



# shalem *Digest*

Spring 2016

TOPICS OF INTEREST TO FRIENDS OF SHALEM MENTAL HEALTH NETWORK

## When Grief Overtakes Us

BY BERNADINE TOGERETZ

*Jules\* has been coming into my office once a month for a while now. He has been sharing his sadness and grief, missing Jani deeply. Together we are journeying through the grieving process. Understanding that sometimes life hurts. Really, really hurts.*

When I hear the words “my heart is broken”, I can be reminded of so many different sadnesses. The death of someone I love, the end of a relationship that was very important to me, having to watch someone I love suffer in pain. Reading these words, hearing about this can make me want to turn away from the subject of grief. Why would I want to talk about sadness or grief? Talking about it can make me feel so helpless. What good is it to be reminded that there is pain in this world all around us?

And yet, we need to talk about it. We need to

understand that the feelings and emotions associated with the grieving process are normal and natural. Even though we don’t always enjoy these feelings and emotions, they are part of our journey in life. And we want to reach out and be there for the people we care about, those who are tender and hurting because they are carrying a heavy burden of grief that can feel overwhelming.

When someone we love dies, we each grieve the loss in our own way. We may feel numb or sad, empty or insecure, angry or hurt. We may

also be reminded of a wonderful memory and feel happy or laugh, only to have an aching sad memory come and take its place, leaving us feeling heavy and hurting. Grief can seem like an emotional roller coaster ride. Days of feeling stronger and calmer may be followed by a return to intense grief and sadness.

### THE GRIEVING PROCESS

It is helpful to understand that grieving is a process. The first part of this process is *becoming aware* of the loss that has occurred. Becoming fully cognizant of a loss can happen suddenly or take place over a longer period of time. “I can remember feeling ‘surreal’ when she died. We had been living with her and caring for her, and when she died, I did the things I was supposed to do. I cleared our things from her home, and moved back to our house, I met with our extended family as preparations for her funeral were made, but I really didn’t feel anything. I was numbly going through the motions. One day—a few days later, I was in my car driving home from a visit with a friend and a song came on the radio. Listening to this song opened up a floodgate of emotions for me and I needed to pull over—I had started sobbing—body shaking, ugly crying. She was really gone. Her death was becoming real for me.”

During the time it takes to become aware of a loss, a person may feel numb or seem distracted. Rituals and events like Funerals and Memorials are helpful in deepening our ▶

\* Jules, Jani and ‘she’ are all based on my personal experience with grieving and a composite of the shared experience of various clients over the years.



▶ awareness and helping us move towards acceptance of the loss that has occurred. Grieving is a paradox – it is a personal journey where everyone grieves in their own way, and yet there is relief when we share how we are feeling with others. When we can look into the glistening eyes of someone who shares our sorrow, there is relief and comfort.

Grief can also cause conflicted feelings. “I was happy and relieved that she was no longer in pain; that her suffering was over. I was sad for my children that they wouldn’t see her eyes twinkle with joy when she talked with them anymore, or be there to witness my daughters graduations or weddings.” Or perhaps the person had caused me real harm. Feeling both despair and relief is one of the confusing aspects of the grieving process.

Spiritually we may also respond in conflicted or confusing ways. Some of us may find great comfort and support in turning towards God and trusting in his grace, in knowing that our loved one is rejoicing with God, while others may begin to doubt our beliefs in the face of a

tragic loss, wondering how a loving and caring God could allow such a senseless and painful tragedy to occur. David expresses this deep suffering beautifully in Psalm 88 when he cries out to God, “Why O Lord do you reject me and hide your face from me? ... You have taken my companions and loved ones from me; the darkness is my closest friend” (verses 14 and 18).

### THE GIFT OF PAIN

Allowing ourselves to experience this pain is part of the grieving process. Phillip Yancey talks about this in his book *Where Is God When It Hurts?* The “gift of pain” alerts our bodies to pay attention to what we are feeling and take action to aid in our recovery. We may be tempted to try to block feelings of intense pain, but this can be dangerous. The pain receptors in our brain are there for a very good reason. Yancey provides an example of this. Years ago, a star basketball player wanted to keep playing basketball despite having a badly injured ankle. His team doctor injected painkillers into his ankle to numb his pain and this worked! He went back out to

play but during an intense part of the game, his ankle snapped. He was oblivious to the pain and continued to play for a little longer. Unfortunately this caused permanent damage to his ankle and his promising basketball career was finished.

### SEEKING SUPPORT

Seeing the grieving process through this lens, we can respond to “the gift of pain” by listening to our body and seeking support. Rather than trying to find ways to numb the pain (such as alcohol or drugs) we need to allow ourselves the “time, talk and tears” needed for recovery. We need to recognize that there isn’t a timeline for grieving. We may feel that we are on the road to recovery but then feel overwhelmed by sadness or loneliness for a time. We will need to find a way to express our feelings. This is where being a part of a supportive community can be very beneficial. Biblically speaking, we know that it is in the context of shared lament that hope emerges. Knowing that we are loved and supported through the roller coaster experience of grief is extremely valuable. Talking

with a counsellor, a pastor, trusted friends and loved ones is often very helpful. Grief support groups allow people who are grieving to feel supported and support each other. If you attend a Congregational Assistance Plan (CAP) church, call 1.866.347.0041 to receive anonymous, free counselling support from a local counsellor. A doctor can also help when the emotional pain of this process feels overwhelming.

Sometimes this grieving process can become complicated. Over time the intensity of our grief should start to fade. If it seems to linger or grow in intensity over time, it would be a good idea to check in with our doctor. If you or someone you care about continues to be overwhelmed by intense emotions, or seems unable to function in daily life, you or they may be experiencing complicated grief. A doctor can assist with this, providing recommendations for therapeutic support and medication as needed.

### LIVING A FULL LIFE

Leo Tolstoy once wrote, “Only people who are capable of loving strongly can also suffer great sorrow, but this same necessity of loving serves to counteract their grief, and heals them.”

Living a full life means that at some point we will experience what it is to grieve. The grieving process is not about blocking or forgetting. Rather, it is about acknowledging the impact that our loved one, family member, friend or colleague has had on our life, honouring and remembering him or her, while at the same time accepting and staying open to our pain. These ongoing courageous acts will move us forward on the journey of healing. ◀

**Bernadine Togeretz, M.S.W., R.S.W.,** is a Registered Social Worker and a Counsellor at Shalem. Bernadine also offers Family Group Decision Making Conferencing as part of Shalem’s new “Restorative Families” service. She can be reached at [bernadinet@shalemnetwork.org](mailto:bernadinet@shalemnetwork.org)



### FOR FURTHER READING...

Books that I found to be helpful as we journey through grief:

James, J.W., Friedman, R. (2009) *The Grief Recovery Handbook*, 20th Anniversary Expanded addition, Harper Collins, New York

Nouwen, Henri (2004) *Turn my Mourning into Dancing: Finding Hope in Hard Times*, Thomas Nelson Inc., Nashville, Tennessee

Yancey, Philip (1977) *Where is God when it Hurts*, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Online Resources that can be helpful:  
Ontario

<http://bereavedfamilies.net/affiliates.htm> Bereaved families of Ontario has a website that provides support for families who have lost a loved one. They also provide access to local resources in Ontario (such as local grieving support groups for children and youth)

International

<http://griefnet.org> This website offers online support groups for people who are suffering from grief for a wide variety of reasons. A small fee is involved in accessing these groups.

<http://kidsaid.com> This website was set up by Griefnet.org and is available for parents and children to visit where children can help each other deal with grief and loss.

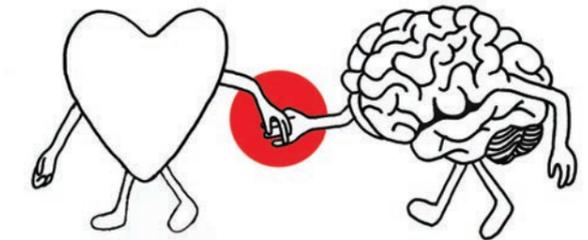
### STAGES OF GRIEF

In an attempt to assist people who are grieving, counselors and therapists will break down the grieving process into steps/stages. I will share with you some of the widely accepted stages of grief with one caveat—everyone’s experience with grief is unique. These stages are not intended as a prescription for how to do grief well, more as a tool to help you understand and normalize what you or someone you love may be experiencing.

- Stage 1 – Denial (shock, numbness, protest)
- Stage 2 – Emotional Intensity, acute awareness of loss (despair, anger)
- Stage 3 – Disorganization (confusion, bargaining)
- Stage 4 – Sorrow (sadness, depression)
- Stage 5 – Reorganization (acceptance)

Please also keep in mind that these stages don’t always follow each other neatly. We can often move between stages, as we travel through this process towards peaceful acceptance.

SHALEM is thrilled to host the upcoming attachment conference:  
**Recovery through Relationship**  
**ATTACHMENT, TRAUMA, AND THE BRAIN**



**NOVEMBER 28 & 29, 2016**

**LOCATION**  
Michelangelo’s Conference Centre  
1555 Upper Ottawa Street, Hamilton, ON

**TIME**  
9:00 am - 4:30 pm

**COST**  
\$300 before Sept 30, \$350 after Sept 30  
includes lunch and refreshments

#### WHO SHOULD ATTEND?

**Couple therapists:** learn the interplay of trauma and negative patterns, and effective interventions to create change.

**Child and family therapists:** learn about the impact of broken attachment and trauma on family relationships and neurobiological development, and learn effective interventions to build secure attachments.

**Therapists working with individuals:** learn how client attachment history impacts current relationships, growth and healing.

Join us for two exciting days with two leading experts in the field of attachment and trauma recovery. Dr. Sue Johnson and Dr. Janina Fisher will draw connections between attachment, trauma, and the newest insights into the neurobiology of relationships, with a focus on effective clinical interventions.



Dr. Sue Johnson



Dr. Janina Fisher

[WWW.SHALEMNETWORK.ORG/WORKSHOP/ATTACHMENTCONFERENCE](http://WWW.SHALEMNETWORK.ORG/WORKSHOP/ATTACHMENTCONFERENCE)

You are invited to  
join us for our  
**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

### LOOKING IN, LOOKING OUT

Come and hear from Shalem Board and Staff about exciting developments in 2015, and what we anticipate, with God’s grace, lies in store for 2016.

**THURSDAY, MAY 26, 2016**

11:00 am - 12:45 pm

First Hamilton  
Christian Reformed Church  
181 Charlton Avenue West  
Hamilton, ON

A light lunch will be served. Please contact our office to RSVP and for a copy of our Annual Report or for details on becoming a member. These documents are also posted on our website.

Shalem is committed to best practices in mental health and is a member of Family Service Ontario. All services are offered in strictest confidence.

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Mental Health Network

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## { DIRECTOR'S CORNER }



**MARK VANDER VENNEN,**  
MA, M.ED, R.S.W.  
Executive Director

### GRIEF AND CELEBRATION

Dear Friends of Shalem,

The past few months at Shalem have been a poignant mix of celebration and pain. Perhaps you have experienced such times in your life, when joy and grief become so intertwined that it is difficult to make sense of it all.

#### OUR GRIEF

The journey of grief that Bernadine Togeretz writes about in this issue has been all too real for us at Shalem. Andrew Debicki, Shalem's WrapAround Development Director, passed away suddenly and unexpectedly on February 10, 2016. Ten days later, Gord Hope, a much-loved therapist who, due to complications from leukemia treatment, had left us a year earlier, also passed away. They were both 61 years of age.

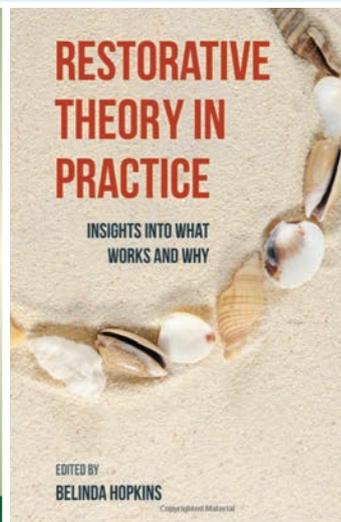
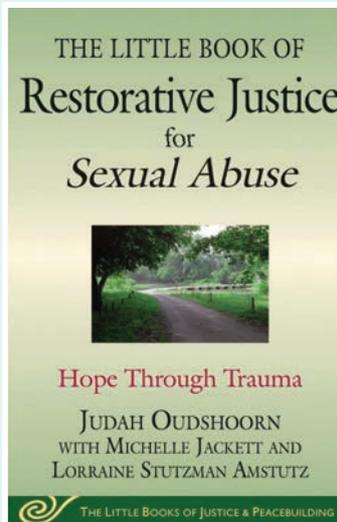
These losses have left us reeling. Both men were treasures, deeply loved, whose contributions to us and to our field were extraordinary. As a staff, we have supported each other, even as we work to support their families. For more extended tributes, please see our eNewsletter, *The Shalem Networker* ([www.shalemnetwork.org/shalem-networker/](http://www.shalemnetwork.org/shalem-networker/)). Through it all, we have felt upheld by the grace of God, even as we walk through the hard, real stages of grief outlined by Bernadine. As the apostle Paul writes, "we are not people without hope" (I Thess. 4:13).

#### OUR CELEBRATION

Our grief is made all the more poignant by a sense of celebration at the growing reach of Shalem's work. Through our affiliation with Wrap Canada, the training and support done by Andrew Debicki continues unabated—supporting Healthy Child Manitoba in its province-wide implementation of WrapAround, and youth gang-diversion



Front and centre—Gord, Andrew and the rest of Shalem's staff, 2014



programs based on the WrapAround model developed especially by Andrew in Edmonton, Calgary, Winnipeg, Brampton and Montreal (two sites). Dr. Eric Bruns, Director of the National WrapAround Initiative in the US, wrote me: "To my eyes, Andrew was a national treasure for Canada." He was indeed a national treasure.

Our Restorative Practice work reached a new milestone with two major publications. The new *The Little Book of Restorative Justice for Sexual Abuse* profiles Shalem's FaithCARE program as its prime example of a community-based restorative response. And the new book *Restorative Theory in Practice* contains a chapter by me entitled "Towards a Relational Theory of Restorative Justice", drawing on the linkage between Shalem's attachment and Restorative Practice work.

From 2013 to 2015 the number of people we have walked alongside across all of Shalem's programs increased dramatically. In 2013 we worked with 1,153 people; in 2015, 2,932 people. And we are pleased to announce our new "Restorative Families" service, a joint effort of our Counselling and Restorative Practice programs, featuring Family Group Decision-Making and, where called for, restorative approaches in clinical situations.

Finally, we celebrate the launch of the Shalem Mental Health Foundation, a separate organization that has been in development for several years. Its purpose is to support the Shalem Network with gifts and donations. Please see *the Insert to this Digest introducing the Foundation to you*. And please welcome the Foundation by directing your financial support to it!

Thank you! Thank you for your extraordinary, generous support, as together we seek to live out the Gospel in mental health in today's world. And please pray for us as we continue to walk along the journey of grief—we covet your prayers during this time. May God bless you on your own journeys!

Yours in Christ,