RANDOM HOUSE eBOOKS

Life After Loss

Raymond Moody and Dianne Arcangel

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About the Book

As the pioneer of modern research into the near-death experience, and author of the bestselling classic *Life After Life*, Raymond Moody has completely changed the way we view death and dying.

In his new book, *Life After Loss*, he and Dianne Arcangel (former director of one of the Elisabeth Kubler-Ross centres) examine why grief causes us so much suffering – and how it is that some people are able to transcend their loss and become more whole than ever before.

Taking up where *Life After Life* concluded, they describe the very latest findings on near-death experiences and show how individuals who believe that consciousness survives bodily death are more likely to go beyond their grief, and be transformed by it. Understanding life's 'greatest mystery' brings self-confidence and inner peace.

Using a mixture of personal stories and cutting-edge scholarship, this remarkable work will offer insight and support to anyone going through the bereavement process, as well as those experiencing any type of loss or separation.

About the Author

Dr Moody is a respected psychiatrist, lecturer and researcher, and the leading authority on the near-death experience. He has written several books since the phenomenal bestseller, *Life After Life*, and now runs an institute in Alabama called The Theatre of the Mind, which offers workshops for educators and professional clinicians.

Raymond Moody's seminal work, *Life After Life*, has completely changed the way we view death and dying. He is widely acknowledge as the world's leading expert in the field of near-death experience.

LIFE AFTER LOSS

Finding Hope Through Life After Life

RAYMOND MOODY
AND DIANNE ARCANGEL

RIDER
LONDON · SYDNEY · AUCKLAND · JOHANNESBURG

To you, the reader

Foreword

When archaeologists recently examined a Neanderthal grave that was more than forty-four thousand years old, they found traces of ancient pollen from hyacinth and hollyhock flowers, apparently the remnant of a garland left by a mourner. It was a poignant reminder that grief, loss, and bereavement have been part of the human experience for a very long time.

Some say this will change. Experts are predicting a sensational increase in human longevity in the near future. There is heady talk about postponing death indefinitely, as scientists unravel the mysteries of aging. So far, however, the statistics are compelling—everyone dies, no exceptions—which means that the primal sense of loss is unlikely ever to be eradicated.

Although death remains a constant, our attitudes toward it are changing. One of the most significant developments in Western cultures during the twentieth century was our increased willingness to confront death openly. Books on death and dying are bestsellers. Courses in "death mentoring" and compassionate care for the dying have become standard fare in medical schools, hospitals, and secular institutions. Hospice care of the dying is helping medicine reestablish contact with its spiritual roots. Talk of a "natural," "good," "peaceful," and "graceful" death abounds. Baby boomers, now in their fifties, who once wrote their own wedding vows, are now writing their funeral scripts in an attempt to personalize their departure and ease the grief of those left behind.[1]

One reason for these developments is the recognition that painful emotional experiences such as grief and loss can best be dealt with by entering them fully instead of ignoring them or burying them in the unconscious mind. As Buddhism says, “Welcome everything, push nothing away.” This is where Moody and Arcangel’s *Life After Loss* excels. There is no better practical guide for confronting pain and loss than their fine book. They write from personal insight and experience, and they have immense wisdom to share.

During the reign of materialistic science in the past two centuries, it became fashionable to consider human consciousness the equivalent of the brain. This meant that, with the death of the brain and body, consciousness was annihilated and total personal destruction was assured. This view not only deepened the experience of grief and loss for survivors; it reminded them of their own impending destruction as well. Today, however, many lines of evidence suggest that we must rethink the assumption that mind equals brain. The reason, in a nutshell, is this: scientific evidence shows that consciousness can do things that brains cannot. Quite simply, brains and consciousness are not the same.

In his investigation of near-death experiences (NDEs), Raymond Moody, Jr., has illuminated some of the evidence suggesting that consciousness may transcend the physical brain and body. Like the academic philosopher that he is, Moody is careful not to overstate the case for the survival of consciousness. Yet hope for survival is clearly in the air.[2] As a team of British physicians recently put it, “The occurrence of NDE during cardiac arrest raises questions about the possible relationship between the mind and the brain.”[3]

When we speak of grief and loss, what, actually, is lost? The physical body obviously dies, but what about consciousness? John Searle, one of the most distinguished

philosophers in the field of consciousness studies, has said, "At our present state of the investigation of consciousness, we *don't know* how it works and we need to try all kinds of different ideas."[4] Philosopher Jerry A. Fodor has observed, "Nobody has the slightest idea how anything material could be conscious. Nobody even knows what it would be like to have the slightest idea about how anything material could be conscious. So much for the philosophy of consciousness."[5] Recently Sir John Maddox, the former editor of *Nature*, soberly stated, "The catalogue of our ignorance must … include the understanding of the human brain…. What consciousness consists of … is … a puzzle. Despite the marvelous success of neuroscience in the past century …, we seem as far away from understanding … as we were a century ago."[6] These observations show that we are appallingly ignorant about the nature of consciousness, the relationship of mind and brain, and the origin and destiny of consciousness. It is important to acknowledge our ignorance, because this permits a greater openness to the new views of consciousness and perhaps for survival.

We are entering a renaissance in which scholars are investigating how consciousness operates beyond the brain.[7] For example, the evidence for distant healing and intercessory prayer is compelling and continues to increase.[8] As a result of this and many other lines of evidence, we are beginning to realize that some aspect of consciousness transcends the physical brain and is apparently nonlocal or *infinite* in space and time, thus eternal and immortal.[9]

Why emphasize these developments? Nothing, I believe, could be more important in annulling the sting of death and the sense of loss and grief following the death of loved ones.

I love the ambiguity of this book's title, *Life After Loss*. Life for whom? For those who remain? For the deceased?

My answer is: life for *both*.

Many people still believe that grief and loss are brute experiences that must be borne in isolation, solitude, and silence. *Life After Loss* demonstrates that this assumption is wrong. Practical steps can be taken to diminish the pain of grief, mourning, and bereavement, as the authors show.

This book is a work of love and caring, and only someone capable of deep compassion could have written it. The authors deserve our collective gratitude for nudging us toward the realization that, although we cannot annul death, that is not the final chapter for those who remain—nor, perhaps, for the departed as well.

—Larry Dossey, M.D

Introduction

Ours is a grief-denying culture. After a loved one dies, most people escape their feelings of loss by indulging in mundane things: work, food, liquor, drugs, music, television, exercise, sex, books, shopping, the Internet—the list goes on and on. Why not escape? Who wants to feel pain? Who wants to feel anything even remotely related to mourning?

What if you were to look across a deep, forbidding valley to envision a perfect place, high atop a beautiful mountain. Not only is this place beyond anything you have ever imagined; it is surrounded by everything you hold dear. Only one connection exists between you and this wondrous place—a bridge. That mountaintop is your optimum self, the person you were born to potentially become. In the valley lies the gulf of grief, and the bridge is mourning. Mountainous growth does not develop through joy and splendor, but from sorrow.

Glimpses of the bridge appear many times—when friends move away, Grandma goes home, holidays are over, relationships end, opportunities are missed, seasons change, and so on. Crossing that bridge, however, can only be achieved by having loved, lost, and mourned for someone dear to your heart.

Loss can be heartbreaking. It can be devastating. It can seem like the end of everything. Our journey began forty years ago in classrooms, libraries, and churches while we were trying to understand and manage our own grief. Our personal losses became catalysts for our professional work in the fields of thanatology (the study of death and dying)

and survival (life-after-death studies). As we were researching, counseling, and teaching, it became clear that others who were bereaved sought the same things we did: comfort, hope, and reassurance that our states of mind and emotions were “normal.”

This book is our offering to others; however, we did not write as experts teaching people how to grieve. We believe that each person is the lone expert for his or her grief. Although some readers will discover their own paths for mourning within these pages, we present no formulas. Formulas are not applicable to something as individualized as grief. Our intention is similar to Tommy’s.

Tommy’s Story

Tommy, only six years old, had been wanting a wristwatch. When he finally received one on Christmas Day, he was eager to show it to his best friend, Billy. Tommy’s mother approved and warned her son as he was leaving, “Now, Tommy, you are wearing your new watch and you know how to tell time. It takes two minutes for you to walk home from Billy’s, so there will be no excuses for returning home late. Be here before six o’clock for supper.”

“I will, Mom,” Tommy assured her as he scurried out the door.

Six o’clock came and went, but no Tommy. At six-fifteen, when there was still no sign of him, his mother became irritated. Then at six-thirty and still no Tommy, she felt angry. At six-fifty, her anger turned to fear. Just as she stood to go search for her son, the front door eased open. Tommy quietly stepped inside.

“Oh, Tommy!” she scolded. “How could you be so inconsiderate? Didn’t you know I’d be worried? Where have you been?”

“I’ve been helping Billy …” Tommy began.

“Helping Billy what?” his mother yelled.

Again the young child tried to explain. “Billy got a brand-new bike for Christmas, but it fell off the curb and broke and …”

“Oh, Tommy,” she interrupted, “what does a six-year-old know about fixing a bike? For heaven’s sake, you …”

This time, it was Tommy who interrupted, “No, Mom. I wasn’t trying to help him fix it. I was sitting on the curb beside him helping him cry.”

Our Purpose

Our intention, like Tommy’s, is not to try to “fix” anything. Grief is far too profound for anyone to fix. Although we cannot sit on the curb beside all those who mourn, we can offer words of comfort, hope, and inspiration as you cross your own bridge, in your own way, and in your own time. In some way, we can be there with you.

For You, Personally

Life After Loss was written for individuals in the throes of grief; however, our reflections can be applied to other losses as well. Some of this material will be exactly what you need, and some will not. We invite you to use what will serve you and set the rest aside, perhaps returning to it at a later time. How you find comfort within these pages is up to you; however, this book should never be considered a substitute for treatment or professional counseling.

Format

The text was designed to address the questions we are most frequently asked: How do some bereaved individuals grow stronger from their losses? How can sympathy be offered and received? What are the differences between functional grief and dysfunctional grief? When will my

suffering end? How do survivors rebuild their lives after loss? How can stress be managed? We conclude by presenting some of the blessings that loss offers and then list available resources, including books, magazine articles, newsletters, journals, associations, organizations, bereavement centers, crisis hot lines, support-group affiliations, and Internet sites.

At the request of certain people whose stories are told in these pages, we altered their names and other identifying details to protect their privacy. The integrity of their stories, however, remains undiminished.

ONE

Early Grief Experiences

> The child's sobs in the silence curses deeper
> than the strong man in his wrath.
> —Elizabeth Barrett Browning

The death of a loved one reactivates our very first experiences with separation and grief. People who grow stronger during times of loss are willing to explore their early encounters. Therefore, in this chapter we will examine five events that continue to influence us into adulthood: prebirth sensations, the experience of birth, attachment and loss, the introduction to the concept of death, and, finally, beliefs about mortality that were formed during childhood.

Prebirth Influences

Early on, psychologists disregarded prebirth recollections, insisting that fetuses were too underdeveloped to carry repercussions from intrauterine events. Numerous claims, however, have brought the issue forward. Mothers who were grief-stricken during their pregnancies attest that their children were born sorrowing. Other family members, and sometimes the children themselves, have made similar claims. Jenni's case carries reliable evidence that prebirth sensations can extend well into adulthood.

“I feel myself in a deathly dark room”—Dianne’s Story

For as long as she could remember, Jenni, a successful New York model, had carried deep-seated sorrow and fear, which she tried to resolve for many years.

It was midsummer, 1988, and everybody who could had deserted Manhattan—except Jenni. “I’m determined to resolve my emotional difficulties,” she said when we met. “I’ve tried every kind of counseling, even hypnotherapy, but every time a therapist told me to go back in time I felt myself in a deathly dark room and became hysterical. I still feel this continuous nagging restlessness in my heart. I don’t know where it belongs, and I’m tired of it complicating my relationships. I’m concerned about what I might uncover, but I have to do something. Dianne, will you help me?”

Our two hypnotherapy sessions produced the same results. “I’m in a completely blackened room,” Jenni relayed. “I have no hint of light in here. Voices … I hear loud muffled voices outside. Now I hear someone screaming … it sounds like my mother’s voice. I’m being tossed around. I’m so scared in here. Someone … Mother …”

Jenni was wincing and squirming; therefore, I reminded her, “We are in this together. You’re safe.” After she settled down, I asked, “What’s going on now?”

She tried to identify what was happening outside her confine, saying, “I can’t tell. I think … someone … someone is hurting my mother … now I’m … I’m in danger … all alone in here … in the dark … tossing around … everything is …” and, with that, Jenni’s body collapsed into her chair. Her breathing slowed.

“What’s going on now?” I asked.

“I’m just in here,” she answered.

“How old are you?”

“I don’t know. I’m little, very little.”

“Who else is there?” I asked.

“I’m trying hard,” she answered, “but I can’t tell.” Only vague, isolated noises penetrated her motionless boundary. Then stillness, quiet, and finally an eerie peacefulness comforted Jenni as she rested inside her small enclosure.

“Wow,” she said, opening her eyes. “Whatever happened is stronger in my mind. I felt like I was a young child, maybe two or three years old, and hiding inside a closet. I was helpless, listening as someone was trying to hurt my mother. But how could I, inside a closet, have experienced jostling like that? It doesn’t make sense. I have to find out what happened to me.”

The following week Jenni flew home to Asia to ask her parents about her childhood, but when she began to inquire, her mother uncontrollably sobbed. Her father scolded, “Don’t you ever bring that up again!” After that, she approached her maternal grandmother, who disapprovingly dismissed her as well.

“My trip ended in disappointment,” reported Jenni, “because I had to leave without answers to my questions. But at least I know there must be a story.” Haunted by her memories, Jenni was driven to uncover her past. Patiently, she waited for a family gathering.

Sometime thereafter, she was certain that her cousin’s large wedding was the perfect place for her to approach family members. With the flow of alcohol-fueled reminiscences, her questions seemed part of the fun. Jenni’s aunt, at last, revealed the troublesome event.

Many years ago, her father’s jealous mistress had broken into their house, taken a butcher knife from the kitchen, and proceeded toward the bedroom with murderous intent. Jenni’s mother, eight months pregnant with Jenni, awoke from a nap to see a figure creeping toward her. The mistress jumped onto the bed, cursing and lashing at the mother-to-be with the knife. Jenni’s mother struggled

desperately to defend herself and her unborn child, fending off her crazed attacker until her husband rushed into the room. A large muscular man, he grabbed the other woman from behind and was able to subdue her and drag her from the bedroom. Alone and too debilitated to move, Jenni's mother thanked God that the episode was over.

The attack explained the sensations Jenni had felt during her hypnotherapy sessions—her feeling of being tossed around while inside a dark enclosure, the loud and muffled voices, her sense of terror, and then, finally, a holy stillness.

"That was a miracle," Jenni wrote in an e-mail to me ten years after our sessions together. "I know that Divine Providence presented those events—my restlessness, the therapy, the vivid flashbacks, and then the family gathering. The experience taught me that God does not give us a spirit of fear, but one of power, love, and sound mind, and that has become my life theme. I went back to college and am now a licensed clinical social worker. I develop spiritually based programs for children in the United States and abroad. I've never before been this peaceful and happy."

Clinicians and researchers have gathered a great deal of evidence that suggests intrauterine events can leave impressions. This means that your first experience with grief could actually have occurred before you were born.

Birth Leaves an Imprint

The process of birth is intensely stressful for newborns, psychologically as well as physiologically. The initial separation may cause an anxiety that remains for life. Some psychologists believe that all human beings carry a deep-seated desire to return to the womb.

Other psychologists assert that life begins as a tabla rasa, or "clean slate," and that we form impressions of life and

the world around us only from the moment of birth onward. Accordingly, they argue that infants are not developed enough for any complex emotion, such as separation anxiety, to be created during birth.

A combination of the contrasting opinions offers practical insight. It seems reasonable that separating from the comfort of the womb would be stressful. After months of living in a dark, warm, stable environment, infants are suddenly exposed to a very different world. They are startled by bright lights, loud noises, open space, and cold air. Then they are passed from hand to hand to be washed, poked, and prodded. Birth can also be physically painful, as Dianne's three-year-old grandson, Silas, recounted to her daughter and then to her.

"It hurt me"—Dianne's Story

A team of twenty doctors and nurses crammed into the delivery room. After nine months of a difficult pregnancy and sixteen hours of complicated labor, K'Anne underwent a cesarean section and Silas was finally born.

"Three years ago, at this very moment, you were being born," K'Anne told Silas, pointing to her watch.

"It hurt me," Silas said, bowing his head.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"It hurt me real, real bad. I wanted to stay in there," he said, frowning.

Upon their arrival at my house, K'Anne (an occupational therapist with a second master's degree in psychology) pulled me into the kitchen. After repeating their conversation to me, she questioned, "He couldn't actually remember, could he?"

"I don't know," I said. "It sounds unbelievable. Do you want me to ask him about it?" After the family gathered for supper that evening, I posed the question to Silas, "Do you

remember the day you were born?" at which time he made the same statements.

We must all endure leaving the womb, and whether consciously remembered or not, this first great loss plays a fundamental role in the development of our early psyches.

Early Attachment, Separation, and Grief

We are born into this world totally dependent. We all need nourishment, warmth, shelter, protection, and love. Attachment and mourning are as primary and instinctual. Studies of attachment and separation expose the undiminished misery of both grieving human beings and grieving animals.

Attachment, Separation, and Grief in Animals

Just like people, many animals become grief-stricken by separation. Pets sometimes grieve themselves to death after their owners have died. Even though the separation may be temporary, some are in such despair that they refuse life-sustaining care. Numerous veterans report that when they left for war, their pets refused water and food and starved themselves to death.

Certain animal communities (elephants, for instance) rally around their dying, never faltering from their side. Observing such a community has carried a lifelong effect for Joe.

"What have I done?"

When Joe was ten years old, his dad gave him a shotgun. By the time he was twelve, he often ventured into nearby fields and woods alone. When no game was available, he would shoot any creature that moved, just to improve his

marksmanship. Joe sorrowfully recalled his last hunting experience.

Nothing was unusual about the day's expedition—that is, until Joe shot a seagull. As the beautiful white bird fell shrieking toward a nearby pond, dozens and dozens of seagulls rushed to its aid. They circled above their comrade lying mortally wounded at the water's edge. Their gentle flight was in contrast to their grievous cries. Soon, from every direction, many more seagulls joined overhead, until there seemed to be at least one hundred. High-pitched shrieks of mourning filled the air as they circled around and around in anguished protest.

Never had such an experience befallen Joe before. *What have I done … what have I done?* he thought. More birds than he had ever seen collected to fly vigil. The community of seagulls never wavered from its grieving flight, even after their comrade lay lifeless. Joe turned away, no longer able to tolerate the haunting sobs and forlorn circling of the graceful birds.

"I regretted what I had done," he explained, "so I began to run, thinking I would leave the aftermath behind. But I couldn't. The mourning flock made me realize that this one little seagull's life had been significant, and that *every* living thing had meaning and a right to live. I vowed never to harm another animal."

Although time and distance eventually separated Joe from the reverberating calls, the mourning he witnessed that day lingered in his memory. His experience catapulted him into a lifelong interest in attachment behaviors and loss. He verifies that all living species (human, nonhuman, wild, and domesticated) suffer grief. Grieving loss is as innate as eating when famished.

Early Attachment and Grief in Human Beings

Infants depend on attachment for survival.[1] Babies usually attach to their mothers first and cry out in grief when separated from her. Even though their separation may be only temporary, or even imagined, it can be intensely devastating. No behaviors are powered by stronger emotions than grief, and they do not disappear with infancy. Adults carry the same feelings and behaviors they experienced during their first year of life, along with others that develop through the years.

Grief Patterns Develop

Infants are not developed enough to understand their feelings of separation or grief, and, even if they could, they would not have the necessary verbal skills to express how they feel. As a result, they bring all those emotions into their next stage of development.

During the next stage, the second and third years of life, children begin to understand their feelings, and they also begin to develop the ability to express them. At that point, grief responses become more obvious. Unfortunately, few people realize that children hold a genuine need for attachment and that they need to express their sorrow when separated. Most adults respond by saying, “Stop that bawling,” “Big kids don’t cry,” “There’s no reason to cry,” or “Cry, and I’ll give you something to cry about.” The following examples chronicle how grief patterns can develop.

“We didn’t want you kids to raise a big fuss”

Emily and her two sisters were parents of six children, all between the ages of one and four. Early on, the three mothers agreed to share baby-sitting duties. Wanting to avoid their children’s crying episodes when being left behind, they devised a system for leaving them. Emily, for

example, made no mention to her children that they would be staying with one of their aunts for a few hours. When they arrived at the aunt's home, everybody gathered in the living room. Then, when it was time for Emily to leave, one of the adults distracted all the children by taking them into the backyard to play. But every time Emily's children returned to the room where they had last seen her, they panicked. "Mommy ... Mommy ... Mommy," they screamed and cried, beating on the door for her to return. Their feelings of abandonment, betrayal, and grief were dismissed by their aunt's scolding, "What's the matter with you? You know she'll be back."

Now fully grown, Emily's children's deep-seated grief, abandonment, and betrayal resurface with every loss, yet they dismiss their feelings—just as they were taught to do during childhood. One niece, however, probed into her background after her mother died. "What were all of you thinking?" she asked her aunt.

"We just didn't want you kids to raise a big fuss," was the response.

After understanding how her feelings had developed, Emily's niece explained to us, "I prepare my kids. I kiss them good-bye and remind them that I'll be back in a few hours. They might grieve a little when I leave, but they won't feel abandoned and lost the way I did."

"Here comes the funeral procession again"—Dianne's Story

From the time I was very young, my grandmother stayed with me while my parents worked. On my fifth birthday, my parents, older sister, and I moved from Hot Springs, Arkansas, to Houston, Texas, leaving Grandma behind. Although we visited her often, our departure for the long drive back to Texas always ended the same.

My mother and sister said their good-byes to Grandma inside her house and then hastened to our sedan. That gave Grandma and me time for our private and emotional good-byes. During my last few moments inside, I grasped for every millisecond by absorbing the aroma of her freshly baked buttermilk cake, the drip-drip-drip of her leaky kitchen faucet, the faded floral wallpaper, and Grandma's tight embrace in which I was lovingly enveloped.

Mother, meanwhile, patiently sat behind the steering wheel, while my sister, perched on two puffy pillows, drummed her painted fingernails against the rear window. After some time, Mother revved the car's engine, a signal that it was time to leave. As Grandma and I emerged through the creaky screen door, sobbing and clinging together, my sister loudly voiced her complaint, "Oh God. Here comes the funeral procession again."

Sitting down in the front passenger seat, I hurriedly cranked my window down to eliminate the glass that stood between my grandma and me. As the car rolled forward, I threw one last kiss. Wiping the tears with her dainty hand-stitched apron, Grandma looked as if her heart was breaking; nevertheless, her wrinkled hand moved to her mouth to return my kiss. I craned my head and shoulders around, my eyes ever longing to keep me connected to the grandma I so adored. Finally, a blur of houses stood between us. Grandma was gone again. "Oh, honey, please don't cry. If you cry, you'll get sick," Mother pleaded.

Such a little girl not to be allowed to have her feelings, but that is the way it is for most children. My mind, however, took Mother's warning one step further. My grandfather had died from an undiagnosed illness; thus, I made up the equation as follows: *If I cry, I will get sick, and if I get sick, I will die. Cry = get sick = death*. Tears became a survival issue, with only one way to cope—to hold them in, no matter what.

Some thirty years later, after my parents died, I felt as if my heart was drowning in tears. In my memory, I revisited my early losses and my pattern for dealing with them. I investigated crying, its effects on the immune system, and other grief responses. On the one hand, I know that Mother wanted to protect my health, and I will always love her for that. On the other hand, I learned beyond what she knew. I discovered that bottled sorrow is not beneficial to anyone's well-being and that tears actually eliminate toxins from the body. I now carry numerous conscious choices for reacting to separation instead of the unconscious *one*.

"I have grieved all my life"

In a home for unwed mothers, a seventeen-year-old gave birth. "Baby girl" became the newborn's identity. That's the way illegitimacies were handled back then, on June 28, 1922, in Fort Worth, Texas.

After three days and a long train ride, "Baby girl's" twenty-year-old adoptive parents arrived. The tiny infant with thick dark hair and a button nose was finally given a loving mother, a wonderful home, and a name: Leona.

"I remember life being so sweet," Leona said, as she reflected on her early years. "But then my mother got sick and had to have an operation. She died during the surgery. At the age of three, I had been orphaned twice. But we never talked about it," Leona said with a sigh. "I just grieved and grieved all to myself. It was awful. And it was fresh grief all over again when I started school, graduated, got married, gave birth to each of my children, and became a grandmother. I cried myself to sleep many nights, and not just on special occasions. Now I realize that I have grieved every day of my life."

As Leona's story points out, repressed grief can be resurrected, and not only during bereavement. Any longing

can initiate the original pain.

Introduction to the Concept of Death

Before the age of two, children have usually had an encounter with death. In premodern times, people were not sheltered from it; instead, death was a natural and intricate part of their lives. With the advent of our youth-focused culture, however, the subject of death has become verboten, and television is now the major introducing medium. Unfortunately, the violent scenes presented there teach nothing wholesome about dying. Death is not portrayed as real, nor is any sense of sorrow for the bereaved.

Children's first personal experiences with death are often the most vivid and color their perception for the rest of their lives. For many, it might be finding a dead bird or insect in the yard. Or perhaps a beloved pet or family member dies. Still others are introduced to the concept of death through a grandparent's mourning. Grief is so powerful that it can silently pass from one generation to another, as the following example illustrates.

Multigenerational Grief—Dianne's Story

Rays from the morning sun reflected rainbowlike patterns through my stained-glass goblet, a gift from a former hospice patient. I used it only when my spirits needed a lift, and I certainly needed it this day. My twenty-year-old cat, Cuddles, was not well, and the veterinarian had called to report that recent blood tests indicated that his kidneys were failing.

Cuddles was beginning to knead his snow-white paws on my robe when the telephone rang again. This time it was my daughter. "Hi! Let's have a birthday celebration!" she invited. "Silas is six months old today." But I did not feel

festive, and I did not want to expose them to my sorrow. After some thought, I decided that an outing would give me a break and I would avoid mentioning my sickly cat. Like a clown preparing for a party, I threw on my most colorful outfit and happiest face.

As I stepped inside their front door, my usual cheerful greeting “Hi!” was met by my grandson’s squeal of excitement. From across the room, his tiny outstretched arms were ready for his grandma. With his bright blue eyes and broad toothless grin, Silas prepared to leap from his mother to me. As the distance between us narrowed to a few feet, Silas’s delighted baby face completely changed. By the time he reached my arms, his sparkling eyes and upturned lips had wilted into the deepest expression of sorrow. Simply and calmly, he cupped my face in his tiny hands and fixed his eyes on mine. Then he draped his arms around my shoulders and snuggled his face against my neck. As if that were not enough evidence for multigenerational grief, he moaned several times. “He knows … he knows,” I said. Without Silas loosening his grip, I carried him to the sofa, where we sat nestled together in silence. Finally, I drew in a deep breath and explained Cuddles’s grave diagnosis.

Many children experience their first loss by intuiting a parent’s grief—grief that is silently passed from their grandparents to their parents, and then to them. In Silas’s case, my grief was passed directly from me to him. His example also illustrates that even infants are capable of feeling and expressing grief. Although Silas may not be able to recall this early experience, it will probably influence the way he copes with his own losses in the future.

Other people not only recall their first introduction to the concept of death but are profoundly influenced by it. Instead of being the Father of Near-Death Experience,