

Starting Over by Kim Olver

How does one start over after the loss of a loved one? It is a monumental task that just feels overwhelming at times. Similar rebuilding occurs after the death, divorce or separation of a loved one.

First comes the shock of the loss and an almost denial that it has happened, particularly if there was no warning. We have hopes and dreams of the future that include our loved one and suddenly he or she is not there. How will we cope? How can we go on?

But go on we must and we will. Often times our first step is to attempt to regain what we have lost. This is impossible if our loved one has died but that doesn't stop us from trying. A lot of what we go through in our grieving process is our best attempt to keep that person alive and well in our perception. So, we do things like go over the memories, look through picture albums, talk about our loved one to everyone who will listen, think about him or her every minute and even speak to him or her out loud.

If a loved one has not died, but has chosen to walk out of your life, it can be more challenging. In this instance, you not only have to get over the shock of the loss but also cope with the feelings of rejection.

In our best attempt to get our loved one back, we may engage in all the behaviors someone who has lost their partner to death would. But in addition, we may beg them to take us back, follow our loved one around, try to get our friends to intervene on our behalf, and a host of other maladaptive behaviors.

Everyone grieves at his or her own pace. I am in no way suggesting that this process can or should be rushed. What I am saying is that when a person is ready, he or she can turn the grief into a new hope for the future.

There's a quote I've learned that is very helpful during this phase. Unfortunately, I do not know its source. The quote is: " Don't cry because it's over; smile because it happened." This is a highly evolved place to get and not everyone gets there.

However, if you find yourself in the process of starting over, adopting this particular attitude can be fairly helpful. You would begin by brainstorming all the possible benefits of no longer being in relationship with the person who's gone. This may seem uncomfortable at first, almost a betrayal of the love you shared, but it is the most healing thing you can do at this point.

You may feel that moving on will, in some way, send the message that you didn't really love enough. In an attempt to show the world how much you loved your partner, you use the depth of your grieving as the message. And if you are someone who wants to continue grieving, then nothing I have to say will get in your way. You don't even have to continue reading.

This article is really for those people who are tired of being depressed, who are ready to us start again and who want to actually believe that things can get better.

In 1999, my husband died of leukemia when he was 37 years old, leaving behind our two sons ages 13 and 15. Initially, there was no positive benefit I could see from that event at all. However when I was ready to look for the positives, they did appear.

One of the first positives I saw is that I actually had the opportunity to say goodbye. My husband's entire family had the opportunity to say the things they wanted to say to bring closure to their relationships with him. Many people do not have that opportunity when loved ones pass.

A second benefit is that when my husband learned he was sick, he stopped working. He didn't stop because he was too sick. He stopped because there was some research link between his type of leukemia and the chemical benzene -- something he worked with at his job.

Prior to his illness, my husband was a workaholic. Once diagnosed, he began to spend lots of quality time with our children. He coached soccer, coached Little League, taught our boys how to work on cars, and spent long hours with them hunting and fishing. This would not have happened had he lived to be a hundred years old with his workaholic behavior.

You too, can find the benefit in the loss of your last relationship. It merely involves putting on the proper lenses that will allow you to see it. Just like in science, there can be no positive without the negative and no negative without the positive. You can't have protons without neutrons -- and you can't have a devastating event in your life without it also bringing some positive benefits. Healing and moving on requires these lenses.

While you continue to mourn the loss of your relationship, you're only staying stuck in the past. Let's return to the quote mentioned above. Instead of mourning the loss of the relationship, focus on how fortunate you were to have that relationship in your life for as long as you did.

There are no guarantees in this life. When a loved one enters our life, there is no surety for how long he or she will stay. They're not possessions to be owned, but rather our gift to be cherished for as long as we have it.

One of the first steps to take in healing our grief is to reach out to others in our life who love us. When someone we love leaves us, it creates a huge void in our life. Some try to fill this void with drugs or alcohol, but that only results in a temporary reprieve from the pain.

If love is what we lost, then the only thing that will help us to feel better is more love. During this time you may confuse sex with love and go looking for meaningless

encounters. However, this again will only postpone the inevitability of the pain of the loss of love.

We must replace love with love. Reach out to friends, family and co-workers --- anyone who will fill some of the gap left by your loved one. It's not the same, it's not what you are really craving, but it will help heal the pain.

After that temporary reprieve with those who love us, you must start rebuilding your life and your strength. You can go on. You can laugh again. And yes, you can love again. Love has many forms.

You may develop another relationship in time. You may find a cause that you love and believe in. You may "adopt" a neighborhood child. You may find or create work you love. You may get a pet that you can love unconditionally. You may become involved (but not too involved) in the lives of your extended family. Whatever form love takes, it will fill the void that was left by the relationship you lost.

But none of this will truly do the trick unless you learn to love yourself again. How does one accomplish this task? You must take inventory. Make a list of all that you have to offer the world. What are your strengths? What are your interests? What are your talents and abilities? What do you love?

If you're having difficulty completing your list, ask someone you trust for help. An objective viewpoint can often point out positives of which we are unaware.

And if, after taking this step, you are still unsure of your special talents and skills, then make a list of the person that you want to be. What is it that you would like to be able to offer the world? Describe a person that you admire whom you would strive to become. As long as there's breath in your body, it is never too late to learn to expand and grow to become the person that you truly want to be.

If you feel as if your life is over, you are truly wasting the gift of life that you have been given. There is only one you. You have something unique inside you to offer the rest of us. Please don't keep it hidden, lost in your grief

Do not climb in the grave with your loved one. It is not your time. Do not wither and die behind the door your loved one closed on his or her way out of your life. Find someone less fortunate than you, and do something for them without expecting anything in return. You'll be surprised what that does to elevate your mood.

If you are ready and having trouble getting started, please email me at Kim@therelationshipcenter.biz or phone me at 708-957-6047. I would be happy to talk with you further about this.