

LIFT

Grief is a process, not a state. –Anne Grant

July 2022
Bereavement Newsletter

Living Is For Today
West Texas Rehab's Hospice of San Angelo

Grief Education Support Group
Tuesday, July 5, 5:30 pm
WTRC/HOSA Bates Bereavement Center
1933 University Avenue

Monthly Luncheon
Tuesday, July 19, 11 am
WTRC/HOSA IDT Room
1933 University Avenue

For more information about any of HOSA's bereavement offerings, please call the Bereavement Department at 325-658-6524 or email Karen at kschmeltekopf@wtrc.com.

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## EXCERPT: COLORING YOUR WAY THROUGH GRIEF

By Jane Brody, NYT (May 16, 2016)

Deborah S. Derman, a professional grief counselor in suburban Philadelphia, has clearly suffered more than her fair share. "The field of grief counseling found me," she said, "because I had such a long history of loss." [*The article details the suicide of her boyfriend when she was a young adult, the death of her parents in an airplane crash which she witnessed, and the sudden death of her husband when he was 39.*]

"Healing is a lifelong process, and elements of grief can occur at any time, she said. "I've been widowed now for 24 years, but when my son got into medical school, I cried because my husband and parents weren't there to see it. My daughter is about to graduate from college, and we will both cry because she never even knew her father. Her grief is different, but it's not absent."

Now Dr. Derman has produced an intriguing new tool – an adult coloring book intended to help others "get through tough times." Called "Colors of Loss and Healing," the book consists of 35 pages of lavish illustrations to color, each relating to a word or phrase, like "one day at a time," "bitter and sweet" and "resilience," meant to evoke thoughts and feelings that can help to promote healing.

Opposite each illustration, designed by Lisa Powell Braun, is a blank page with the heading "My palette... my words... my thoughts," to prompt people to write down the feelings the words and phrases in the illustrations evoke.

While art therapy has been used for decades to help people express what they can't put into words, filling in the spaces of a coloring book has a different kind of benefit: enabling people to relax and be more focused. Marygrace Berberian, a clinical assistant professor in art therapy at New York University, said, "Research has shown that art making can have a profound impact on a person's physical and psychological well-being. And coloring within an outlined structure can help to contain and organize feelings of distress and helplessness."

In 2005, Nancy A. Curry and Tim Kasser of Knox College in Galesburg, Ill., reported in *Art Therapy, Journal of the American Art Therapy Association*, that coloring mandalas reduced anxiety in undergraduate students, a finding that has since been replicated and expanded. Today, there are adult coloring books to help alleviate stress and anxiety, release anger, induce calm and enhance mindfulness.

Dr. Derman's idea for her book was prompted by a coloring book she received for her birthday. "I colored one space, then another, and another, and realized this is how I proceeded through my life – one small step at a time. This is a good paradigm for how a person gets through loss, one day at a time. After my husband died, I didn't think I could make it through a whole day. I looked at my watch – it said 10 a.m. – and I made a deal with myself to make it to 11, then 12, then half a day."

The book is meant to help people with losses of every kind, including illness, divorce, financial ruin, post-addiction – anything that might force people to redefine their identity.

Dr. Derman emphasized, "It's not a recipe book. It doesn't dictate how people should feel. We all go through grief and loss in very unique ways. One thing I've learned from my life and the hundreds of people I've counseled: Don't try to pretend it didn't happen and walk away fast."

### How to Use This Book

By Deborah Derman, Introduction, "Colors of Loss and Healing"

Clear a space for coloring. Remove the bills, the legal documents, medical records, and mail from the table. They will only serve to distract you. This is your time to be calm and focused. Take a few minutes each day to sit and color. Take as little or as much time as you'd like.

The pages can be colored in any order. When you start to color a page, focus on the page's word. What meaning does that word have for you? Grief is not an orderly affair and these words can apply at any time in your healing process. "Wisdom," for example can happen early in loss, and certainly appears as we go through healing.

Color whatever word or which illustration appeals to you at the moment. The right way is your own way. Everyone's journey is different, and your thoughts and feelings will be uniquely yours. Coloring gives you the time, however, to take pause.

This book also has blank pages for your own journaling. Take the time to write down your own words, thoughts, and feelings as you go through each page. What things do you cherish? How do you value family and friends? What small steps are you taking toward healing? No one goes through loss and grief in exactly the same way. Write. Draw. Experiment with color. It is your journey and your process, and it is unique to you.

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