

the grief Haven Journey

no. 4 - 2017

LIFE, SCIENCE, LOVE

Every So Unexpectedly...

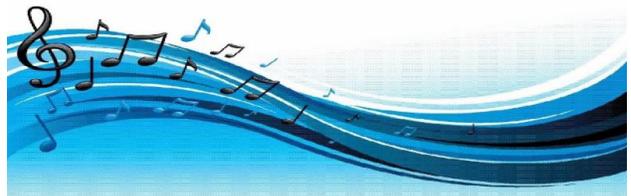
By Dennis Gura

Every so unexpectedly often
In a hushed tone of dulcet respect
A long-term acquaintance
Not seen for ages
Will recount and remember
And say the name
That drifts from others' memories
As weeks months years decades
Roll away.

The mention is no surprise
And welcomed.
The story or observation or condolence,
Received with gratitude,
And, one hopes, with grace,
And we repeat the name
Just to hear it again
In a stilled and casual context.

It is not as if there is news to be shared
For that name or in that name
But for the sweet burning echo
Just to hear again,

*Thank you.
I like to
hear her name.*



In a stilled and casual context,
That name.

And I reply at comments' end
'Thank you. I like to hear her name.'

A Powerful Exercise To Help You



**Expressing Gratitude
Not Only Makes You Happier,
It Changes Your Brain AND Your Life**

A Way to Get Through These Holidays

Here's How

Stephen Yoshimura and Kassandra Berzins researched expressing gratitude and how that impacted our brains. Turns out, expressing those things for which we are grateful begets positive results for our overall well-being.

Science Backs It Up

You may think expressing gratitude is just another trendy thing, yet there is actual science to back this up. Looking into the brain, scientists can actually see that expressing and experiencing gratitude increases life satisfaction, vitality, hope, and optimism. Moreover, it contributes to decreased levels of depression, anxiety, envy, and job-related stress and burnout. Also, people who practice "gratefulness" have fewer symptoms of physical illness, are able to exercise more, and have a better quality of sleep. In our work at griefHaven, we have seen how it helps with the grief that follows the death of someone we love.

But That's Not All

Turns out that some pretty amazing things actually happen in our brains and body while we are expressing gratitude--aaahhh, the good ole mind-body connection. The part of the brain associated with understanding other people's perspectives, empathy, and feelings of relief (for we science nerds, it's the medial pre-frontal cortex) lights up while expressing gratitude. This area of the brain is massively connected to the systems in the body and brain that regulate emotion and support the process of stress relief. These are the same areas that light up when we experience pleasure. All of this tells an amazing story how the mental practice of gratitude **may even be able to change and re-wire the brain!** Now THAT is something for which we can all be grateful.

How It Helps With Deep Pain and Suffering

And all you have to do is focus briefly on what you are grateful for, express it out loud or to yourself or others, and practice this regularly. In fact, researcher Glenn Fox, Ph.D., from USC

Performance Science Institute who is responsible for looking into the grateful brain had this to say:

I am doubly inspired to practice it in my everyday life. Indeed, all of us will experience deep loss and struggle in our lives.

Based on my research so far, I believe gratitude's capacity to ameliorate suffering in these circumstances does not stem from our ability to "think happy thoughts" or deny reality. Instead, its benefits likely stem from the same functions that it serves in other aspects of our lives: It brings us together, raises awareness of what we have, and impels us to consider how we can recognize and spread human goodness.

Powerful "Grateful" Exercise. Use the Holidays to Practice This.

Here come the holidays. For those of us who are missing our loved one who died, the holidays are always a trying and sometimes brutal time. By focusing on those things for which we ARE grateful we can soften the rough edges. A "little" goes a long way at a time like this.

Here's what we at griefHaven do with gratitude. At the end of each of our grief groups, we get into a circle and we go around the circle, and one person at a time says one thing for which he or she is grateful. We encourage everyone to do this daily--just one thing.

So on this Thanksgiving, here's something you can do, either silently, out loud, or with a group of people.

Say at least one thing for which you are grateful. I have shared my list with you below. If you are with a group of people, suggest that you go around the room or table, or even get in a circle and do this, and each person say one thing for which they are grateful. It doesn't have to be anything utterly amazing or super deep. It can be as simple as, "I am grateful for dark chocolate."

Give it a try, and then continue to practice saying one thing for which you are grateful every day, even when you don't think there is anything; there IS something. You just need to think about it and then say it. In no time, you will start to see changes within you. It's powerful. It works. Give it a try.

Here are my "gratefals" for today.

And I am grateful for the 32 years I had with Erika.

I am grateful for griefHaven.

I am grateful for the birds and the way they flutter their bodies when they are in our bird fountain. They make me laugh.

I am grateful for a good joke--and laughter.

I am grateful for butterflies.

I am grateful for my husband and the way he loves me.

I am grateful for all of the people who have come together to make griefHaven thrive.

I am grateful for love.

I am grateful for my new, built-out closet. She's a beauty and oh so organized!

I am grateful for black iced tea.

I am grateful that I am healthy.

I am grateful that I get to live in my sweet little town where "everybody knows your name."

I am grateful for the presence of an essence of love that fills my life and that I talk to when I'm down.

I am grateful for my very old holey jeans that were just \$29.99 because today they would be \$200 or more!

I am grateful that, although my heart was cracked wide open when Erika died, I have found a way to embrace life again and fill it with wonder and love and amazing friends.

I am grateful for makeup, hair color, sparkly things, getting my hands in the dirt, my garden, flowers, trees, the sound of ancient wind chimes on a windy day, the trickle of a fountain, the loving look of a stranger, when someone I don't know says hello, wind, air conditioning and heaters, running water, a good meal, dark chocolate, kind and thoughtful people, a good book, free will (or the illusion thereof), an old face with kind eyes, wisdom (often painfully learned), and talking to strangers in restaurants and elevators.

Of course, you only have to think of one. So start with just one week, every day, one thing. Tell us how it's going.

And Happy Holidays to each and every one of you.

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