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Alzheimer's: Use Grief Over Alzheimer's Loss To Transform Yourself

Emily, one of our blog visitors, wrote a while back about the losses she has suffered. The loss of her husband to Alzheimer's disease, she wrote, will be her worst. Alzheimer's, as all of you know, gives you more than your share of losses.

Probably the most difficult are those that alter the core of our most intimate relationships. If your partner of many decades has Alzheimer's disease, with whom do you share your most personal thoughts, or share your day, your joys and challenges?

Does your loved one know you, feel a connection to you, sense love toward you? Do you love differently? Who are you now - a wife, husband, caregiver, stranger? These I believe are complicated questions reflecting profound losses.

At the 2005 Frontotemporal Dementia Caregiver Conference in Philadelphia, Dr. Dan Gottlieb said, "If we didn't love we wouldn't suffer - and the more we love the more we suffer." It's only because we love that we grieve, making grief a human response that can't be avoided.

And although we do not fully get over all of our losses or our grief, we can change our relationship toward them. Grief, according to my teacher and mentor, Lyn Praschat, Ph.D., is the most powerful untapped resource for human transformation.

Each of us has the opportunity to transform our grief, yet the transformation does not come without anger, pain, loneliness, and sometimes terror. I see this transformation unfolding when caregivers begin to work on what they can change and begin accepting what they can't.

I observe a shift in caregivers from "saving" their loved one to finding hope and meaning in other ways. This may be in discovering creative ways to offer the best care they can to be fully present with their loved one, and finding joy in everyday happenings. Others discover qualities about themselves they didn't know they had, including patience, resilience and even humor in the most challenging of situations.

Some caregivers find ways to help others who are experiencing similar pain or advocate for laws that support persons with Alzheimer's disease and their families. The key I believe is to avoid feeling helpless. With incredible tenacity, many caregivers transform a heartbreaking situation into one of hope and meaning. Yes, Emily, we will pray for you.

"Grief deepens you ... Grief forces you to look at those parts of yourself that are not yet healed. If you look at grief as a teaching you will grow."

- The Power Deck, by Lynn Andrews. Free Medical Advice published By [Dr Vivienne Balonwu](#).

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