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ISBN: 978-1-60013-490-6

Cover photo:
© Randy Groh Grohfoto, LLC

Cover design:
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HOW THIS BOOK WAS BORN

This book comes in the wake of a television segment in which I participated and discussed the issue of losses and how to deal with them. After this program, many people asked me if I had ever written a book about loss, because they wanted a guide on how to turn their life around after going through a grieving process. Analyzing people's need for more guidance on this subject—which is so universal, yet so ignored—I decided to write this book. I was inspired because I had experienced the loss of my father at the age of twelve, and at that time I had no professional help or books to give me hope or consolation either. I am aware that this experience of loss changed my life and was the flame that gave me the desire to help other mourners to process their losses and, in turn, to transform their lives.

With the birth of this book, thirty-six years after the physical loss of my father, I give tribute to his memory, which I always carry with me:

Love does not end, it is transformed ...

But we have to be aware that when talking about losses we do not need to limit ourselves to loss by death alone. We face

countless situations in our daily lives that cause us pain and grief. We live in a society that avoids talking about losses. We believe that it is logical to maintain the attitude of “I’m well and I hope that you are also all right.” We can appreciate this attitude when we ask someone how they are, and are surprised if we do not hear the preconceived answer “Fine, and you?”

Although we continually face loss and go through the grieving process, we still have not become used to speaking about the topic. We realize that we are part of a society in denial of grief, as Elizabeth Kübler-Ross said when she spoke of the five stages of grief, which are applicable to all kinds of losses: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

The first of these stages is precisely the denial.¹ While we remain in this stage we cannot really process our losses or understand those of others. We must recognize that sometimes we are not okay, and we need to share and process that experience. Similarly, we need to be aware that we have within us the power to move forward and transform our misfortune into a source of personal and spiritual growth.

With my desire to give you that opportunity, *Transform Your Loss* was born.

This is an interactive book that discusses and illustrates the various types of losses we face in life, how we react to them, and how we can transform them. In its final part, I offer you the tools necessary to transform your loss after you have read the testimony of those who decided to share their own stories of loss, with the intention of helping you in your moment of pain or confusion. Although most of these stories deal with the loss of a loved one, other losses that are significant in our lives have been included. Keep in mind that each of these stories is written with great feeling and in the spirit of helping you in

your own process. Each of these people, including myself, went through pain and grief similar to yours after our loss. I do not say the same kind of grief, as each person's is unique.

Many of us feel that sometimes we are unable to get up and go on with life. However, a number of us have shared our stories to assure you that, although we do not know you, we feel very close to you in your loss. We have opened our souls and hearts to let you know that, like you, we have suffered, we have cried, and we have trusted—and transformed our loss. Our losses are part of life, and we must learn to deal with them and grow during the grieving process.

My greatest desire with this book is to inspire you to take the opportunity and necessary steps to transform your loss and, consequently, to change your life.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

It's not what happens to you that determines how far you will go in life; it is how you handle what happens to you.

ZIG ZIGLAR

I invite you to read this book through the eyes of your soul. Surely some of its sections or stories will touch you more than others. But if one of the messages, one of the ideas, even a simple suggestion, helps you process your grief and enhance your life, this project has been worthwhile. I will therefore feel honored to have contributed to the transformation of your loss, and hence to your life. All who have contributed their own stories have done so wholeheartedly and with a desire to help you and inspire your own process of transforming your loss. It is also my wish to let you know that you are not alone and that loss is a part of life. Unexpected things happen at every turn and we face them, suffer them, and the world continues to turn.

So read this book at your own pace, read it all at once or section by section. But read it as if it was written for you—which it was.

The book is divided into three sections. In the first section, I deal with what loss and grief are. I explore the different types of grief and their manifestations. This will give you the opportunity to identify your own personal situation. The second section offers personal stories about several kinds of losses, with messages of strength and hope; and in the third section, I give you the tools necessary to transform your loss. I do not intend to give you all the answers about loss, as there are many philosophies and approaches to dealing with grief. The eleven principles that I propose (in the third section) for transforming your loss are based on my personal and professional experience as a grief counselor, and on the common elements contained in the stories that were shared in the second section. In response to the principles I hope you will write your own thoughts, using the simple exercise *A Moment of Reflection*, which will allow you to communicate with your inner self and tap your internal capacity for transformation. (It would be a good practice throughout your reading of the book to keep a notebook or journal handy).

I invite you to read the book in its sequential order, as it was written for that purpose. It would be best to answer Questionnaire I, *Evaluation of Your Loss*, following this introduction, before reading the first part of the book. Then, after you have read our stories and completed the exercises and meditations, you can answer Questionnaire II, *Evaluation of Your Loss Now*, at the end of the book for comparison.

If you have suffered a recent loss, especially the loss of a loved one, you may think that this book is too demanding and that you are not yet ready to do the exercises or to accept and use the suggestions. You may still be in the acute stage of mourning. If so, just set the book aside, and when you are

ready to begin this process, pick it up again and open your heart to its message. Indeed, this may be the first step to transforming your loss. But if your loss is very recent or you think you cannot deal with your grief, let alone try to transform your loss, be assured that with time, you will work out your grief, and succeed at transforming your loss.

The most important thing is to start on a path of personal and spiritual growth even in the early stages of you loss. Once you gain control of your life you can develop the potential you have within yourself to transform you loss. The desire to move forward is what can generate enough will to take the necessary steps to transform your loss and regain a sense of life. In carrying out these steps, you will integrate the loss into your life in a special way, without it causing you so much suffering, and thus learn to live a new reality. You can also decide to stay where you are, without even attempting to move forward. It is your decision. As Rabbi and thanatologist Earl Grollman says, “Grief is a process, recovery is a choice.”

In order to assess where you are in regard to this loss, it could be helpful for you to answer Questionnaire I below. (The statements are not intended as judgments, only to reflect your thoughts and feelings in the present moment.)