MY THOUGHTS AND ENERGY ON THIS POSITIVE ASPECT AND LET IT HELP GUIDE ME TO THE FUTURE.

I can write about…

…something I want to fulfill in memory of my loved one.

…a phrase or saying that inspires me and gives me a sense of hope.

…how discouraged I feel when I think about creating a new future.

JOURNAL THEME

Depression



All this pain has changed my values…All I can think of is battling the depression and tears and just getting through the day.

— HANELL NELSON, IN LOVING MEMORY OF HER DAUGHTER, AMY

Grief can overwhelm us and deepen into depression.

Feelings of worthlessness, hopelessness, and unrelenting sadness are potential signs of depression. So too are major changes in our daily routines, such as being unable to work, maintain personal hygiene, sleep, or eat.

Sometimes, we may need professional help. Seeking help is a sign of courage and may be the most responsible thing we can do for ourselves and our family.

I CAN MONITOR MY EMOTIONAL HEALTH FOR SIGNS OF DEPRESSION. I CAN TRY TO CHANGE MY OWN ATTITUDES AND THOUGHTS, OR, IF NEED BE, SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP.

I can write about…

…a recent event that has encouraged me and rekindled some of my energy for life.

…a negative attitude or thought that keeps running through my head.

…my desire to feel whole and engaged in life.

JOURNAL THEME

Being unable to function normally



My dad's death was very trying. One morning I went out, started up the car, and backed out only to hear a very loud crash…When I glanced in the rearview mirror, I was shocked to see that I hadn't opened the garage door! I was so out of step with life that I didn't realize what I was doing.

— SUZANNE BANGERT, IN LOVING MEMORY OF HER FATHER, ROBERT TENNER

What is normal and routine in our lives is instantly disrupted when our loved one dies. For a time, everyday activities take a backseat to our emotions. It's as if we are disconnected from everyone and everything around us.

The shock of our loved one's death numbs us, making us feel disengaged and out of control.

> I WILL ACCEPT THAT MY BODY MAY NOT FUNCTION AS IT USUALLY DOES.
> I WILL ATTEMPT TO BE PATIENT DURING THIS PERIOD OF MY LIFE.

I can write about…

…a recent situation, humorous or otherwise, that shows how out of sync my mind and body have become.

…some aspects of my life that seem to be improving.

…my distress at being disconnected and out of control.

JOURNAL THEME

Emptiness



My own heartbeat sounds like ten thousand drums each beat crashes in my brain. I close my eyes… but I still see emptiness.

– FROM "UNTITLED" BY PATTI FOCHI, IN MEMORY OF HER SON, JUSTIN

The pain of grieving can be so loud that it sounds like the thundering beat of ten thousand drums. Yet even that great noise can echo hollow and empty inside us. We are like a lifeless shell of nothingness, empty without our loved one.

Though we know that our life must go on, our heart cannot bear such reality. To heal, we must let our heart slowly mend.

> MY HEART IS FILLED WITH EMPTINESS AT THE LOSS OF MY LOVED ONE. I WILL RESPECT THIS PAIN AND LET MY FEELINGS BE.

I can write about…

…a pleasant memory I hold of my loved one.

…how my loved one added meaning and purpose to my life.

…my feelings of emptiness.

JOURNAL THEME

SETTLING DIFFERENCES



Many things, small irritations and upsets, had existed between my mother and me for some time. As her death was impending, we both knew this was "it" for us… I feel grateful for the quiet time we had to work through our differences.

— AL HONRATH, IN LOVING MEMORY OF HIS MOTHER, ROSE KERKVLIET HONRATH

Most of us have some differences or difficulties in our relationships with others, even with our loved ones. Some of us are able to resolve the differences with our loved ones while they are still alive, and find peace. For others of us, however, this is not the case. Our hearts ache for a reconciliation that never came.

Though our loved one has died, we can still make amends by laying aside our differences and offering forgiveness.

I WILL CREATE SOME QUIET TIME TO MAKE PEACE WITH MY LOVED ONE AND TO BOTH OFFER AND ASK FOR FORGIVENESS.

I can write about…

…what my loved one has taught me about forgiving.

…something I have said or done in the past for which I would like to be forgiven.

…my struggles with finding a sense of peace in my life.

JOURNAL THEME

Humorous moments



At Mom's funeral we found my son, Tommy, only five, jumping off the table in the foyer of the funeral home. He'd been licking shut all the memorial cards that hadn't been used!... Now, after some time has passed, I can laugh about these things. At the time though, I just couldn't.

— MARY LAING KINGSTON, IN LOVING MEMORY OF HER MOTHER

Humor seems out of place after the death of a loved one. It's not that humorous situations don't exist; it's that we dismiss them as inappropriate, or we lack the capacity to respond to them. But with the passage of time we may be able to look back and recall some amusing moments.

Recalling such moments, and laughing about them, can build positive feelings to replace some of the more painful ones that have fixed in our mind.

> I CAN RECALL SOME OF THE COMICAL THINGS THAT HAPPENED NEAR THE TIME OF MY LOVED ONE'S DEATH. I WILL USE THESE RECOLLECTIONS TO BUILD SOME POSITIVE MEMORIES AND LIFT MY SPIRITS.

I can write about…

…one of my loved one's favorite jokes or funny stories.

…how awkward it felt to laugh after my loved one's death.

…the strain of being serious so much of the time.

JOURNAL THEME

Goodbyes



That last hug…
That last goodbye
I'll treasure, them always.
He wouldn't have wanted to live in that broken body.

— BARBARA CARNES, IN MEMORY OF HER FATHER, FRANCIS E. SLY

Some people have a chance to say goodbye to their loved one before he or she dies. These shared thoughts and feelings may be among the most poignant and remarkable moments in their lives.

But not all of us have a last farewell. For us, goodbyes must come in other ways. We can create our own goodbyes as we recall our loved one and connect with what is in our heart.

> I WILL TREASURE MY LAST GOODBYE TO MY LOVED ON. WHETHER LIVED OR CREATED, OUR PARTING WAS POIGNANT AND MEANINGFUL.

I can write about…

…a time when a goodbye marked the end of a relationship.

…the bittersweet feelings I have when I think about my loved one.

…my feelings of discomfort when other things in my life draw to a close.

JOURNAL THEME

Fitting in socially



Trying to fit in is a real dilemma for me… What am I – married or single? Where do I fit in now?

– ANONYMOUS

Knowing how we fit in socially or how to define our relationships can be confusing and hurtful after a loved one dies. If we lose a child, do we have two children or three?

It takes time to adjust to a changed life. How best to describe ourselves may be a matter of trial and error. Voicing our concerns to an understanding friend can help us feel more comfortable about our choices.

> I will be patient with myself as I work to fit in again. I am confident that I will soon come to know how best to categorize myself and define my relationships.

I can write about…

…a group of friends I once knew and spent time with.

…my feelings of guilt when I choose not to mention my loved one's death.

…how awkward I feel when friends or family won't talk about my loved one.

JOURNAL THEME

Their suffering has ended



What is much too real for me is the large lump of memories I carry in my heart of all the pain and sickness that were so much a part of over half of my son's life…I am very glad that he is free of that part of the human experience.

— DAN J. HENDERSON, IN LOVING MEMORY OF HIS ONLY CHILD, NATHAN

For some of us, there is a sense of relief knowing that the suffering that gripped our loved one's life is finally over. As a witness to our loved one's torment and distress, we experienced our own kind of anguish.

Now that the pain has ended, we can be grateful that our loved one has been set free.

> I CAN FEEL THANKFUL THAT MY LOVED ONE'S SUFFERING HAS FINALLY ENDED.

I can write about…

…a time in my life when I felt thankful for a positive ending to a difficult situation.

…what my loved one might say in response to being free of pain and suffering.

…my lingering sense of anxiety and guilt over my loved one's death.

JOURNAL THEME

Feeling deserted by our loved one



I don't feel like a survivor. I feel left behind.

— HELEN BEVINGTON, IN MEMORY OF HER HUSBAND

The death of our loved one can feel like an abandonment or desertion. We had planned to be together forever, and now, suddenly, we have to go on alone.

Like it or not, we cannot change places with our loved one. Nor would our loved one want us to. We are the survivors. We owe it to our loved one to go on, if only to honor our loved one's memory. In this sense, we don't have to feel abandoned or deserted.

> I CAN ACCEPT MY STATUS AS A SURVIVOR. I WILL MAKE THE MOST OF MY LIFE AND HONOR THAT OF MY LOVED ONE.

I can write about…

…something friends, family, or neighbors have done in honor of my loved one.

…what it means to be a survivor.

…my frustration and disappointment that life has not turned out differently.

JOURNAL THEME

Fear of additional tragedy



We were afraid that more tragedy would befall us…We became afraid of the dark, literally. We slept with a nightlight on for over a year.

— STEVE AND MARY VAN BOCKERN

When a loved one dies, many of us feel vulnerable and fear further tragedy. We worry that we've been singled out for disaster, and we react by trying to exert more control over our world. We want some assurance that we will not suffer further harm.

Our desire to control our world is understandable. For now, this may be how we are able to feel comfortable and safe.

> I will work to manage my fears and replace them with feelings of safety and comfort.

I can write about…

…something my loved one taught me about my own inner strength.

…wanting to be safe and protected from further harm.

…my anger at having already made enough sacrifices in life.

JOURNAL THEME

Life is looking up



Surprisingly, life is looking up, I never thought that I would see this day…I am pulling my life together, making right choices, consulting my brother as I go along, and knowing he's watching over us.

— MICHELLE DUBREUIL, IN MEMORY OF HER FRIEND AND BROTHER, RICH

It can be surprising when life starts looking up. One day we suddenly realize that the bad moments are stretching further and further apart and that, finally, our reservoir of strength has begun to fill again. Our grief may not have gone away, but at least we know now that we can survive it.

> I WILL APPRECIATE MY NEWFOUND SENSE OF STRENGTH. I CAN BE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT SURVIVING MY LOVED ONE'S DEATH.

I can write about…

…a positive change in my attitude or outlook on life.

…my appreciation for family or friends that have stuck by me.

…having some reserve strength.

JOURNAL THEME

Holding on to hope



One must hold on to hope;
Even when the days are darkest,
The hours the longest,
When the heart aches the heaviest,
And promises that were made never come true.

– FROM "HOPE" BY CATRINA GANEY, IN MEMORY OF LOSING A LOVE RELATIONSHIP

Hope gives us strength when we are grieving. Sometimes it is the only thing that enables us to wake each day, get out of bed, put one foot in front of the other, and go about our daily activities. Hope lights our way through the dark and lonely alleyways of our grief. With hope as our companion, we will survive.

I WILL HOLD ON TO HOPE AND RELY ON IT TO SURVIVE.

I can write about…

…a recent incident or experience that has given me hope for my future

…some good words of advice that I have received over the last few months.

JOURNAL THEME

The Prayers of Others



I truly believe my recovery was dependent largely on my friends' prayers. Letter after letter assured me, "We're praying for you."

— DOROTHY HSU, IN MEMORY OF HER HUSBAND, MIN

The prayers of our family and friends can help us heal. They reassure us that others love us, care about us, and want to help us. The prayers of family and friends give us the courage to believe that we can survive. And we are surviving.

I AM GRATEFUL AND APPRECIATIVE THAT FRIENDS ARE PRAYING FOR ME.

I can write about…

…my appreciation at receiving a card or note from a special friend.

…the difficulty I sometimes have asking for help.

JOURNAL THEME

Gratitude



…I am so glad you came.
So incredibly honored
To have known you at all.

– FROM "I'M SO GLAD YOU CAME" BY JUNE PETERSON, IN MEMORY OF HER DAUGHTER, COLLEEN KRYDER MURPHY

Whether our loved ones live for a long time or a very short time, we are honored and grateful to know them. Their presence in our life is an incredible gift. We are thankful beyond words.

> I AM GRATEFUL FOR THE GIFT OF MY LOVED ONE'S EXISTENCE. I WILL HONOR AND REMEMBER THEM ALWAYS.

I can write about…

…an ability or perspective of mine that I feel grateful for possessing.

…how I still feel out of control at times.

JOURNAL THEME

Our loved one's example



My dad left me so many gifts and good memories.He taught me to accept both love and death through his example.

– DICK FRIBERG, IN MEMORY OF HIS FATHER, ROY C. FRIBERG

Our loved ones are our role models, helping us learn how to handle both the hardships and the rewards of life. We are empowered by their examples, and our achievements reflect their influence. We can – and should – acknowledge the influence our loved ones have had on us.

I AM PROUD OF THE INFLUENCE MY LOVED ONE HAD ON ME. I WILL LET MY LOVED ONE'S EXAMPLE CONTINUE TO EMPOWER MY LIFE.

I can write about…

…an important life lesson that I learned from my loved one.

…my difficulty paying attention to my own feelings and needs.

JOURNAL THEME

Coming together again



I found that healing is like assembling a puzzle, beginning at its center and building outward without knowledge of a border or ending. As the scene develops, the intensity softens – the healing proceeds.

– ANONYMOUS

Our life may have felt very scattered and unconnected after our loved one died – all the pieces tiny and fragmented with no shape or form. Those early days and weeks were an agonizing struggle.

Fitting our life together again has meant facing unknowns and uncertainties. The order and meaning we have in our life today is born of hard work and effort. As we have reassembled the puzzle of our life, healing has taken place.

> I CAN RECOGNIZE THE EFFORTS I HAVE MADE TO REBUILD AND RECONSTRUCT MY LIFE. I HAVE HEALED AND WILL CONTINUE TO HEAL.

I can write about…

…one or two aspects of my life that feel better now and indicate to me that I am healing.

…someone who has inspired and helped me along the way.

JOURNAL THEME

PEACEFULNESS



Nothing can bring you peace but yourself,

— RALPH WALDO EMERSON

After the death of a loved one, it can be very difficult to regain a sense of peace. We are so angry, bitter, resentful, and envious in our grief. With work and time, however, we adapt and change. We grow in acceptance and feel a greater peace in our life.

> THE SENSE OF PEACE I NEED IS INSIDE ME. AS I CONTINUE TO WORK ON MY GRIEF, I WILL FEEL BETTER ABOUT MY LIFE AND THE WORLD I AM PART OF.

I can write about…

…a shift in my thinking or attitude that has helped me feel more at peace.

…how I am still working to accept my loved one's death.

JOURNAL THEME

Silent remembering



Losing my parents was devastating. Later, when the silence allowed a small, gentle flow of music to return to my heart, then and only then could I experience the depth of gratitude, appreciation, and pride for the richness of their lives.

— DR. BEVERLY MUSGRAVE, IN LOVING MEMORY OF HER PARENTS, MR. AND MRS. FRED P. MUSGRAVE

Our pain and sorrow can be so overwhelming that they obscure the beauty of our loved one's life. In the calm, quiet reflection that comes with passage of time, we can rekindle fond memories of our loved one. We have much to appreciate, and celebrate.

> In the stillness of my grief I can rediscover the beauty and richness of my loved one's life.

I can write about…

…something unique and special about my loved one.

…ongoing obstacles to my healing.

JOURNAL THEME

The loss experience



Guilt:
guilt when you smile again – laugh again
guilt when you start forgetting
guilt that you have the desire to live again
guilt that you get hungry and need other people

– FROM "FEELING THE LOSS" BY GISELA SCHUBACH, IN MEMORY OF ALL THOSE WHO LIVE IN HER THOUGHTS

Time has marched on, and so has our grieving. We are healing, if only little by little. Some of the devastation we originally felt has subsided, yet every once in a while it crashes down upon us again in full force. Is it okay to go on?

Guilt is always stalking us. But however much we may question ourselves, we must go on, if but to honor the memory of our loved one.

> I CAN ALLOW GUILT TO CHALLENGE MY CHOICES AND THINKING. IN THE END, I WILL CHOSE TO GO ON LIVING.

I can write about…

…one way that I have dealt with my guilt while grieving.

…what I've learned about grief and loss from a bereaved friend or coworker.

JOURNAL THEME

We never stop loving them



The best advice anyone ever gave me was to remember that I never have to stop loving her.

— ELIZABETH LEVANG, DEDICATED TO HER GRANDMOTHER, SALUTE BELLUZ

All of us experience some pressure to put the death of our loved one behind us and get on with life. When people admonish us that we are grieving too long or too deeply, we feel hurt, even confused.

Our grief has no end. We will love our special person forever. That is our right, our gift to our loved one and to ourselves.

> I HAVE THE RIGHT TO LOVE FOREVER. I WILL NEVER FORGET MY LOVED ONE.

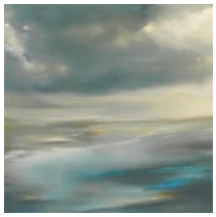
I can write about…

…a bittersweet memory I have of my loved one.

…a movie or book that has been especially helpful to me.

JOURNAL THEME

Drawing strength



My child was my guide in helping me grow even stronger in my relationship with my husband, with other people, and with myself…So even though my child never got the chance to grow physically, in my heart and emotions my child is a giant and a large part of my life.

— LOIS HOLMES, IN LOVING MEMORY OF BABY HOLMES

Our loved ones can inspire us. They can help us to live more productive and meaningful lives, to build closer relationships, and to understand ourselves better. Even in death, a loved one may open our eyes to other possibilities. The changes we make are that loved one's precious legacy.

> THE DEATH OF MY LOVED ONE HAS CHANGED ME. I WILL DRAW UPON MY LOVED ONE'S LEGACY OF LOVE FOR STRENGTH.

I can write about…

…what I consider to be part of my loved one's legacy.

…how comforted I feel when someone reminisces about my loved one.

JOURNAL THEME

Acknowledging our long struggle



We have learned what real love is about. We have learned, too, that courage and strength can grow as far as we are willing to allow them, and that the human spirit has no limit.

— CATHY GUNNING, IN LOVING MEMORY OF HER SON, FREDDY

The death of our loved one has been an agonizing experience. More than once we have been anxious or fearful about our own ability to survive. Our suffering has been profound. Healing has come slowly, day by day, week by week.

Still, most of us have had some triumphs along the way. We may have come to understand what love is, what life is all about, and what the human spirit is capable of enduring. Out of our suffering new truths have been learned and wisdom gained.

> I HAVE LEARNED SOME INVALUABLE LESSONS SINCE MY LOVED ONE DIED. I WILL CELEBRATE ALL I HAVE ACHIEVED DURING THIS LONG STRUGGLE.

I can write about…

…something I've learned about myself and others since my loved one's death.

…the worries I still have about making room for joy.

JOURNAL THEME

Lingering "whys"



I'm still trying to deal with the "whys." My daughter's cardiologist explained to me that they were able to learn from what happened to her and have been able to help three other babies… I know that someone else's baby would have died…but why did it have to be my Robin?

— DIANE CRATER, IN LOVING MEMORY OF HER DAUGHTER, ROBIN MARIE CRATER

Even after much time has passed, the "whys" may linger. Though some good may have come from our loved one's death, it may still seem unfair. We want answers.

Trying to understand the "whys" is natural. It is part of the process of healing. If nothing else, it helps to have someone who will listen sympathetically to our questions.

> I CAN WANT ANSWERS TO MY "WHYS." MY QUESTIONING IS A WAY TO FOSTER HEALING.

I can write about…

…any answers I have received that have proved helpful to me.

…how I have been able to walk through my fears.

JOURNAL THEME

Memories of the Heart



We cry for all the moments
We know will never be.
Now our memories must sustain us
As your spirit is set free.

— FROM "AFTERTHOUGHTS OF THE HEART" BY JOYCE LUNG AND LINDA MOXLEY, IN LOVING MEMORY OF ANN MARIE CAVNAR

Our life will never be the same. As we remember our loved one, there will always be regrets, sorrow, and a longing to have had more time. Our memories are our bond with our loved one. Though we will always grieve what we lost, we will also always remember what we shared, and in this way we will always be together.

I WILL ALLOW MY MEMORIES TO BE MY CONTINUING BOND WITH MY LOVED ONE.

I can write about…

…my need for some alone time once in a while to take care of me.

...how I want others to remember my loved one.

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