

# Unmourned Loss: Sabotaging Bodies, Minds, & Spirits



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[www.OpusPeace.org](http://www.OpusPeace.org)  
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## What Does the Word "Bereave" Mean?

Rob (Old English derivation)  
Didn't you feel robbed?  
Loss is not just about death.  
Have you taken a class on how  
to be a loser?  
Influence of American culture.  
Influence of military culture:  
families  
How many want to grow?



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## What is "Normal" Grief?

- Unique, yet boundaries.
- Time Frame as indicator
- Depression as process marker
- A Letter



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## What is Complicated Grief?

- Falls outside the usual time frames or depression
- The source is almost always the same
- Underneath superficial appearances of acknowledgment, the mourner has not actually accepted the reality of the death, but harbors an unconscious feeling that it can be reversed and the deceased will return. There is some chance to undo it. This causes unceasing searching.
- -Rando
- 12 inch journey from head to heart




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## Complicated Grief: Predispositional Risk Factors

- Factors surrounding the death
- Factors within the mourner
- Factors within society  
(Self-Explanatory)

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## Predispositional Risk Factors: Factors surrounding the death

- Sudden, unexpected death (especially if it's traumatic, violent, or random)
- Overly lengthy illness
- A child
- Perception that the death was preventable

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### Predispositional Risk Factors: Factors within the Mourner

- Relationship with the deceased that was markedly angry, ambivalent, or dependent
- Mourner has unaccommodated losses or stresses, or mental health problems
- Perceived lack of social support

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### Predispositional Risk Factors: Factors within Society

#### Disenfranchised Grief

- Invalidation of the loss (abortions, adoption placements, pets, dementia)
- Invalidation of the relationship (no kin tie, gay/lesbian, extramarital affair, ex-spouse, in-law)
- Invalidation of the mourner (child, elderly, mental handicap)

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### Grief vs. Depression

Triggers for mourning	s/s persist independent of triggers, events
Temporary loss of perspective	Persistent, distorted negative perspective
Agitated grief	Anergic grief
Variability of mood	Flat
Psychosis r/t deceased	Psychosis r/t self
Responds to encouragement	Prefers isolation

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## What is the Relationship between Complicated Grief and Trauma?

- IS PTSD!!
- Traumatic event experienced with fear, horror, helplessness
- Original event gets reexperienced
- Avoidance behaviors to minimize triggers
- Intrusions happen anyway



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- Change=letting go + opening up.
- Why is that scary, especially for those with PTSD?
- Why is control an issue for those with PTSD?
- Helplessness and Uncertainty acts as trigger
- They will resist grieving because they resist change they can't control!



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## Those Who Grieve Well, Heal Well

- What is a major factor that interferes with grieving?
- STOIC CULTURE



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## Stoicism

"Showing indifference to joy, grief, pleasure, pain".

(Webster's Dictionary)



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"Stoicism is not strength to overcome, but strength to hide. Stoics develop an attitude of unshakability toward life, a *passionless calm* attained by an effort of strong will and by a refusal to let one's self be touched by the ordinary emotions of grief, hardship, and loss of life. You should assert your mastery over outward events, or, if you could not do that, at least you should be *unaffected* by them."

- Rollo May  
(Love and Will)

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We are a society that is blatantly afraid of emotional pain. So...

- Unmourned loss is rampant.
- Unmourned loss is controlling us Unconsciously.
- Unmourned loss is sabotaging lives in subtle and not-so-subtle ways.

How would our world be different if we weren't afraid of emotional pain?

How would my world be different if I wasn't afraid of pain?

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### Stoicism Antidote



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### Influence of the Military on Bereavement Care (Veterans)

- PTSD don't trust easily or reach out.
- Stoicism. Not a gracious receiver of care. Isolation, "bunkering down."
- Groups: Veteran: "for cry-babies" or a "pity party".
- Personal Death or death of a loved one can trigger PTSD or activate grief from the many past losses during combat, which were often mutilating or guilt-laden.
- Brotherhood /Sisterhood continues into caring for fellow vets as they are dying.
- PTSD/alcohol abuse create multiple families, estrangements, forgiveness/reconciliation issues.
- Past experiences with death were violent and mutilating – not peaceful
- Might have anger/bitterness toward how they've been treated: medals, pensions, agent orange, keeping alive for pension.
- All veterans are eligible for free burial at a national cemetery, as well as their spouses.



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### 3 Concepts Intimately Linked but not Recognized



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### Influence of Military on Bereavement: Family Members

- Stoicism. Veteran and whole family system
- Validate influence of military/PTSD on family
- Foreign spouses: May not have support
- Military moving: no roots but also might know how to reach out
- Caring for someone with PTSD may increase caregiver burden.
- Family may not understand a veteran's inability to grieve family member due to their fear of unresolved grief from combat
- Secondary Gain: keeping alive for pension
- Multiple families. Who gets the flag?




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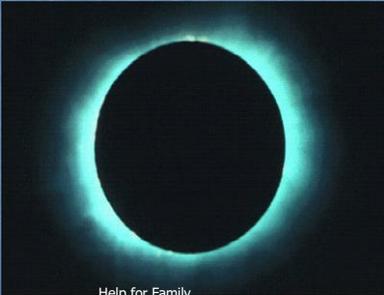
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### A Letter to the Bereaved




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"The wound is cut deep.  
 Somehow war has snuck past my skull and  
 ripped my brain apart.  
 Too many distortions and emotions to find.  
 The pain smells like rotten flesh.  
 It comes and goes, leaving a stain...  
 Wishing I could erase it and start fresh.  
 The mind plays cruel tricks after hours of  
 no sleep.  
 Nightmares turn into reality whether you are  
 awake or not.

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Even when you survive...  
 You become a black sheep hearing bone-chilling screams. Fire power put me in shock.  
 It feels like a dream – like those friends I lost never existed.  
 The confusion is unbearable. I'm in a time warp.  
 Trapped in my subconscious, I miss my life.  
 I feel like I'm in hell and I've already died.  
 Always on edge, I can't leave home without my knife.  
 Home in the States, I'm at war with my mind.  
 Nobody understands. Nobody is patient enough to care.  
 My loved ones never see the signs because I'm so confined.

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Most of the time, I'm smiling.  
 It's just to make others happy.  
 On the inside, I'm screaming and fighting for my life.  
 I keep wondering if there's a God,  
 then why am I so unhappy?  
 I should be thankful I'm alive.  
 Yet, I'm disappointed and sad that I survived.  
 The soldiers that died, if they were alive  
 would have thrived.  
 I'm just scared and weak all the time.  
 Angry and frustrated, I try to stay isolated to  
 protect myself from committing any crime.  
 This is the soul of a kid that Americans call  
 "A Hero."

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### Loss of the Person Sent off to War



Conflict if don't grieve → "Go back to the way you used to be." →  
 Guilt

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### What is Chronic Sorrow?

- Chronic sorrow is a natural grief reaction to losses that *are not final* but continue to be present in the life of the griever.
- Chronic sorrow is not about endings; it is about living with unremovable loss and unending wounds.
- It is about losses requiring – and even demanding – energy and persistent courage to cope with crises and making adaptations necessary in order to live a life of one’s own.

-Susan Roos, Ph.D., LMSW, ACPc BCD

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### Grief vs. Chronic Sorrow

Grief	Chronic Sorrow
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|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Loss with an end point or finality</li> <li>■ Loss that is known and permanent</li> <li>■ Loss subject to some resolution and lifting of symptoms</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Living with a loss that cannot be removed.</li> <li>■ A loss continually requiring energy for adaptations.</li> <li>■ The inevitability of more losses to come.</li> </ul> |
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### Validating Suffering: Essential!

- Taking time to “lick your wounds” BEFORE you “get on with it.”
- Validation is an act of self-compassion to acknowledge the loss.
- It counters DENIAL. (Don’t Even kNow I Am Lying.)
- “Licking your wounds” allows you to feel the pain so the part of self feeling it doesn’t have to be exiled into unconsciousness → numbing and/or angry outbursts.
- Allows you to cultivate some support for the loss.

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## How to Create Safe Emotional Spaces for Grief?

- Give Permission – even a prescription
  - Educate
- “Tears are your friend.”  
 “The only bad tears are uncried tears.”  
 “Your tears are safe here.”  
 “It’s good to see you cry.”  
 “Don’t choke down tears. When you feel the lump in your throat, let it on out in your tears.”




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### Learn to Grieve

#### (Unmourned grief weighs us down)

Stop **Dis-owning the pain**, leaving the part of you carrying it **homeless**.

**Re-own the Pain:** A process of being willing to deliberately discover scattered parts of ourselves that previously we had only wanted to avoid. Then...

**Re-home the Pain:** Open a nurturing relationship with our disconnected part of self so it can feel safe enough to reintegrate.

Grief is Creative. **Unmourned Grief** is destructive.

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## Let's Do some Grief work... ie. Healing

**Forgive Me**  
**I forgive you**  
**I love you**  
**Thank you**  
**Goodbye**  
**Let go**  
**Open up**




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## Integrative Rituals: Access the Unconscious

Ceremonies of Change: Becoming Unattached to "Same"

- \* Separation Stage: Identify the problem. Letting Go, Saying good-bye to "same"
- \* Transition Stage: Education to help with the confusion, uncertainty. Becoming unattached. Liminality.
- Incorporation Stage: Integration of new relationship with the world/others. Symbol of change.
- Examples: Funerals, Military, Religious services




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## A Gaping Hole in our Society! Unmourned Loss/Unforgiven Guilt



Soul Injury Restoration Ceremony:  
Veterans, Hospice Workers,  
General Public

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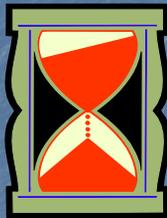
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## Does Time Heal?



One of the hallmarks of emotional maturity is realistic acceptance of the limitations and vicissitudes of life including mastery and tolerance of sadness, helplessness, and uncertainty.

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Start a Book Circle!

Start a Veteran Circle!

# Stay in Touch!

Leave your business card with me  
(or write email address on paper!)  
Utilize our website: [www.OpusPeace.org](http://www.OpusPeace.org)  
and [www.soulinjury.org](http://www.soulinjury.org)(Tools, Blogs)

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