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Dealing with Loss, Grief and Trauma: Seven Phases to Healing



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The more extensive a man's knowledge of what has been done, the greater will be his power of knowing what to do. (Benjamin Disraeli)

We know we cannot live in the past but the past lives with us. (Charles Perkins)

OVERVIEW

This chapter describes the potential of a holistic loss and grief mode, Seven Phases to Healing, to heal anger, rage and violence and empower people who see and find themselves as victims. This model of self-healing and spiritual reconnection provides a basis for elements related to counselling processes. It is based on five years of personal life experiences and over 15 years in professional practice. The culmination was the development of a healing centre and a counselling model that focuses on assisting people to understand and take personal ownership of their healing journey. Drawing on this deeply personal experience, this chapter emphasises the importance of positive self-healing and each person's responsibility for this.

GRIEF AND LOSS AND THE LEGACY OF COLONIAL HISTORY

Research has shown that mental health problems and distress are prevalent among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. A study by McKendrick et al. (1992) reported that over 50% of 112 randomly selected Aboriginal participants could be described as having a mental disorder, with a further 16% reporting at least 10 non-specific psychiatric symptoms, including depression and substance abuse. Within the sample, 49% had been separated from both parents by the age of 14 and a further 19% from one parent. Those who grew up in their Aboriginal families learned their Aboriginal identity early in life and regularly visited their traditional country; these people were significantly less distressed.

Similarly, in Clayer's (1991) study, based on a sample of 530 Aboriginal people in South Australia, 31% had been separated from parents before age 14. The absence of a father and of traditional Aboriginal teachings was found to be significantly linked with attempted suicide and mental disorder. Hunter (1994) also found that childhood separation from parents was strongly correlated with subsequent problems, including high levels of depression in Aboriginal people seeking primary health services. Hunter comments particularly on the effects on males, whose histories are influenced by the loss of fathers. In these cases, models for, and initiations into, mature manhood are often lacking.

Raphael and Swan (1998) argued that high levels of loss, traumatic and premature mortality and family break-up contribute to the present high levels of stress experienced in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations. The extended family structures of Aboriginal peoples mean that individuals have more exposure to bereavements, trauma and loss than non-Indigenous peoples. It has been argued that these experiences are likely to lead to higher levels of mental health problems, in particular depression and symptoms of posttraumatic stress (Raphael & Swan, 1998). Recent work has focused on both intergenerational (Danieli, 1998), and chronic personal experiences of traumatisation that may cause anxiety disorders. Problems include a wide range of general psychological and somatic symptoms, impact on personality and identity, vulnerability to self-harm, suicide, revictimisation and further abuse (Raphael & Swan, 1998). Given findings such as these, it is not surprising that Indigenous Australians experience high levels of mental illness. In this respect, Sansbury (1999) noted that 25% of Aboriginal people living in the inner city or in large towns have mental health problems associated with stressful life situations; that Aboriginal males are 80% more likely to commit suicide than non-Aboriginal males; and that more than 63% of Aboriginal people presenting to Aboriginal medical services have a significant level of distress, principally depression. However, for a long time I have observed that we've got medical centres all over the place. They can't be separated like that. The physical body will heal once we heal our spirit from all of our past pains, traumas and tragedies. We've got to look at the whole thing holistically.

Definitions and scope of grief and loss

What is loss?

- Loss has two categories: recognised or that which can be seen, and unrecognised or that which cannot be seen.
- Loss is experienced by all that is living: Mother Earth, human beings, animals and fauna and flora.
- Losses are a natural part of being a human learning how to grieve and evolve.

What is grief?

- There are two categories of grief: healthy and toxic.
- Whatever two categories of grief are being experienced at any given time generate live energy that appears to be invisible, but it becomes visible when it causes the physical body to pressurise at dangerously high levels. Grief generates dangerously high levels when left suppressed and unresolved for long periods. Imagine a pressure cooker not able to release the steam from its spout because there's a serious blockage—the laws of nature predict that the pressure cooker will explode. Similarly, the laws of nature will cause the physical body to pressurise because this live energy has now accumulated enough power to begin the process of dismantling healthy cells and thus cause disease. As the pressure cooker explodes, so does the physical body explode into disease; this becomes more of a reality if it is toxic grief.
- Healthy grief is when someone is consciously aware of honouring its process.
- Toxic grief evolves when it is suppressed in the long term. The person is unconscious and suppresses it.
- It is seen, felt and heard via storytelling across and down the generations (ancestral), eventually compounding and complicating contemporary descendants' grief.

The characteristics of loss and grief

- They are holistic and do not shame or blame but rather assist accountability and responsibility for self-healing.
- They are holistic and realign and/or solidify all seven humanities to the innate instincts.
- They do not discriminate.

- There's much more to it than death and dying.
- If addressed, they can support the recovery of mental illnesses.

The seven humanities: A human being has seven humanities: mental, emotional, physical, spiritual, sexual, cultural, social.

A MODEL OF HEALING

The Seven Phases to Healing model aims to heal toxic anger, rage and violence, and depression and suicidal thoughts, thereby leading to empowering people who see and find themselves as victims. The model was developed from my own experiences at a women's shelter when I was at my rock bottom, and the only way out was to heal, in the first instance, all my anger, rage and violence. I needed to find out where I came from to be so angry, so full of rage and at times, so violent! So yes, I was a victim but I was a perpetrator of family violence: I was mentally, emotionally and physically abusive to my children; alcohol only served to fuel my anger, rage and violence. I draw on my story to show the benefits of using grieving as a ladder to get out of this black hole. When I began, I had no name for all this stuff; but I know I could have ended up with some form of mental illness without my personal healing processes.

This holistic approach to loss and grief assists clients to deal with suppressed unresolved grief and has enormous potential to be the missing link to healing mental illnesses in the Aboriginal community. Just as healing oneself is all in the timing, it's all in the timing for finding new approaches to a new model of healing grief; it's important for Western civilisation and all its health systems to understand that mental illnesses are derivatives of intergenerational (ancestral) suppressed unresolved grief and that there are two forms of grief, healthy and toxic, as outlined above. Intergenerational suppressed unresolved grief has been compounded and complicated by the suppressed unresolved grief of our contemporaries, as was my experience. It seems to me this phenomenon occurs when children see, feel and hear their carers tell stories: it's all a part of being human to tell these stories with emotion.

It's been my observation growing up biculturally that mental illnesses have become extremely sensitive and deadly diseases, but I have also observed that they seem to be elusive diseases from the perspective of Western medicine. I believe I didn't end up with a mental illness because I found my innate human instincts. During the first few years, these instincts had me unconsciously seeing, feeling and hearing my ancestors communicate to me that everything was going to be all right. Over the five years from 1987 to 1992, I somehow came to know that I was going to be OK going through all this stuff; but this is not to say I didn't experience my highs and lows of anger, rage and violence. Similarly, I had highs and lows of sadness, depression and suicidal thoughts.

In 1992 while in the Pitjantjaratjara lands reconnecting with my ancestors, I designed what became Phase One. Phase One evolved so that eventually the Seven Phases to healing myself was conceived. But still I had no idea that I was going to use it to develop a specialised holistic approach to healing loss and grief. It wasn't until 1993 that I had a very broad design of what the Seven Phases to Healing would unpack.

In 1994, I completed a loss and grief course that enabled me to finally put a name to all 'this stuff' called loss and suppressed unresolved grief. My grieving processes saw me grow out of being a childish frightened victim to an empowered adult. Although the course opened my consciousness to seeing, feeling and hearing that there's so much more to loss and grief than death and dying, it was several months before I began conceptualising that the model needed an extensive overhaul to include the loss of one's culture and much more. By 1994, I had developed and described the seven phases to include:

- Phase One: Contemporary adult major grief reaction
- Phase Two: Identifying childhood and adolescent multiple losses and suppressed unresolved grief

- Phase Three: Ancestral losses and suppressed unresolved grief. Aboriginal and European physical experiences and emotional legacies
- Phase Four: Identifying ancient Aboriginal and European grieving ceremonies/ activities for physical expression
- Phase Five: Identifying ancient Aboriginal and European grieving ceremonies/ activities for spiritual expression
- Phase Six: Contemporary loss and grief healing centres for practical ceremonies/ activities—physical expression
- Phase Seven: Contemporary loss and grief healing centres for practical ceremonies/ activities—spiritual expression.

In order to validate the Seven Phases, I use my own personal experiences. I want to explain that it is a holistic system, and I do not want to depersonalise this approach as a system. While it is important that the process of healing grief is seen as an experience that is unique to the individual—real, uncomfortable and confronting, I believe that it is a powerful healing model with processes that can be used to address the intergenerational suppressed unresolved grief of other individuals, their families, their communities, a race, a nation.

The *Seven Phases to Healing Using Loss and Grief* figure below is an adapted version of the original model:

| PARTS | PHASES |
|----------------|--|
| 1) The Past | 5 Traditional cultural grieving processes—spiritually based. |
| | 4 Traditional cultural grieving processes—socially based. |
| | 3 Ancestral losses and their unresolved grief begins: Invasions experienced by Indigenous European culture 388 BC; and by Aboriginal Australians through experiences of 1788 and since. |
| | 2 Contemporary child/teenage losses: contemporary losses. |
| 2) The Present | 1 Contemporary adult major grief reaction experiences of major social and health problems. |
| 3) The Future | 6 Develop traditional/contemporary grieving programs—spiritually based. |
| | 7 Develop traditional/contemporary grieving programs—socially based. |

Phases 1—3 are categorised as losses, which ultimately amount to grief-fear.

CATEGORY 1 losses are recognised losses *that can be seen with the naked eye*—death/removal from family/abuse: mental, emotional, spiritual, physical, cultural and sexual/loss of traditional grieving process.

CATEGORY 2 losses are categorised as losses *that cannot be seen with the naked eye*—sense of identities; mother, father, sister, brother, cultural, granddaughter, grandson/power/confidence/self-esteem/dreams/ hopes/intelligence/safety/self-respect/love.

Phases 4—5 are categorised as powerful, structured culture which ultimately amounts to *innate instincts*. Innate instincts are what have maintained traditional culture.

Phases 6—7 are categorised as *innate instincts* that can be reclaimed using loss and grief processes.

Phase One: Contemporary adult major grief reaction

Contemporary adult major grief reaction in adulthood, such as I experienced, would more than likely be called a nervous breakdown by the medical profession.

Such a major grief reaction occurred in 1987 in Sydney in a women's shelter—I was disfigured, bruised and battered yet again. I have no idea how I got here, how I came to be a part of three violent relationships and other mentally and emotionally abusive relationships. How is it that I have been both the victim and the perpetrator of domestic violence? Yes, I'm a wife, a mother, a woman, a colleague and yet on leaving the women's shelter I'm traumatised as I realise I don't know who the hell I am. I feel only half a person; it feels like my spirit had split from my physical body, giving me the sensation that I'm only half a person. I continue with depression and having suicidal thoughts. While I know intellectually that I am an Aboriginal person, emotionally and spiritually I do not *feel* a *Nunga* (a South Australian word for Aboriginal people); I didn't know then how different it is to feel my 'Nunganess' mentally, emotionally and spiritually compared to knowing intellectually that I was a Nunga. Holistically, I felt inept inside, then I realised that the lack of my Nunga identity had me experiencing my life with a lot of deep-seated shame. I had lost faith and trust in myself. In order to figure out how I ended up in this emotional whirlpool a 'voice' told me to go back into my past: this terrified the hell out of me. All my adult life I had been conditioned to stay away from the past, 'what's happened has happened, you can't change it so just move on', yet as I am sitting here at 3 a.m. with tears streaming down my face, I know that it is time to feel the fear of my past and do it anyway. The depth of my emotional whirlpool became what I now call my rock bottom: not knowing the names of my adult and childhood major loss experiences and unresolved grief emotions. I'm uncontrollably catapulted back into my childhood/adolescent years.

So, a question came from unpacking Phase One and it was this: 'How the hell did I end up like this?'

Summary of Phase One:

As a health practitioner/counsellor (or even other family member) it is useful to be aware that:

- The individual has to reach what they consider to be their rock bottom.
- When the timing is right and with the right support, they'll pose their own question: How the hell did I end up like this?
- With the right support, they need assistance to feel their childhood/teenage grief-fears when they revisit childhood/adolescent years to find their major loss experiences and suppressed unresolved grief emotions.

Phase Two: Contemporary child/teenage losses

To illustrate the various elements in this phase, I draw on my own life experiences and memories. This phase involves recognising major losses that can be seen and then unpacking these *Loss experiences* as outlined in Table 19.1, column 1; column 2 involves naming the *Forms of abuse*; the third column involves connecting with the *Innate emotions* that we are born with. Depending on the individual's life experiences within their family environment, their communities, their cultural background(s) and the nation they are raised in, these innate emotions have the potential to become affirmed incrementally—these are losses that cannot be seen. Correspondingly, depending on the individual's life experiences within their family environment, their communities, their cultural background(s) and the nation they are raised in, these innate emotions can be extinguished

incrementally and I call them *Emotional legacies* as outlined in column 4. Column 5 is the *Age in which loss experiences occurred in childhood/adolescence*.

Table 19.1: Loss of Innate Emotions model

| Loss experiences (visible) | Form of abuse | Innate emotion (what I had) | Emotional legacies (not visible) | age |
|--|---|--|--|------|
| Teacher told me and classmates that I was a dummy. I felt her wrath. | Mental and emotional abuse | Sense of safety; sense of trust for teacher. My sense of intelligence was intact. | Don't set myself up to trust people in authority; to feel safe; I believe I'm a dummy. | 8 |
| Witnessed my father physically abuse my mother. | Mental, emotional and spiritual abuse | In the home safe and feeling trust; trusting parents. | Don't set myself up to truly love; to trust people I love. | 7 |
| My mother died when I was ten years old; I was removed from family and taken into the Welfare for 2.5 years. | | Love for family; Love for mother and father; Life in control; Dreams, hopes and expectations of parents/family will remain intact. | Don't set myself up to truly love my children. Family equals death. Don't set myself up to be controlled by marriage/relationships (sabotage). | 10 |
| First foster home I experienced a beating with a copper stick naked below my waist. | Physical, mental and emotional abuse | Went in with a degree of trust and safety | Don't set myself up to trust certain white people; similarly they aren't really safe to be around. | 11 |
| Second foster home, teacher states that 'When Captain Cook landed Aboriginal people were savages.' I felt her wrath again. | Mental, emotional, spiritual, cultural and social abuse | Sense of pride for Nunga identity but was waning by this time but still intact. | Ashamed of my Ancestors' Aboriginality and that of myself. | 12 |
| Second foster home I experienced sexual abuse. | Mental, emotional and sexual abuse | Minimal sense of trust, safety and power was still waning but still intact. | Don't set myself up to trust certain white people; similarly they aren't really safe to be around. Sexual abuse is a new experience. Saying no is worthless; compliments mean abuse will follow. | 12 |
| The day I left the second foster home I witnessed the woman attempting to commit suicide in her kitchen by using their gas oven. | Mental, emotional, and socially abused | Sense of trust, safety and was still waning but still intact. | Don't set myself up to trust certain white people; similarly they aren't really safe to be around. | 12.5 |
| A non-Aboriginal woman pulls a pair of scissors on me in a shop. | Mental and emotional abuse | Safe and trusting shop keeper on entering her shop. | Don't set myself up to trust certain white people; similarly they aren't really safe to be around. | 16 |

As outlined above, these major loss experiences took place when I was from 7 to 16 years of age and they became my childhood/adolescent experiences. It is now my theory that these experiences do not constitute an inner child (in the singular) as is commonly referred to. By experiencing these multiple childhood experiences at these ages, they become collectively what I call multiple inner children. My multiple children had unresolved childhood grief and anger that grew into rage and violence as an adult. Growing up with all these eight inner children inside me, as outlined above, they developed personalities in their own right. They had their childlike major grief reactions when they sensed they could or would be exposed to experiencing degrees of emotional legacies throughout their adulthood; for example, love from someone who could inspire happiness by doing or saying something that inspired dreams and/or hopes for the future, like marriage/children/careers. Sometimes these childlike major grief reactions would be experienced as covert or overt tantrums as they went into a state of panic to rescue adult me from an adult intimate relationship. This would make sure that I, the adult Rosemary, didn't fall in love with a view to staying in love, or get too familiar or too loving or too happy with someone or something that I could get pleasure and happiness from.

From 18 to 38 years of age, these experiences constantly reminded me, the adult Rosemary, of what happened to all of us in our childhood/adolescent years; love and happiness leads to major recognised and unrecognised losses that cause us to go head first into a major grief reaction yet again. So when the timing was right, they would implement the sabotage pattern, on my behalf—I actually had no control over them. So, why risk experiencing love and happiness again? It's like putting your hand into a fire knowing you're risking getting severely burnt, blistered and scarred.

This would then have the adult Rosemary sabotaging/rejecting/detaching from someone or something sooner rather than later.

I refer to this phenomenon as the inner children's interpretation. It helps a child make sense of being violated holistically or in part; or of their whole family as they experience numerous major recognised and unrecognised losses and numerous grief emotions engulf them like a tsunami—there's no stopping the grief emotions from coming in.

For thousands of generations, Western civilisations suppressed grieving processes and so as each new generation became a part of the human race they were conditioned to suppress their grief in isolation. This was an intergenerational phenomenon for Western civilisation. So it makes sense for a child who has been and still is being raised in Western civilisation to continue this phenomenon in the 21st century. (This is not to shame or blame but it is imperative that we include First Inhabitants of any continent who experienced an invasion/colonisation by Western civilisation.)

These experiences collectively became inner children residing inside us; they are a collection of individual loss and grief reaction memories frozen in time. The intensity of a major grief reaction experienced by a child or adolescent will be determined by the following two things: What are the material object/s lost? and Which human being was lost? Furthermore, the intensity of the grief reaction can be measured according to how holistically attached a person is to the loss.

Here I was, 30 something, and I still did not know what really happened to me as a kid and not just what happened to me as an individual child. But what were the political explanations and what was the law that allowed me to be taken into the welfare?

Throughout this phase, my mental thought processes:

- Seemingly out of control (couldn't shut them up); always in a state of questioning significant memories or a contemporary behaviour possibly linked to childhood or adolescent or early adulthood.
- *What* happened? *Where* did it happen? *When* did it happen? *How* did it happen? *Why* did it happen?
- *Who* did it? Mental thoughts of suicide plan in my head.

My emotions:

- In and out of anger, rage, violence; in and out of sadness, depression; emotional suicidal thoughts (plan in my head).

Question:

Who the hell gave someone the right to take me away from my family?

Summary of Phase 2:

As a health practitioner/counsellor (or even other family member) we need to be aware that:

- To maintain holistic wellbeing, it's imperative we give ourselves and others permission to unpack our/their childhood loss experiences and find where grief was stifled and suppressed.
- Once someone understands what happened to them as a child, with many inner children, they can surrender them to who they are becoming as a mature adult.
- It takes the adult person to really heal all their inner children's suppressed unresolved grief emotions that collectively develop into grief emotions and grief-fears in adulthood.

Phase Three: Invasions/colonisations

As a 12-year-old student in a class full of non-Aboriginal students, a history teacher told us that Aboriginal people were savages when Captain Cook arrived in Sydney! I recall her telling this story with such malice. What follows is the power of storytelling when it's heavily wrapped in emotional grief anger; for me I immediately felt the shame for my Ancestors and sorrow for them. Under my breath I whispered to myself: 'Oh no, shame job! How could my ancestors do that to those poor people?' I never forgot the way she said it and how I internalised my feelings of shame as it engulfed me in the classroom. This was the moment that I lost my innate emotion called 'pride' and replaced it with an emotional legacy call 'shame'.

So, for 20 years I unconsciously accumulated my childhood/adolescent and early adult emotional legacies. But they began magnifying in 1987 and reached their culmination in December 1991. It was as if something detonated emotionally inside my head and heart. The detonation blew up this stockpile of grief and fear that had been generated by the accumulation of all my emotional legacies and living a life under these emotional legacies that sometimes coerced me into living unhealthy lifestyles (mild to medium to extreme unhealthy lifestyles will be determined by what we have experienced in any given moment, day, month or year).

Phase Three focuses on understanding features of European history, where the origins of suppressed unresolved grief are deeply rooted and are the causes of major social and health issues in contemporary Aboriginal Australia.

Growing up biculturally in non-Aboriginal society, I have seen, felt and continue to hear that sadness over the other grief emotions is a weakness. It's been a long-term intergenerational practice not to show sadness, and of course this has implications for the physical body. When grief-sadness (as with any other grief emotion) is suppressed, it begins to build up, which leads to the manifestation of grief-depression; still suppressed, it manifests into suicidal thoughts and for many, if it's still suppressed, they succeed in committing suicide.

Ironically, sometimes when the individual's suppressed child's grief-anger is suppressed in adulthood, they may enter the workforce and take on senior positions with subordinates working under them. This has been Western culture for centuries; again it resembles a triangle where the superior is at the top and the subordinates line up below and feel so powerless because they have been raised from within a culture that observes grieving as a weakness. In my experience, they need to have superiors above them, or believe they have no alternative. The three concepts have been endured transgenerationally since people came to this continent with their bible clutched in one hand and a deadly weapon and diseases in the other. Once I really got my head around the truth of 1788, I found that there were three forms of warfare executed across Australia: outright warfare, disease warfare and psychological warfare.

With 20 years' experiences of unpacking and developing a holistic approach to a loss and grief model, I have come to the conclusion that a grief-stricken human being carries the unresolved grief of their ancestors; we then unconsciously weave the combined toxic grief into the fabric of our contemporary life experiences that they have endured as numerous major losses that are both recognised and unrecognised. What I found here is the following: a child is generally victimised by an adult perpetrator, but when that child's grief remains unresolved, it's just a matter of time before the child victim becomes a perpetrator in their own right.

This has potential for an adult perpetrator not being able to see, feel and hear when another human being is becoming a victim of theirs. The perpetrator is stuck in their grief emotions (more likely grief anger, rage and violence) holistically because the perpetrator is experiencing high levels of grief energy that is a contributing factor to a numbness of their own. Suppressed unresolved grief has the ability to generate revenge, manifesting into grief anger, rage and/or violence; human beings' grief-revenge can manifest in individuals, families, communities, a race of people, a nation.

It's been extremely interesting to observe how many non-Aboriginal Australians find it in their hearts to celebrate and acknowledge celebrations of Australia Day and Anzac Day without a serious and meaningful questioning and acknowledgment of the truth behind them. How do we as contemporary human beings gain knowledge about what happened to our ancient and/or contemporary ancestors and their culture? For thousands of years humanity has used storytelling (in Western culture, the written language, art, dance and songs, and the media).

Throughout this phase, my mental thought processes:

- Seemingly out of control (couldn't shut them up), always in a state of questioning significant memories or a contemporary behaviour possibly linked to adolescence or early adulthood.
 - Childhood (what the teacher/classmates told me)
 - Teacher who told lies about my Ancestors/history
- *What* happened? *Where* did it happen? *When* did it happen? *How* did it happen? *Why* did it happen? *Who* did it?

My emotions:

- In and out of anger and rage; in and out of sadness; depression.

Question:

Well, if my ancestors weren't savages, what sort of people were they?

Summary of Phase Three:

As a health practitioner /counsellor (or even other family member) you need to be aware that:

- Suppressed unresolved grief in victims of historical and contemporary recognised and unrecognised losses are more likely to convert their grief energy into grief behaviours associated with anger, rage and violence, thereby becoming perpetrators as individuals, as a family, as a community, as a race, as a nation.

- A perpetrator's suppressed unresolved grief has more than likely been learnt in childhood and therefore is more likely to pass it on to their children as learnt behaviours, hence becoming intergenerational.
- A perpetrator's suppressed unresolved grief is likely to be affirmed in the extended family, in the community, and through societal conditioning, as a race of people, as a nation, hence becoming intergenerational.
- Suppressed unresolved grief from ancient times gets passed across and down the generations into contemporary time.
- Many from Western civilisations in contemporary times still internalise and suppress their grief, guilt and anger on behalf of their ancestors, causing grief denial for what was inflicted upon the First Inhabitants. Many from Western civilisations in contemporary times have internalised and suppressed grief-guilt, and still do.
- Anger, rage and violence by non-Aboriginal ancestors cause grief denial for what was inflicted on Aboriginal ancestors whose ancestors were First Inhabitants, centuries ago.
- Denial of the truth about invasions around the world only serves to sustain grief-fears of an individual, a family, a community, a society, a race of people, a nation.
- A perpetrator can be an individual, a family, a community, a society, a race of people, a nation.
- Every human being as an individual, as a family, as a community, as a society, as a race of people, as a nation of people has a story to tell of severe, recognised and unrecognised losses; and their grief predominately remains suppressed and unresolved.
- It is crucial to teach history from a loss and grief perspective.
- Humanity has come a long way but still has some way to go.

Phases Four and Five: Traditional culture

I was fortunate to have a very spiritual experience to demonstrate that some traditional Aboriginal Dreaming totems can and will find us, not by us going out and finding them—we have to experience them to know the difference. Our Ancestors will see, feel and hear our commitment to healing our intergenerational unresolved grief that has been compounded and complicated by contemporary unresolved grief in the 21st century. Not being afraid to reclaim our totem when it arrives is a cultural belief, concept, understanding and practice of traditional culture that has contributed to maintaining strong kinship relationships to all living things.

Before, during and after this experience and within this phase, I began the grieving processes of returning the intense shame back to my teacher who, unbeknown to her, gave it to me. I gave the shame back by first of all giving myself permission to express my deep-seated grief, anger and rage towards her, even though she might be dead. I carried shame not just for *my* cultural identity but for my Ancestors' as well. It wasn't until I unpacked this part of my history and had such a powerful experience that I deeply reattached to my Nunga identity without any more shame or blame. Similarly, I attached to my ancestors with love, honour and respect. Correspondingly, my faith and trust in them was reclaimed and they are here with me and it has only solidified over the years. I have never experienced such a deep love, faith or trust for any human beings as I have towards them today.

Throughout researching this phase, I discovered many things about traditional culture and because I have never lived or studied traditional culture, my research is what I would describe as broadly abstract, other than what I experienced above. In December 1992, when I moved to Adelaide, the concept of setting up the Sacred Site Within Healing Centre was conceived.

During this phase, my mental thought processes:

- Became more responsive and not reactive when I thought about what my teacher/classmates told me. Thinking more about her experiences and the system she was raised in that enabled her to teach such lies about my ancestors and history.
- For the teacher: *What* happened to her? *Where* did it happen to her? *When* did it happen to her? *How* did it happen to her? *Why* did it happen to her? *Who* taught her?

My emotions:

- Fluctuated between sadness, understanding, low levels of anger and empathy and forgiveness for non-Aboriginal Australia and their history—they committed anger and violence from what had happened to them in ancient European times.

Summary of Phases Four and Five:

- It is critical to teach the next generations how to address and overcome major social and health issues using loss and grief as an individual, a family, a community, a race of people, a nation.
- It is crucial for humanity to use loss and grief to understand human civilisation—to know where we have come from, to know where we are going.
- I have the ability to forgive my ancestors for not fighting back to keep our culture.
- Our ancestors did not have the numbers, let alone resources, to keep our culture intact.
- Aboriginal Australians were spiritually evolved to the highest order.
- Contemporary Aboriginal Australians can reclaim the ability to become spiritually evolved again.
- Aboriginal Australians developed strategies that were structured to maintain relationships with each other, nature, Mother Earth.
- It is crucial for practitioners/services to support people who report hearing voices, or seeing and feeling things that aren't tangible or who have an association with the supernatural/spiritual, as this may be part of the process of self-healing.

Phase One—Full circle: The present

It is important to understand not just the psychological effects that are experienced by Aboriginal children and teenagers as they grow up in a society dominated by non-Aboriginal systems delivered predominantly by non-Aboriginal service providers. It's also imperative to understand that when an individual is or feels powerless in their emotional legacy and they are in a grief-stricken state they can make choices from that place of grief-fear. Grief-fear is a byproduct of intergenerational unresolved grief that has compounded and complicated contemporary unresolved grief, and individuals can be forced into, seduced and/or coerced into unhealthy lifestyles and grief behaviours as a consequence.

So here I am, having done the full circle. Over a five-year period, virtually single-handed, I committed myself to expressing my toxic grief-fears for my contemporary losses and that of my ancestors. I could not have done it any other way because throughout my grieving processes I lived in grief-fear of mainstream services because it was non-Aboriginal people who delivered those services, predominantly. My grief-fears were based on what I was experiencing was my fault; I was afraid I would experience racially motivated comments or behaviours within the services; I would be made to feel less; and these fears of what would happen I had already experienced, just as I have outlined. I lived in grief-fear most of my teenage and adult life.

After 22 years, this is what I believe I know about humanity: holistic loss and grief and mental illness. I say this from first-hand experience and not formal research to back up the following statements:

Humanity

- There is not a race of people who have not experienced some form of invasion and the invaders called it settlement and or colonisation.
- There is not a race of people who have healed as a contemporary race of people to break the cycle for future generations whereby major social and health issues don't exist.

Holistic approaches to loss and grief

- I have not totally reclaimed my grief-fears whereby I can see, feel and hear that I am totally safe in my own country. I need to believe that's yet to come. This fear is a derivative of Australian history that has been passed across and down the generations of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families via storytelling. As a consequence of Australian history, my personal grief-fears came from living the psychological warfare.
- It's important to acknowledge that not all grief is toxic. When a person experiences healthy grief, they have become conscious that loss and grief are a natural part of a human being's life experiences, and they can do this because they have healed their toxic grief and they know the difference.
- It would be in the best interest of health services, providers and the patient/client to develop and implement a holistic approach to grieving programs that's accessible and that's culturally appropriate.
- Public, systemic and workplace racism has been and can be perpetrated by an individual, a family, a community, an institution, a race of people, a nation
- My informal research on racist beliefs, concepts, understandings and practices tells me that they come out of ancient European culture and have become intergenerational, suppressed, unresolved grief-fear of multiple losses; the individual, family, etc. become fearful of feeling any form of grief emotions and so take their grief-fear out on the minority. The word 'racist' or 'racism' may not have been used in ancient European cultures but the concepts and practices have found their way into contemporary Western society and are still being used by an individual, a family, a community, an institution, a race of people, a nation to keep minorities away from all forms of wealth of a nation. Keep in mind that genocide was a systemic practice across Australia.

Mental illness/es

I don't believe there is a disease that should be called mental illness. This name is maintaining the Western cultural beliefs, concepts, understandings and practices that have been passed across the generations and down the generations in the field of health/science since the time of the ancient Greeks. The human being was never meant to be dissected as it has been throughout Western civilisation. Table 19.2 shows how the Western system dissects an individual as they seek assistance when they are in poor health, when all that is wrong with them is that they are grieving.

Table 19.2: The Western dissection of an individual

| | |
|----------|--|
| Mental | Psychiatry: the study of medicine which deals with the diagnosis and treatment of mental disorders |
| Physical | Medicine: the study of diseases and ways of maintaining and restoring health |
| Emotion | Psychology: the branch of science which studies consciousness and behaviours |
| Sexual | Psychiatry, psychology, medicine |

| | |
|-----------|--|
| Spiritual | Theology: the study of divinity or religious doctrines, such as the characteristics of a god or gods in relation to man and the universe |
| Cultural | Anthropology: the study of origins and development of mankind |
| Social | Sociology: the study of social behaviours especially in relation to the development or changing of societies and social institutions. |

- A mental illness by any other name is suppressed unresolved grief and can be processed using loss and grief as a holistic model because it has more potential to restore and realign the seven humanities of the whole person.
- Traditional Aboriginal culture had forms of psychology; for example, in the Kurna traditional culture the word used is *Tanka Manninendi*,¹ meaning 'to alter the mind for the better'. So we must ask: If Western civilisation across Europe had all forms of mental illnesses, severe to mild, throughout all classes of their society before, during and after 1788 and on arrival of the First Fleet, is there a record of mental illness as they knew of it recorded about traditional Aboriginal people?
- Today, there's enough evidence to show there was a difference between Eastern and Western Europeans' cultural beliefs, concepts, understandings and practices compared with Kurna traditional Aboriginal cultural beliefs, concepts, understandings and practices. Some people believe the East and West were culturally violent whereas Kurna was culturally in relationship with everything and everybody. It's my hypothesis that traditional Kurna people were able to maintain cultural relationships because they intellectually understood that grieving processes expressed toxic grief energy that secured their seven humanities to their innate human instincts.
- Using holistic intelligence to interpret and recognise experiences as cultural beliefs, concepts, understandings and practices enables people to work with the voices and visitations of the supernatural or extraordinary.

During Phase One, my mental thought processes:

- Are extremely responsive and very rarely do I react to any situation.
- I process any racially motivated behaviour as grief-fear of the person who is perpetrating it—not to shame or blame them but I see, feel and hear their grief-fears.
- I feel the fear and do what I have to do to achieve my dreams, hopes and expectations as a human being who happens to be a woman and an Aboriginal person.

My emotions:

- Fluctuate between low levels of anger, sadness, understanding, empathy and forgiveness for where Western civilisation has come from to become who they became.
- I choose not to experience substance abuse but rather to live a healthy lifestyle.
- I had no fear in creating my own future, using my life experiences to become a businesswoman; I had no fear of getting out of poverty (a mortgage).

Summary of Phase One:

- It is crucial to teach the next generations how to address and overcome major social and health issues using loss and grief to heal and restore one's humanity to an individual, a family, a community, a race of people, a nation.

¹ Bi-Cultural Awareness Training Manual, It Takes an Individual to Nurse a Nation Back to Health. Tanka Manninendi was given to me by Lewis O'Brien, a Kurna Elder.

- I use loss and grief to understand human civilisation better, to know where humanity has come from to know why we impose inhuman grief behaviours upon each other.
- There is no mental illness, just intergenerational suppressed unresolved grief that has compounded and complicated contemporary Aboriginal Australian societies.
- There is no mental illness, just intergenerational suppressed unresolved grief that has compounded and complicated contemporary non-Aboriginal Australian societies.
- For people there are four categories of loss: traditional culture, contemporary losses, recognised losses that can be seen, unrecognised losses that cannot be seen.
- Loss and grief impacts upon but heals relationships: individuals, families, communities, race, nations, humanity, Mother Earth.
- Loss and grief are toxic when left suppressed and unresolved; they generate dangerously high levels of live energy. Toxic grief is a pressure cooker over the heat with a blocked spout—it's dangerous and will explode. Toxic grief is experienced by an individual, a family, a community, a nation, a race of people, humanity. Families grieve as individuals. Men grieve differently from women. Women grieve differently from men. Children grieve differently from adults and from other children.²
- Ten common grief emotions: Anger—anger, rage to violence (male perpetrators); Shock—disbelief, denial, numbness; Panic—panic attacks; Apathy—lack of energy, submissive aggressive behaviour (female victims); Depression (mental illnesses); Guilt—“if only” stage; Physical illness (diseased body); Emotional release—need to cry; Hope and readjustment—forgiveness.
- *Victim to perpetrator/perpetrator to victim*: until healing is completely processed, a grief-stricken human being can oscillate between being a victim one day and a perpetrator the next—it's like observing two people doing a waltz with each other: they have a propensity to seek each other out because their inner children recognise the victim and/or perpetrator characteristics from experiencing their parents waltzing around with each other, in their childhood.
- *Reactive trigger*: this is an indicator that the grief emotions are still suppressed and unresolved in relation to a particular major loss; it triggers memories and the triggers can be ignited by sight, smell, taste, hearing, touch, feeling, dreams; by intergenerational addictive triggers (alcohol, gambling); and by compounded and complicated contemporary addictive triggers (alcohol, gambling, etc.). This form of trigger is a pathway to ascertaining what could be the multiple major loss/es, and where the grief is still suppressed and unresolved in relation to these loss/es.
- *Responsive trigger*: this is an indicator that the loss/es don't cause the reactive to ignite, which means the grief is resolving or resolved.
- *All in the timing*: healing as an individual, a family, a community, an institution, a race of people, and a nation - is all in the timing.
- *Distorts*: toxic grief distorts the past, the present and the future; healthy grief inspires one to use the past and the present to help humanity reconnect to each other and to nature.
- *Inner children's interpretation*: to make sense of major losses in a child's life they will give their experiences an interpretation.
- *Gender grief*: it's been my observation that males are conditioned to adopt grief-anger; women are conditioned to adopt grief-apathy. I believe this is why we statistically see males who perpetrate (grief-anger to rage to violence) family violence and females who take on the role of victim (grief-apathy) and develop submissive aggressive behaviours.
- *Discounting*: discount the self—‘I can't do it.’ Discount others—‘What would they know?’ Discount situations—‘Well, it happened 200 years ago’ or ‘They died 30 years ago’. Either way, ‘get over it’.

² Bereavement Educational Services Model from my course in 1994.

- *Forgiveness*: loss and grief must reclaim forgiveness! Forgiveness is available at the *end* of the grieving journey; it's not the immediate solution. To acquire and sustain lifelong health and wealth organically and holistically, forgiveness is always available—it's all in the timing. Forgiveness is for the self, others and nature; it is intergenerational and it is for contemporaries. It is a choice. Realigning the seven humanities enables forgiveness to reach its full potential:

Forgiveness is an important part of resolving grief and moving on in healing ... Many people get stuck in anger because of an unwillingness to forgive—to let go. Forgiveness is to cancel all demands, expectations and conditions ... if we continue to hang on to anger and not forgive, we tend to become bitter and we are the losers. We are the one that suffers, not the person we chose not to forgive. Quite often the person that we are angry at does not know of our anger or they are dead. Forgiveness does not excuse the behavior, does not negate the wrong; it is an acknowledgement of what has happened; a choice has been made. Forgiveness does not mean forgetting. (Bereavement Educational Services)

Phases Six and Seven: The future

Phases Six and Seven are about the future. During these phases, innate instincts are reclaimed using loss and grief processes/activities for an individual/family/community. During these phases, and where appropriate, we need to develop traditional and/or contemporary grieving activities/ceremonies. Herein lies the power to break the cycle of grief-fears and the grief behaviours that accompanies them.

Phase Six involves the development of traditional and contemporary grieving programs that are spiritually based. In this way you can make your connection to your spirit and to our spiritual ancestors. The Seven Phases to Healing is one such program.

Phase Seven involves the development of traditional and contemporary grieving programs that are socially based. During this phase, we express the built-up grief energy out of the physical body. The Seven Phases to Healing is one such program.

In broad terms, when an individual, a family, a community, a particular cultural group, a nation of people experience the Seven Phases they will invariably experience AIRRFI.

AIRRFI: Six steps to healing grief

AIRRFI is the acronym for Awareness, Identify, Reclaim, Reconcile, Forgive, Inspire. AIRRFI are the six steps that became an ongoing process for me.

Journeying throughout the Seven Phases, the suffering was horrendous. I don't recall experiencing AIRRFI at a conscious level. As I had little or no contact with counsellors or professionals, out of fear of being judged and criticised for getting myself into my situation, I identified some years ago that I experienced the AIRRFI process within these Seven Phases instinctively. I had endured my rock bottom and instinctively knew I was ready, willing and able to climb out of what I had become; I was submissive, aggressive, angry, full of rage, violent, and had thoughts of suicide.

Step 1—Awareness. This first step slowly opened my consciousness, enabling me to fully understand that 'there's nothing wrong with me, I'm "only" grieving'—it was an 'ah ah' moment. This first step explains what, where, when, how and why loss and grief became my missing link to understanding my major social and health problems.

Step 2—Identify. This stage cleared a pathway where I was able to identify and name what, where, when, how and why numerous recognised and unrecognised losses occurred for my ancestors. I was able to apply the same processes for me as one of their contemporary descendants. It was also the stage where I married together these same two categories of major losses with my trapped suppressed unresolved grief emotions.

Step 3—Reclaim. During this stage, I had to presuppose what my ancestors must have endured as a starting point to reclaiming, where possible, their recognised and unrecognised losses; I had to put myself through my contemporary grieving ceremonies/activities on their behalf. I was also compelled to apply comparable contemporary grieving ceremonies/activities on my own behalf throughout my adulthood as we were never able to grieve throughout my childhood/adolescent years. By and large, these steps eventually led to me reclaiming my innate human instincts from grief-fear.

Step 4—Reconciling. The first three steps were physically enduring and exhausting since my physical body had been accumulating dangerously high levels of grief energy. So, expressing the build-up of this dangerously high level of grief energy prepares my physical body to embrace my human spirit; they both readied themselves for a powerful spiritual and physical reconciliation. When my human spirit reconciled with my physical body, this primed me holistically as a human being to become spiritually evolved. Becoming spiritually evolved supported me to rise above the day-to-day surroundings of a grief-stricken physical world of human beings—here is where I found my holistic wellbeing, passion and life's purpose.

It is my belief, concept, understanding and experience that the actual reconciliation occurred when my seven humanities slowly realigned themselves with my innate human instincts, and it's this phenomenon that enabled me as a human being to begin the process of spiritually forgiving. Forgiveness belongs under the umbrella of loss and grief and sadly it has been misappropriated in other areas of society. Forgiving both categories of perpetrators for what happened to my ancestors when they experienced their major invasion led to subsequent losses for the following generations and their contemporaries in the 21st century. Forgiveness is not to forget what's happened or to excuse perpetrating toxic grief behaviours upon humanity, but I was acknowledging that I had hit my rock bottom and my suppressed unresolved grief became detrimental not just to myself but my family and the next generation.

Step 5—Forgive. Spiritually forgiving the European ancestors became necessary for those who were transported in 1788 to this continent; spiritual forgiveness had to be applied to my contemporary family and non-family perpetrators. When I was spiritually prepared to forgive the perpetrators of all forms of abusive and violent grief behaviours, I become responsible for breaking my cycle of perpetrating abuse in my lifetime, in my personal life. Using loss and grief as a health model, I optimistically hope that future generations in a workplace setting or in their personal life will be able to take responsibility for their social and emotional wellbeing by choosing not to impose their personal and/or professional grief-fears upon humanity.

Step 6—Inspiration. This step enabled me to find my wellbeing holistically. In my opinion, the individual who has achieved their true purpose is the person who will be able to keep all forms of unhealthy social and health problems at bay: mental illness, diseases, addictions, etc.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has proposed that it is important to recognise the transgenerational and pervasive effects of individual and collective loss and grief, and the extent to which this has impacted at so many levels on individual and community wellbeing. It has drawn on the comprehensive programs and individual counselling models offered through the Australian Institute for Loss and Grief that explore the major losses and unresolved grief that have been passed down from generation to generation.

Grief is defined as a deep sorrow or suffering and a natural reaction to losing something or someone precious to us. This grief arises from individual as well as collective traumatic loss. To really heal, people need to reconnect with the sacred site that resides within the body, which many call the spirit. While this chapter recognises the shared history of invasion and colonisation experienced by Aboriginal people, it also stresses the

diversity of historical influences and geography and the need for programs to be developed in accordance with these diverse needs and circumstances. It proposes an alternative way of viewing and dealing with mental illnesses and the need for holistic loss and grief programs to be available for individuals, families, communities, as a race of people and as a nation to access without any fear or favour. As long as adults continue suppressing their grief emotions out of shame, blame and fear they will not know how to nurture children in any family or workplace loss and grief situation.

Reflective exercises

- 1 If childhood grief remains unresolved, all of us carry our suppressed unresolved grief into our teens and into our adulthood. It is important for our own healing to recognise our own suppressed unresolved grief in order to be empathetic and to be able to work effectively to assist others to heal their grief and trauma. This exercise is useful for all practitioners in developing cultural competence and critically reflecting on their own level of resilience.

Think about an instance where you have experienced a major loss and you're confident that the grief is still unresolved today. Consider whether these were associated with any form of loss pertaining to abuse and how you feel about this experience today. I've inserted one of my loss models as an example.

To apply this model to yourself, begin by identifying a time when you felt very confident in yourself or when you used to feel safe or trusting. Ask yourself why you tend to feel unsafe around a certain gender and/or situation now?

| Innate emotion (what I had before the abuse) | Scale 1–10 | Identify the experience where loss of innate emotion originated | Emotional legacies (not visible) | Scale 1–5 |
|--|---------------|--|-------------------------------------|--------------|
| Safety | 9 | Sexually abused at 11 years of age | Unsafe | 2 |
| Trusting | 8 | Sexually abused at 11 years of age | Distrusting | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |
| INNATE HUMAN INSTINCTS INTACT (Collectively) | | | GRIEF-FEAR (Collectively) | |

- 2 As you complete this process, try to articulate the thought processes and emotions that you experienced in dealing with the situation at the time, and any questions it raised for you.
- 3 This chapter focuses on the importance of positive self healing. Reflect on Indigenous cultural aspects that may impact on self healing.

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