

Reply to JDate Writer

You asked for what I am thinking about! I've been working on knowledge development for 57 years and characterize my results as "changing wisdoms." (my website is www.changingwsdoms.net). Since you are both a biologist and a recent widow, I think you might enjoy reading about it, but be warned, it might be too much for this setting or perhaps more than you wanted to know. I won't feel offended if you stop reading.

My wonderful wife of 40+ years died 6 months ago and 3 months later I got on JDate as per her wishes. I've experienced so much loss and trauma in the biographies of people on these sites that I've adapted my results to the issue of how to recover from loss.

My first client was, of course, myself and I had four insights that helped me manage remarkably quickly to recover normal life. The first one was that I needed to celebrate the time we had together rather than mourn the loss. Next, I had to stop thinking of her as lost, but conceive of her as being still present because of the way she had changed me over the decades. I like to tell people that, if you liked her, you would probably like me too.

The third insight came when I asked the internet "What is the survival value of grief?" The answer was that it was a vestigial outcome of human parenting. Our dependence lasts so many years that we have evolved a system for bringing a foraging mate back to a caretaking mate. It involves neurotransmitters in a circuit on the upper left parts of the brain. Separation makes us feel a drag that pulls us back together. When there is no "us" to get back to, that "drag" gets worse. In short, it's a vestigial organ

like the appendix and loss causes it to rupture in the form of grief. People who grieve for 3, 5, or 10 years have just lost years of potential pleasure due to a nonadaptive side effect of a process necessary for human preservation. So, that inspired my theorizing about ways to speed up recovery.

The fourth insight was that recovery from grief is complicated by new demands. For example, I also had to learn to do the things she did in our "division of labor" (dinners, laundry, bill paying). My work on changing wisdoms, has been shown to speed up learning in a variety of settings. So, I just applied it to myself. I lost a little weight (about 10 lbs. due to my "fabulous" dinners), but that was good for easing the mild arthritis in my spine enough to walk two miles again. My bills are all paid. And the laundry doesn't get folded right away like it used to. About that, I tell myself, "Give yourself a break, you're just learning." Not so, it's more that I'm a little lazy, but can now away with it.

I've proposed these ideas for a presentation at the Association for Psychological Science which will be in San Francisco next May on my deceased mother's birthday. I'm eager to see if they accept a proposal from an old guy like me. Especially because I will be able to spend time with my beloved little sister and granddaughter, when I'm out there.

Meanwhile, on nice days I get out and ride my recumbent trike or take a walk on Havre de Grace's beautiful boardwalk, go to Synagogue meetings and services, work with my Freemason brothers, talk and write with new JDate friends, and even occasionally have a date. Life is good. How are you coming?

Reply

"Thank you, David, for your kind, caring words. It seems grieving has defined me. You have suggested a better way to grieve without the terrible sadness. Of course, I have such wonderful memories with my bashert. My only deprivation is touch.

So glad to have met you; such an interesting way!

Most sincerely"