



# The Rosemary Branch

Winter 2012



australian centre  
for grief and  
bereavement

The experience of loss informs our understanding of love as much as the experience of love helps us to better understand loss.

Michal deWilloughby,  
Senior Bereavement Counsellor,  
The Australian Centre for Grief  
and Bereavement



## My grief: what is normal?

*At first my grief was overwhelming. I felt as though I was being thrown around in the surf on a stormy day. Every time I got to the surface, a burst of air, a glimpse of light, then another wave would bear down on me and I'd be battered about in the ocean again. Finally the seas started to calm, the sun came out, and I found I could swim again. But back on solid ground, I started to feel guilty. Did coping mean I had forgotten her? That I didn't care as deeply any more? I am relieved to be back on my feet, but the guilt almost makes me want the storm to come back. Am I going crazy?*

Grief is not an open and closed book. The experience of grief is varied. Different people experience it in different ways, and this can make it a difficult maze to navigate.

"Love and loss are opposite sides of the same coin," says Michal deWilloughby, Senior Bereavement Counsellor at the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement. "The experience of loss informs our understanding of love as much as the experience of love helps us to better understand loss. Western society however, doesn't tend to discuss death or grief openly, and as a result, some people feel uncomfortable and confused by the feelings and reactions grief can evoke."

### Grief is an individual experience

Grief is individual and personal, and it is important to respect each other's way of grieving, even if we don't necessarily understand it. We do not always know how people are grieving simply by what we see. Some people do not show their grief in public, and prefer to reflect about it privately. Some are open and expressive, crying, and wanting to talk, whilst others may prefer not to talk about it and to keep busy.

Men and women sometimes grieve differently, as may children, teenagers and adults. Different religions and cultures often have rituals, memorials and ways of grieving that are unique to their belief systems and traditions. "There is no set formula for grieving," says Michal. "Most behaviours

however, so long as they are not harmful to you or others, are completely normal, and are simply a part of your grief journey.”

## Common responses to grief

Grief can impact upon all aspects of our life and can affect our thoughts, feelings, behaviours, beliefs and our relationships with others.

### Emotional responses

Most people respond to loss with great resiliency, however it is normal to experience emotional responses such as sadness, anger, anxiety, disbelief, panic, relief, fear, irritability and numbness. It can also affect our thinking, so that we find it difficult to concentrate, may think we will never get through this, or that we are going crazy.

### Physical responses

Grief can also impact upon our wellbeing, with grieving people often experiencing sleep difficulties or ill health. Other physical responses to grief may include lack of strength, physical exhaustion, feelings of heaviness or numbness, dietary problems, headaches and lack of appetite.

### Grief changes over time

For most people the experience of grief changes across time. The nature of the emotional connection, the level of trauma around the death, and social support are just some of the factors that impact upon how we adjust to a loss. Most people will grieve in subtle ways for the rest of their lives.

### Grief and relationships

In many ways the sustained love and support of family and friends can be very helpful following loss. However, grief can also cause great strain on relationships between partners, family and friends. If your grief is seriously affecting your relationships, try talking to someone about it, whether it be the person involved, a supportive friend or a health professional.



## Seeking help

When you are grieving, or if you are caring for someone who is grieving, it is important that if you are concerned in any way, to find out more. “Do some reading about grief, confide in friends and family, or if you are truly concerned, seek help from a health professional,” says Michal. “It’s ok to admit that you are struggling in your grief and no-one will think any less of you if you ask for help along the way.”



**For more information on grief and support services, call the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement on 1300 664 786 or go to [www.grief.org.au](http://www.grief.org.au)**

## Common concerns about the grieving process



**People keep telling me I should be ‘over it’ by now**

Often people don’t understand profound grief, and may ask why you haven’t ‘gotten over it’ yet. Rest assured, grief is not something we just ‘get over’, but rather is something that we gradually learn to live with and around. Grief is a journey, not a destination, and along this journey, we need to relearn the world without this person. Life will find meaning again, however the loss will always be a part of us.



**I feel like I need to talk to them one more time**

People often talk to their loved ones after they have passed away. Sometimes you don’t have the opportunity to say goodbye, or you’re left with things unsaid. It’s never too late to say them. It’s also not unusual to have ‘extraordinary experiences’ such as dreams of your loved one, or to have a sense of their presence. These experiences can provide both comfort and meaning, and help us to feel close to the person who has died.



**I feel so guilty being happy**

People sometimes worry that if they let go of their grief, they will forget or lose their connection with their loved one, or may even feel disloyal.

The important thing to remember is that the love you have for someone does not die just because they have died. Death ends a life, not necessarily a relationship. You will always carry a part of your loved one with you, no matter what the future brings.

# Letter from the Director



Welcome to the June edition of The Rosemary Branch. Apologies for the extended gap between issues — we've had some staffing changes and as a result this issue has been delayed. Our previous editor, Simon Djurdjevic, has left ACGB to return to further study, and we wish him all the best for the future. In Simon's absence, our Fundraising and Marketing Coordinator, Erin Bevege, has taken over production of this publication.

As a result of this transition of editors, and based on a variety of feedback, you may notice a few changes throughout the newsletter — including a move to full colour and greater inclusion of the services and events offered by ACGB. We've also included an article around common reactions and responses to grief, an article on one of our support groups 'Bereavement @ the Bar', creative contributions from our readers, and information on the launch of a new section of our website specifically designed for 'Your Stories'.

One thing that hasn't changed about the newsletter though, is its name. Many people ask us how the newsletter came to be called The Rosemary Branch. In a 2007 'name the newsletter' competition, winner, Simonetta Seri, described the reasoning as follows: "I thought this was appropriate in the symbolic use of Rosemary as a plant of remembrance, and the analogy of a branch that reaches out and gives hope for the future."

Indeed Rosemary has been a symbol of remembrance since ancient times featuring in a wide range of literature and folklore, including Shakespeare who penned in Hamlet "There's rosemary, that's for remembrance; pray, love, remember." Rosemary has a reputation for strengthening the memory. In the Middle Ages people burned rosemary and inhaled the smoke to ward off sickness and broken sprigs of rosemary were used for baptisms, funerals and marriages.

It is hoped that this Rosemary Branch strengthens your connections with the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement, the community of the bereaved and "reaches out to you and gives hope for the future".

Yours sincerely,  
**Chris Hall**, Director, ACGB

## ACGB support groups

*Support groups are a way of bringing people together in a safe space to share common life experiences. This column looks at the range of bereavement support groups offered by the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement, and how you might become involved.*



"There are many reasons why our group is attended... companionship, conversation, even just to hang out."

— Mark Dean, Group Facilitator

## Bereavement @ the Bar

**Bereavement @ the Bar** is a support group for men who have experienced the death of a loved one.

It recognises that it can be difficult for a man to express the emotion and vulnerability that bereavement presents.

**Bereavement @ the Bar** creates a space where men support other men. It provides a forum to investigate the male grief experience, the problems of re-adjusting, re-living and issues that arise from being, or just feeling, alone.

New members are most welcome and will quickly become part of a network comprising the group's past and present members stretching across its four year history.

"There are many reasons why our group is attended," says group facilitator, Mark Dean, "companionship, conversation, even just to hang out. The conversation is varied and spritely - over the course of the evening we frequently cover as much about our present feelings as we do politics, history and geography."

**Bereavement @ the Bar** meets the third Monday in the month, in Notting Hill, to share stories, companionship and a meal.

**To register your interest, or for further information about the Bereavement @ the Bar support group (or other ACGB support groups) call 03 9265 2111 or email [support@grief.org.au](mailto:support@grief.org.au)**







# Your stories

## The Three Rules of Cancer Club

By Mark Russell Dean

There are three rules of Cancer Club:

1. Have a party
2. Buy some shoes
3. Go on holiday

This is how we lived, because cancer is not about death, it is about living. Live you must, when your mortality is challenged. And live we did.

Under these rules ... I have watched Tash twirl for hours, shoes discarded, her feet bare on dance floors, front rooms and backyards of London, Sydney and Verona.

She would dance, she would smile, she would move, twirling one hand in the air and the other piloting its own upward spiral holding a Jack and Coke. There she would stay into the early hours, until the party would end, and home we would go, my wife whooping, punching the air in celebration of a good night out. She always looked wonderful, not glamorous in hiding, but luminescent for *now*. From her head to her toes a glorious escarpment of the best you could buy. Our flat overflowed with clothes and shoes, so much that she would hide her illicit *scarpe* at work, sneaking the massed footwear back on nights I was out. When we finally took her home, we made sure she looked good: her best shoes, her best frock, her best as ever, her last. *Always the most beautiful Bella Figura*.

There was always a holiday before treatment, a *piss off* to the prescription.

The first: back home to be married. 'Don't try to arrange your wedding from the other side of the world in six weeks,'

she informed our guests triumphantly as we dined at Aria embraced by the Opera house, Bridge and Harbour.

The last: to Iceland. Really, she was too sick to fly, but wanted to go, so we went anyway. From Sydney through Sicily, Verona to Paris, Mallorca, Sweden and around again, everything was always possible. My albums of photographs now digital chronicles of life once lived; bright sunsets, close poses, pictures of living as statements full of intent. Only now I see, in the back of her smile, the knowing that we could never avoid *the-what-might-happen-next*.

When I held her maybe, maybe she could. In those moments I would write cheques I knew I could never cash, borrowing the strength to keep ahead of her by sacrificing any of me. I did this because I loved her, I did this because I knew I could, because I wanted to. All she wanted was to lead a *normal* life and all I wanted to do was make sure that she could.

In the end perhaps, we lived more than that.

## Swings & Roundabouts

By Wendy Joy Smith

Last year I was so unhappy, so at a loss to know why friends had disappeared from view

I prayed for relief,

I prayed for friends to go for coffee with, share dinner with

Must have been on the swings,

Up down, up down, life can be ok when you are on your own,

But on the down swing you can feel lonely

Caught up with a roundabout this year

Choices made an appearance

Friends have revealed themselves to me

Not always the coffee or dinner ones,

But, who cares?

The roundabout brought potential

The kind I was praying for

Now I just have to avail myself

Now I just have to present myself

Hmmm,

Still not easy,

But prayers were answered

Around I go

## Your Stories is going online!

**Want to share your experience of grief with others?  
Want to read about other people's grief journey?**

To complement the Rosemary Branch, the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement are launching a new section of our website called Your Stories.

This space will contain stories, narratives, poems and creative expressions contributed by the public.

To learn more about how you can contribute, or to read other people's contributions go to [www.grief.org.au](http://www.grief.org.au) and click on Your Stories.



**Join with the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement and help transform the lives of grieving people**

The Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement relies heavily on donations for the provision of our services. Donations over \$2 are tax deductible and help support a range of support services including bereavement counselling, support groups, outreach, newsletters, events, education and training.

**How to make a donation**

1. Fill in this donation slip and return to ACGB via post or fax (details below)
2. Visit [www.grief.org.au](http://www.grief.org.au) and click 'Make a donation'
3. Call us on 1800 642 066

**One off donation**

Here is my gift of:  \$25  \$50  \$100  \$200  
 Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_ min \$2)

My cheque / money order payable to the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement is enclosed or, please debit my:

Mastercard  Visa

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Expiry \_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_

**Regular contribution**

I will make a regular gift of amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ (min \$10)

I would like to make these payments:

- Every month
- Every 3 months
- Every 6 months
- Every 12 months

**Information about you**

Individual  Group

Name Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Suburb \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Postcode \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone (h) \_\_\_\_\_ (w) \_\_\_\_\_

Mobile \_\_\_\_\_

Please send me information about including a gift in my Will to the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement

The Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement

McCulloch House Ph: 1800 642 066  
 Monash Medical Centre Fax: 03 9265 2150  
 246 Clayton Road Email: [info@grief.org.au](mailto:info@grief.org.au)  
 Clayton, Victoria 3168 [www.grief.org.au](http://www.grief.org.au)  
 ABN: 22 038 903 478

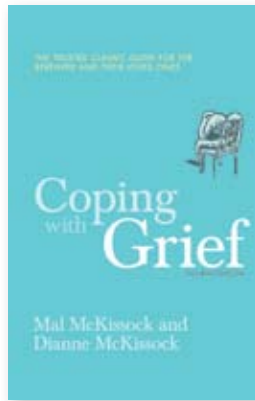
Information that you provide to us will enable us to process your request (e.g. gift, payment, registration, subscription, change of details) as the law permits or for other purposes explained in our Privacy statement. We do not rent, sell or exchange information we hold.

**Thank you**

CUT ALONG THIS DOTTED LINE



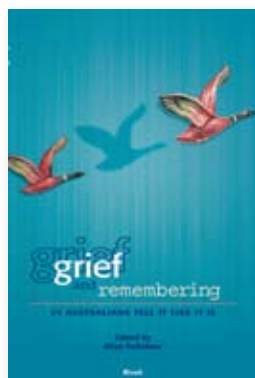
**Featured resources**



**Coping with Grief**

Mal McKissock & Dianne McKissock  
\$11.95

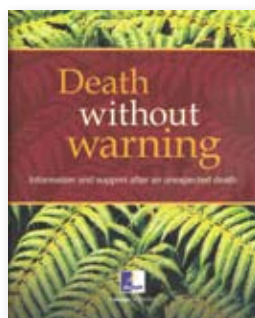
This book describes what one can expect during the grief process. It addresses issues of normal grief, managing anniversaries and special dates, physical and emotional reactions, the funeral, gender differences in grief, children and grief, sexuality and grief, consequences of bereavement, support teams, self-help and community education.



**Grief and Remembering: 25 Australians tell it like it is**

Edited by Allan Kellehear  
\$19.50

In this book, 25 Australians describe their own unique experiences of grief and mourn their spouses, friends, parents, children, or siblings. Contributors to this book are from diverse social backgrounds – they are men, women and children of different occupations, ethnicity, sexuality and age groups. We hear the voices of people who are at the very centre of the experience of grief – no professional theorising, no 'stages' or 'models' of grief, and no judgements.



**Death Without Warning: After an Accidental Death**

Skylight, NZ  
\$10.00

This handbook is for individuals and families affected by any kind of sudden or unexpected death. It is designed to be read soon after the death, but will also offer support in the following weeks and months. The handbook is in an easy to read, engaging format and features personal quotes from people who have experienced the unexpected death of someone close to them.

*These books, along with a range of other useful resources, can be purchased from the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement.*

**Visit [www.grief.org.au/resources](http://www.grief.org.au/resources) to download a resource guide/order form, or call 1800 642 066.**



## Our services

### The Rosemary Branch

For all enquiries about the Rosemary Branch, please contact Erin Bevege on 03 9265 2111 or email [e.bevege@grief.org.au](mailto:e.bevege@grief.org.au). To download a PDF version of current and past editions go to [www.grief.org.au](http://www.grief.org.au)

### Bereavement Counselling and Support Service

The Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement (ACGB) is the Victorian State-wide Specialist Bereavement Service and has counsellors located across metropolitan Melbourne, in regional areas (Grampians, Gippsland, Hume, Barwon South-West and Loddon Mallee), and in areas affected by the 2009 Victorian Bushfires. For further information, call 03 9265 2111, or email [counselling@grief.org.au](mailto:counselling@grief.org.au)

### Support Groups

ACGB operates a range of support groups including groups for adults, children, bereaved partners, death of a parent and many more. For further information call 03 9265 2111, or email [support@grief.org.au](mailto:support@grief.org.au)

### Lending Library

The Lending Library is a portable collection of books about grief and loss. The books cover a wide range of topics and cater for all age groups. For more information, contact Rae Silverstein on 03 9265 2111 or email [r.silverstein@grief.org.au](mailto:r.silverstein@grief.org.au)

### Volunteering

Would you like to contribute to the work of the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement as a volunteer? Contact us on 03 9265 2100, or email [info@grief.org.au](mailto:info@grief.org.au)

### Ceremony of Remembrance

The Ceremony of Remembrance is held each year. Information will be sent to all current and previous clients of the Centre who are on our mailing list prior to the event. For further information call 03 9265 2111, or email [counselling@grief.org.au](mailto:counselling@grief.org.au)

### Better Health Channel



ACGB is a content partner with the Better Health Channel. Better Health Channel provides health and medical information that is quality assured, reliable, up to date, easy to understand, regularly reviewed and locally relevant. For more information, go to [www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au)

### Healthshare



Healthshare is an Australian national health initiative designed to provide better access to health expertise and improve the quality of health information online. ACGB is a content provider within Healthshare's online bereavement support community. Users can post questions or share experiences with others. ACGB staff regularly answer questions posted by the community. For more information, go to [www.healthshare.com.au](http://www.healthshare.com.au)

### We value your feedback

If you have feedback about the Rosemary Branch, the Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement Counselling Service, or any of the services we deliver we would love to hear from you. Contact us on 03 9265 2111 or email [counselling@grief.org.au](mailto:counselling@grief.org.au)

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## Contact Us

Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement  
McCulloch House, Monash Medical Centre  
246 Clayton Rd, Clayton, VIC 3168  
Ph: 1800 642 066  
Fax: 03 9265 2150 | Email [info@grief.org.au](mailto:info@grief.org.au)  
[www.grief.org.au](http://www.grief.org.au)

Bereavement Counselling & Support Service  
Ph: 1300 664 786 (toll free – Victoria)  
Email: [counselling@grief.org.au](mailto:counselling@grief.org.au)

## Other Grief Support Services

Telephone support  
Lifeline: 13 11 14  
Kids Help Line: 1800 551 800  
Suicide Line: 1300 651 251  
Mensline: 1300 789 978  
Griefline: 03 9935 7400

Bereaved Parent & Families Support  
The Compassionate Friends: 1800 641 091  
SIDS & Kids: 1300 308 307  
SANDS: 1300 072 637