

Is it Time for a New Version of Your Grief Story?

By Harriet Hodgson

Oprah has one of the top shows on television, but I rarely have time to see it. Last week, however, I watched part of Oprah's interview with Rosie O'Donnell. For decades, Rosie had been portraying herself as a child whose mother died when she was in fifth grade. Rosie's former partner asked her if it was time to tell a different story – the story of a loving mother of four children.

Rosie agreed that time had come.

After the interview I thought about my own story of multiple losses. Would I always be seen as a bereaved person? Could I describe myself in new ways? If so, what would those ways be? I thought about the answers to these questions.

Clearly, multiple losses had changed my life and changed me. These losses had been fused into my identity. I will always be a bereaved parent, the mother of a brilliant daughter who died too soon. I will always miss my father-in-law, brother, and former son-in-law. The challenge, at least for me, is to learn from grief and create something positive from its ashes.

You may have come to the same realization.

This realization has changed my grief talks. While I still state the facts – four of my loved ones died within nine months – I do it quickly and move on to the purpose of my talk. Similar changes appear in the grief articles I write. When I write an article, I have two goals. One is to inform readers — in other words, to provide a few research findings – and the other is to offer hope. Today, I portray myself as a grandparent raising her twin grandchildren and someone with a new life purpose. Happiness is a personal decision. Instead of portraying ourselves as life's victims, we can choose to portray ourselves as loving people who are grateful for the miracle of life. The ability to do this comes with time, pain, and grief work.

Your grief story cannot be changed, but the way you tell it can be. You may weave colourful descriptions and happy memories into your story. Slowly and surely, you may weave humour into your story as well. Telling a different version of your story does not change the facts. A new version of your story, however, makes it more powerful and compelling.

Bereaved people are more than survivors. We are searching beings, grateful for the gift of life.

Our stories are worth telling.

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