

Introduction

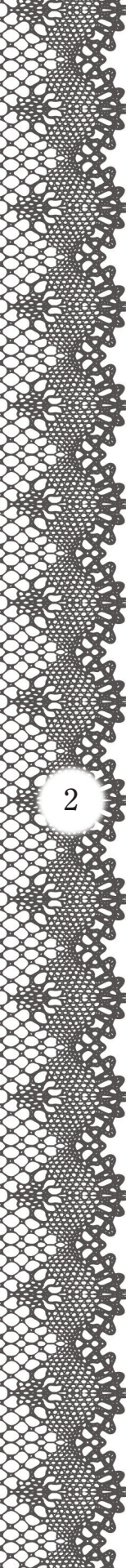
This coloring book is about the beauty and sorrow of grief and its relationship to resilience; it contains many personal stories and professional experiences that I share in order to illustrate aspects of grief and grieving that I have known firsthand. I hope you can use them as “nutrition” for your soul because stories are powerful and can open gateways to your inner life.

I’ve lived through the loss of my parents, the loss of my second husband to suicide, the loss of several special friends to old age, as well as my own experience with cancer, and a near-death experience from a serious car accident. Looking back, I can see now that each of these events opened up a place in my heart that had been unexplored and softened it, filling me with compassion for my own suffering and for the universal human suffering that is part of life. I earned a bit of wisdom each time, and I was given moments of grace that sustained me.

The grief journeys I have taken have given me the courage to keep loving others, even at the risk of one day losing them. With each loss, I become more comfortable with impermanence; I have gradually accepted that nothing lasts forever, and I know it isn’t meant to. That knowing does not rob me of joy or contentment, but, rather, it deepens me, and I keep falling in love with life, again and again.

I also found that music has the power to ground me, to lighten my heavy heart, and to help me heal. The creative arts, such as drawing, writing, and photography, are wonderfully effective ways to express my sorrow and other emotions of grief. The combination of music and art encourages my natural resilience to emerge and helps me regain my emotional footing. I believe they can help you in the same way.

I want to reassure you that grief is a normal and healthy reaction to loss, and so is resilience. We all have the capacity to learn how to live with our losses and to apply our own style of grieving to the healing process. This usually takes time and happens gradually. We don’t overcome grief—it’s



more like we make room for it in our psyche, and we find a place in which grief can co-exist with our other memories.

It is my experience that grief always brings a gift along with it. For example, grief can empower us and cause us to see the world in a different light, and, thus, it can be the spark that pushes us to say “yes” to life and make a move, change careers, get married, or leave relationships that are not healthy. Grief is a response to the loss of a loved one and a reminder that someday we will die too, and that knowledge is a gift. When we know we don’t have forever, it can help us live each day with mindful awareness and remember to show our love to those who are important to us. As my father used to say, “Don’t wait to give flowers until the funeral; give bouquets now while the person is alive.”

Four years ago, I was trained in the art of ceremony, rites of passage, and rituals through being certified as a Life-Cycle Celebrant®. Since then, I have incorporated simple rituals into my daily life as an accompaniment to morning prayers, walking my dog, cooking, and preparing for community events that I offer, such as quarterly Death Cafes. I have also added rituals into my coaching with clients who are undergoing significant life transitions in order to help them honor and respect the meaning of these changes in their lives.

I encourage you to learn more about rituals so that you can add them to your resilience-building resources. In my private practice as a life coach, I’m creating a workshop in which I will show attendees how to use this coloring book to self-nurture and to help honor the pain of grief and transform it into healing. While my workshops are held in Indianapolis, I encourage you to explore opportunities and workshops in your own community where creative rituals are used for building resilience and dealing with grief.

How This Book Came To Be

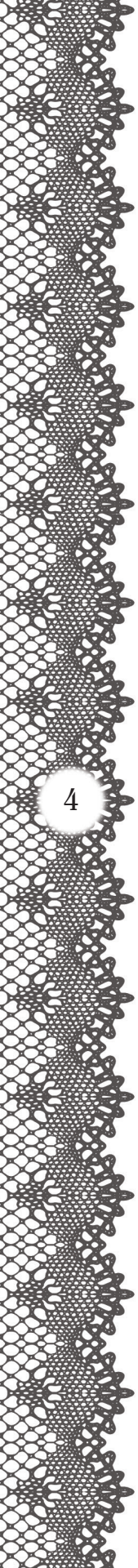
The vision of this book appeared in my mind's eye one April morning upon awakening. I had just finished a project, a musical concert titled "Music for the Soul: Celebrating Life and Facing Death" that I sponsored and hosted in my community. It featured two hours with a wonderful folk singer, Bill Cohen, whose music made the audience and me smile, tear up a little, and feel a sweet nostalgia. The concert had taken a year to plan, organize, and promote. When it was over, I felt a great sense of joy, contentment, and relief. I thought, *Well, now I will just relax and enjoy the summer.* It turns out that Spirit had other ideas.

The concert had been held on a Sunday, and the vision for this book arrived the following Tuesday morning. Clearly, Spirit intended that this grief coloring book was ready to be born and that I was to be the midwife chosen for its labor and delivery. I have written six books, and each one has first belonged to Spirit before being given to me.

I felt a familiar feeling that always happens when divine inspiration arrives: a feeling of quickening, excitement, and rising energy in my body. I have come to recognize this as my intuition speaking to me, and I welcome its voice.

Intuition is one of my best mentors; it has guided me through many life-changing decisions and transitions. It is the finest of all mentors because it wants only the best for me and the larger world to which I belong. It knows the impact that my inspired actions will have in the grand scheme of things to serve the Greater Good. It invites me to act on the nudges that it gently gives me and celebrates my courage when I follow those nudges. It offers me unconditional love and affection, and it conveys over and over to me a simple message: "I believe in you."

It's reciprocal: I trust my intuition. I accepted the invitation to create a book, which is now in your hands. Even if the only thing you read in my book is this introduction, please take my words into your heart and embrace these truths that I have been taught by grief:

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- Death ends a life, but not a relationship. Your relationship will go on as long as you can remember; it is our memories and our stories that keep that person alive in our hearts and our souls.
 - Resilience is a natural ability; it does not keep us safe from the pain of grief, but coupled with self-compassion, it is the fuel that helps us figure out how to cope, adapt, adjust, and go on living.
 - Sorrow doesn't last forever; one day you will wake up and not feel the same level of pain and suffering you have been feeling. Something will have shifted.
 - You can't rush grief. Some people seem to believe that grief is something you can get over, like having the flu, but grief will take all the time it needs to be imprinted on your soul and gradually integrated.
 - A broken heart needs to be comforted, free of your own judgment and the judgment of others, in order to heal. Your way of grieving is uniquely yours, just like your fingerprints are like no one else's. As long as your style doesn't hurt you or anyone else, it's within normal boundaries.
 - Grief will change you forever; the "old" you is no longer present or retrievable. Let go of that old identity, and let yourself feel your pain fully without resistance. Listen to your inner wisdom, and you will naturally evolve into a new version of you. This version is older, wiser, and worth celebrating one day in a blessing ceremony.

Finding Our Way Home

I invite you to consider this proposal: when we are elders, approaching our last days on this earth, and we reflect on how well we did living our life to the fullest, three simple questions will focus our attention:

- Did I love well?
- Was my life meaningful?
- Did I fulfill my life's purpose?

Grief and loss have never held me back from living my answers to these questions. It is during the times of my deepest sorrows that I have devoted myself even more to these aspirations:

- Having my heart cracked open allowed me to give and receive more love.
- Writing eulogies for those I loved who died helped me see more clearly where meaning could be found.
- Wise teachers have taught me to assume that my life's mission won't end until I take my last breath, that I should keep learning and stay open to change so that I can continue to give my time and talents where they are needed.