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Grief River:
A Nature Inspired Map for Understanding Grief and Loss

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Grief River

*"Losing a loved one is life's white-water trip on a river of tears."
Margaret Brownley*

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Different ways of describing grief over time

Grief is a “process”

Grief is a “journey”

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Models and Maps

- Provides an overview so we can get our bearings
- Offers us direction
- Gives us a sense of how long the journey might take
- Suggests obstacles to look out for along the way
- Instills some confidence to move forward



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The “Waves” of Grief

Grief is “Episodic”



Waves Waves (Space) Waves (Space) Waves (Space) Ripples

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Phases of a River

- Headwaters
- Rapids
- Run
- Delta
- Rejoining the Sea

Phases of Life (not "stages" of grief)

Grief River
The phases of a river offer a helpful metaphor for understanding grief and loss over the course of the entire journey of life.

Headwaters
Rapids
Run
Delta
Rejoining the Sea

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Rapids

Our "embodied" response to loss

- Grief impacts the whole person
- Consider the contours of your "grief environment"
 - Concurrent stressors
 - Disenfranchised grief
- Confluence

Throughout the course of a river there may be many sets of rapids, large & small

Rainbow Trout

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Headwaters

Life before loss

- Prior experiences of death and other losses
- Length and character of the relationship
- Circumstances surrounding the loss
- Pre-existing coping skills
- Personality & temperament
- Spirituality and religious beliefs
- Culture and ethnicity
- Addiction and mental health issues

Dragonfly

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Run
 At some point the landscape evens out

- We are able to refocus on the scenery and the events of everyday life and "go with the flow"
- A run may extend for a long period of time with no conscious grief work occurring
 - However, grief remains an undercurrent
- As the months and years go by, survivors learn to adjust to the currents of life without the deceased as their captain or rowing partner
- We are able to explore the "big questions"
- Life transition



Great Blue Heron

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Delta
 When we come to the end of our own journey

- The pace of life will slow down
- We will experience the death of loved ones and use those experiences to inform our own dying
- We may be challenged by our own health issues
- We will review our life
- Some get stuck in the backwaters of bitterness, others will accept it all with wisdom and gratitude and allow the natural flow of life to carry them on toward the sea



Turtle or Alligator

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Rejoining the Sea
 All rivers eventually lead to the sea

Eventually we all join our loved ones who have gone before us; eventually, we all die

Depending on your perspective:

- Heaven or Hell
- Reincarnation
- Conversion to cosmic energy
- Nothingness



Manatee

Death is either the end of the journey or it is the beginning of a whole new adventure

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“You don’t get over grief, but you do get better at it.”

- Learn how to navigate the waves
- Discover who and what can help
- Don’t freak out (as much)

“You must learn to run your kayak by a sort of jujitsu. You must learn to tell what the river will do to you, and given those parameters see how you can live with it. You must absorb its force and convert it to your use as best you can. Even with the quickness and agility of a kayak, you are not faster than the river, not stronger, and you can beat it only by understanding it.”

Slung, Curtis, & Perry,
Whitewater



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If grief were a river, what would you need for the trip?



Provisions



Paddle Partners



Food



Sandbars



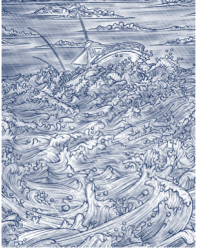
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Troubled Waters

Emotional Flooding

- Dams, Dikes, and Debris
- Create an Emergency Flood Plan



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Four Healing Streams

Grief is just one of the currents of life

- Communication
- Community
- Creativity
- Creation

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Taking this Longer View

Gifts of Grief

- Gratitude
- Compassion
- New skills
- Internal resources
- New companions
- Spiritual growth
- Reflection/wisdom

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Hope for Weary Travelers

<http://griefriver.com>

Grateful appreciation to Ernest Luther for all the illustrations

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Questions?

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Books about Nature and the Cycle of Life


- *Wild Comfort: The Solace of Nature*, Kathleen Dean Moore, Trumpeter, Boston, 2010.
- *Earth Prayers: 365 Prayers, Poems, and Invocations from Around the World*, edited by Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon, HarperOne, San Francisco, 2009.
- *Life Everlasting: The Animal Way of Death*, Bernd Heinrich, Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, New York, 2013.
- *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teaching of Plants*, Robin Wall Kimmerer, Milkweed, Canada, 2013.
- *Lifetimes: The beautiful way to explain death to children*, Bryan Mellonie and Robert Ingpen, Bantam, New York.

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About the TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing®

Launched in March 2018 through an alliance with HFA, the TAPS Institute for Hope and Healing® serves as a resource and training center, providing programs for both professionals working in the field of grief and loss and the public.



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Upcoming TAPS Institute Webinars

- February 18** **Who Am I Now? Life After Caregiving Ends** (Noon-1:00 p.m. ET)
• **William G. Hoy**, DMin, FT, Clinical Professor, Baylor University
- February 25** **Supporting Bereaved Children with Autism** (Noon-1:30 p.m. ET)
• **Margaret Lynn Beaudoin-Kobb**, MDiv, Staff Chaplain, Co-Chair Elect, Diversity & Inclusion Core Council, Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania
• **David Stevenson**, MDiv, CT, Bereavement Coordinator/Counselor at Crossroads Hospice & Palliative Care
- March 5** **Love After Loss (For Women)** (Noon-1:30 p.m. ET)
• **Carla Stumpf-Patton**, EDD, LMHC, NCC, FT, CCTP, Director of Suicide Prevention, TAPS
- March 10** **Love After Loss (For Men)** (Noon-1:30 p.m. ET)
• **Justin Yopp**, EDD, LMHC, NCC, FT, CCTP, Clinical Associate Professor of Psychiatry, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
• with **Warren Pellegrin**, USMC veteran and TAPS Peer Mentor

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