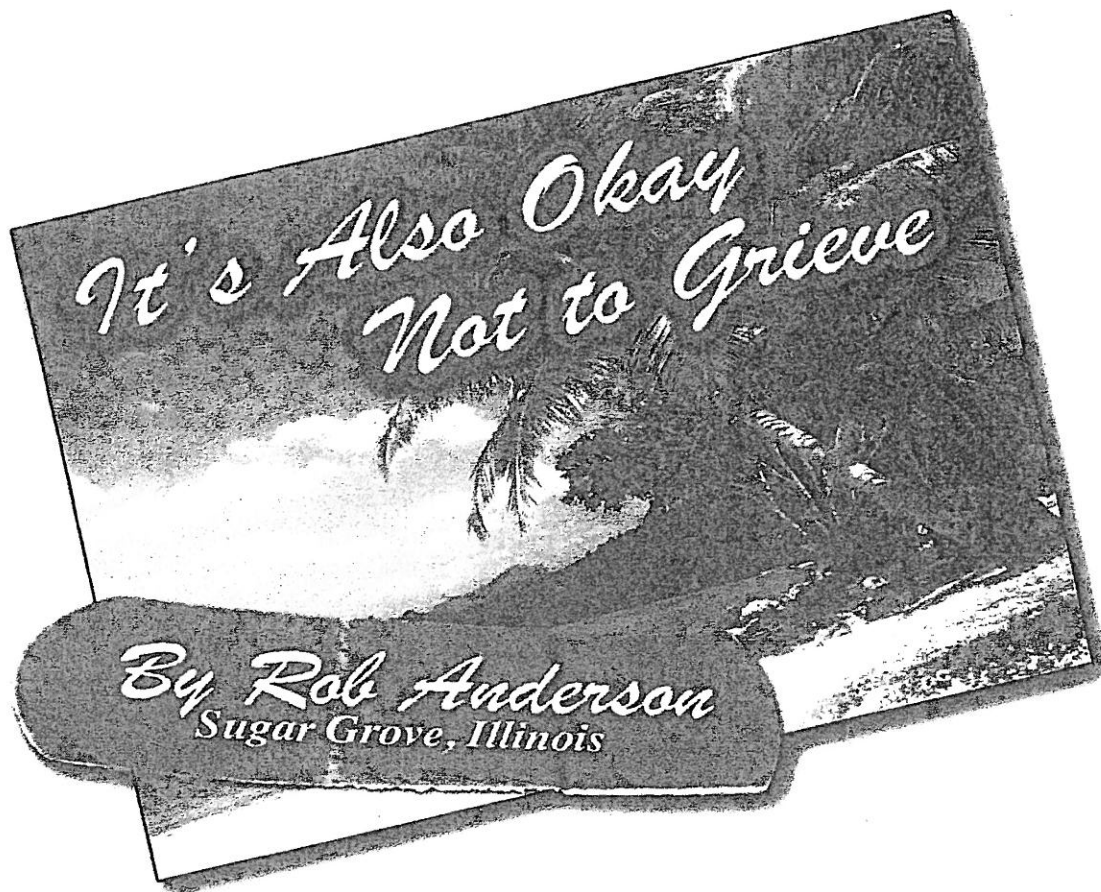




"Wow," you say, "I've never heard someone say that." All you've heard are things like, "Get it out," or "You've got to express yourself," or "Don't keep your pain inside." All of those are true, but I don't believe they're true all of the time. Yes, it's critical you share your suffering. Yes, it's critical to bleed out the poison of your loved one's death. Death is an absolute horror that we don't know how to handle, especially if we're newly bereaved. Grieving is hard work. It's exhausting, draining and essential work if you want to ever smile again—but you can't do it all the time.

Have you ever worked seven days a week for a month, or even longer? Not one day off. You get up, go to work, come home, go to bed; get up, go to work, come home, go to bed.... At some point you say, "Enough already, I need a break from my job." You may do that with a reward of a night out, a massage, a vacation or just a quiet evening with a good book. Whatever you do, it's a way to get away from the work of doing your job. You may love what you do, but at times you need some emotional distance from doing it. It's the same way with your job of grieving. Getting it out, letting go, crying, beating up a pillow, talking, and the myriad of ways to express yourself are healthy and constructive, but they can also be exhausting. The grieving/healing soul can only handle so much.

When death happened in your life, you may have felt like you had been tossed into a blender and switched on high. Around and around you spun, confusion reigned—and may still. You were doing grief work, but you probably didn't know it. What you knew for sure was that at the end of each day you were exhausted, not knowing if you could go on. When the blender slowed down a bit and you found your pain was still with you and you made the decision to feel better, your work began in earnest.

How you heal is up to you. Healing is a lifelong process, full of bumps in the road, falling down and getting back up. While it's hard work, it's do-able work and it can actually be rewarding when done with enthusiasm and optimism, both of which are in short supply if you're new to your journey. A "can do" attitude

can take a while to find, but if you do your work, that attitude can enter your life and you can heal. Time, and what you do with it, and being good to yourself, will help you once again find your smile. This journey is survivable; joy can return, but you will need to invest yourself in the process for that to happen. But it's also important to back off, get some perspective and sometimes take a break from grieving.

The work of grieving and healing is done in many different ways. Sometimes you'll hear, "There are no wrong ways to grieve," and for the most part I believe that's true. But if you're abusing yourself or others, your grief is moving in a dangerous and unhealthy direction. There are no good ways to run from your pain. It can be difficult to express how you feel and you may try to bury your suffering in ways that are destructive and hurtful, but that behavior will not make your pain go away. It will still be there when you return.

If you find yourself walking down that path and feeling helpless and alone, search for help. You are never, ever alone in your journey. There are many ways to help yourself and many understanding and compassionate people to help you. You can get better, you can move in a positive direction, but you might need assistance in finding that path. Seeking help is a sign of your strength and desire to get better. You're saying, "I don't know what to do here, I need help." Reach out for help; it can only do good things for you. The work of grieving in negative ways can be a lot harder than working on your healing in positive ways.

As you do your grieving and healing work you'll find many ways to do that work. Grab as many of those ways as you can, throw them into the mix of your life, take what works and throw away what doesn't. In other words, do what's best for you, not necessarily what others think you should do. Try not to be a "pleaser-griever." Actively participate in your healing and express it in positive ways.

There are books and magazines to read, people to talk to, conferences to attend and support groups to join. There are many ways to heal. But just as your grief can overwhelm you, so can the process of grieving. At some point you may say, "Enough already, I need a break!" That's fine.

Try not to feel bad about taking a break from your job of grieving. If you leave grieving behind for a while, you're not leaving your loved one behind. Try not to think of taking a break from your pain as the same thing as taking a break from the love you have for the person you miss most. You will always love them and you will never forget them whether you're expressing your pain or getting away from it for a while.

There's healing in routine and normalcy. Before your grief, you probably went to dinner, a show, a sporting event, bowling or dancing. Those activities filled your life with laughter and joy. They won't fill your life like they used to because your life is so different now, but if you let them, those fun activities can take you away from

your pain for awhile. Getting

away from grieving can

be healing. When you

take a break from griev-

ing, don't stay away too

long, but stay away long enough

to recharge your heart and your enthu-

siasm for your healing work. Escape to a world

where death isn't on your mind all the time. Let

yourself feel true and genuine laughter. You're

not forgetting your loved one or disrespecting his

or her memory. To the contrary, you're embrac-

ing your healing and memorializing that life in a

positive way.

Life is very difficult after our loved ones die. It will never be the same, but it doesn't mean life has to be painful and filled with suffering. Healing work takes time and at times it can consume us. Smiles and joy are out there to be found. They're found in our healing and in the lives of those we love who are gone. When grieving becomes overwhelming, take a break; it's also okay not to grieve.

