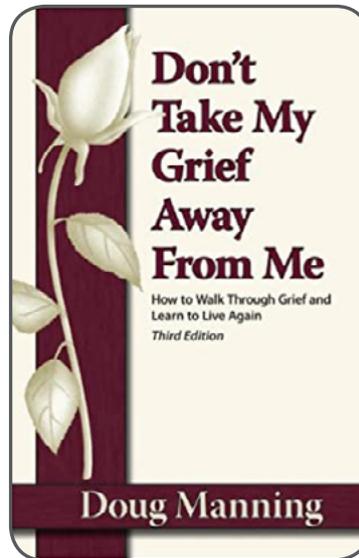


## Book Review by Mark, June 2020 of 'Don't Take My Grief Away From Me' by Doug Manning



**My son Josiah was diagnosed with bone cancer when he was 12 and died aged 14 in April 2015.**

I read this book for the first time a few months after Josiah died. I found it helpful because it described my experiences and highlighted ways in which I could help take care of myself during my journey in grief. As I looked again through this book, 5 years on, I realised how much of what we do in our Dads' Care group is what the author gently recommends. To get his points across, Doug Manning shares many stories about grief from people's own experiences. I would describe it as a book written in a conversational style and on many occasions, I would find myself saying 'yes, that's my experience' or 'I should try that'.

*These are some of the chapters I found particularly helpful:*

### **1. Don't Take My Grief Away From Me.**

In one of our Dads' Care group sessions a new dad joined us who had very recently lost his son, he was obviously feeling the raw pain of his loss and had a very hard time getting his words out while sobbing uncontrollably. The rest of the group listened in such a way that you could feel us all silently urging him to keep on sharing word by word his story of loss. Too often 'helpful' people want to explain why I am feeling the way I am feeling, or argue with me to try and convince me to 'not let myself feel that way'. What I really need, like the new dad in our group that day, is someone to listen with empathy. I know that dad would have left our group that day feeling totally emotionally drained - I was drained just listening to his story - but I know it was an essential step in his journey and we were there to help him take it.

### **5. Grief on the run.**

Life remains busy even as you are journeying in grief, we have to be purposeful in setting time aside to experience our grief, that's what happens in our Dads' Care group. Sometimes we will cry because of what we have chosen to share in the session or because of what someone else has spoken about. "Tears are memories in motion and very important to our grieving process". It's cathartic.

## **8. Understanding grief.**

Telling our story, or some part of it, is always part of our sessions and there are a couple of sections in the book that deal with why expressing our loss in terms of impacts we can understand is important and sharing those things with others who understand. Putting our feelings into words is difficult but the process helps unjumble the mass of thoughts surrounding our loss, some of which have not seen the light of day.

This chapter ends with a section titled: Turning the corner. Is not about not grieving anymore, we will always miss our child and long for their presence for as long as we live. But there are points in our journey which are punctuated with change, a change which means we are able to do something which we hadn't the strength to do before. One of those points in my own journey was realizing I am ready to sort through the cupboards in Josiah's bedroom. Often it is something you cannot part with until that day.

## **9. A series of firsts.**

The first time we do almost anything after the death of our child can bring on a wave of grief. In our Dads' Care group we talk about anniversaries, the book points out that it can often be the anticipation that is worse than the event itself.

## **10. There are no comparisons.**

I found this Yiddish proverb helpful: "When a woman loses a husband she is called a widow. When a man loses a wife he is called a widower. When a child loses a parent they are called an orphan. But, there is no word for when a parent loses a child. That pain is far too great for words." Sometimes I want to shout from the roof top, 'do you realize the pain I am going through'. It's good to recognise that our grief is as unique as a fingerprint.

## **15. Keep your cussin' current.**

Dealing with anger is a big part of our grieving. This chapter in the book helped me recognise I need a healthy outlet for my anger and it's ok to revisit that outlet frequently. It's natural to place blame and rehearse over and over 'if only' scenarios. "A lot of the quilt we face in grief is really internalized anger that had no place to go."

## **17. It takes a family.**

Sharing memories is a wonderful way to honour our children. My experience is family times of sharing don't happen unless we are purposeful about them. When they do occur, their impact is deep and lasting. I've also experienced a very meaningful time with the Dad's group where we have shared precious memories about our children in such a way that at the end of the session it was like our children were present with us in the room.

## **18. Safe people.**

The author says that "safe people are rare indeed". 'Safe people' are those you can talk with and your grief is accepted and your grieving does not make the person nervous or scared. That to me is why the Dads' Care group is so helpful to me, it's full of safe people. So many times I have come away from a Dad's group meeting where I have experienced "grief shared is grief reduced". "As you talk you are ordering your mind. Talking and being heard gradually stops the whirl and helps the mind begin to focus and see through the maze of thoughts". "And safe ears are the most powerful healing force there are for facing your grief." 'Safe people understand'. Doug tells a helpful story from his own experience in this chapter, highlighting the difference between being heard and being understood. And it's only when we are understood that we can move to the next step.

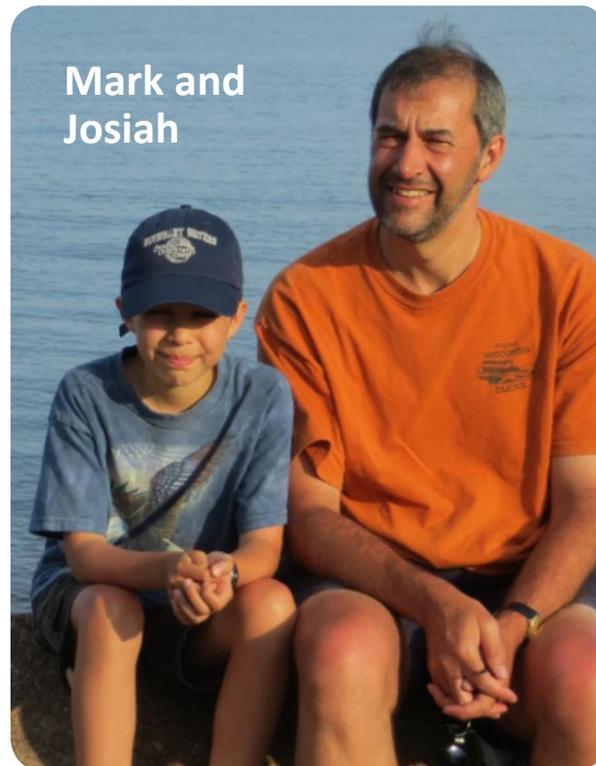
## **20. How do we help ourselves.**

"No one knows as much about grief as those walking through it." Dads' Care group is a place where we benefit by helping others, from our knowledge and personal experience. Somehow we learn how best to deal with our own loss when we help others to deal with theirs. I think this description of the grief process helps me remember where I am hoping to reach:

"When the heart breaks When the heart bleeds When the heart surrenders And When the heart heals". "The heart surrendering is when we give ourselves the permission to live again." We don't want to forget our dead child, we don't want others to forget our child and when we bring our child to mind we want our feelings to reflect warmth and love, and our memories to be happy ones.

*This book has helped me understand what grief and grieving is, and what it is that I am experiencing as a result of my son's death. "Grieving is as natural as crying when you are hurt, sleeping when you are tired, eating when you are hungry, or sneezing when your nose itches. It is nature's way of healing a broken heart."*

I recommend reading this book, it is made up of many short chapters running to 123 pages in total. It can be found on Amazon at <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Dont-Take-My-Grief-Away/dp/1892785749> (ISBN: 9781892785749).



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