

Ep #255: Grief with Krista St. Germain



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Brooke Castillo

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Welcome to *The Life Coach School Podcast*, where it's all about real clients, real problems and real coaching. And now your host, Master Coach Instructor, Brooke Castillo.

What's up, everybody? Today's the best day ever on the podcast. Today, we have the best guest we've ever had and will ever have. I'm trying to make her totally nervous. And I can see her because we're recording this on Zoom. Today, I have Krista St-Germain on the podcast, and we are going to talk about the most exciting topic. We're going to talk about grief, y'all. Are you excited?

Here's the thing; no one wants to talk about grief unless they're in grief. Isn't that true? Like, when you are in grief, that's all you want to talk about, all you can focus on, all you can think about. So, I asked Krista to come on the podcast and I didn't prepare with her at all. And it's not because I'm irresponsible.

It's because what I've noticed lately is that whenever I prepare with a guest ahead of time, all of the best stuff is, like, in the beginning before we start recording.

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Brooke: So, welcome to the podcast, Krista. Tell us a little bit about you.

Krista: Thank you, so much, "Best guest ever..."

Brooke: Ever, will ever be.

Krista: Yeah, so my specialty is grief. It is what I do. I kind of never really imagined that it's what I would love to do, but it is what I love to do, and it's something that a lot of people need help with. And I got into it because two years ago, two and a half years ago, my husband died. So I got launched into my own grief experience and eventually managed to come out the other side actually stronger and more resilient and happier than I went in. And that is an amazing thing. And so now, I get to share that with other people.

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Brooke: Yeah, that's great. So, Krista is a life coach. She got trained through *The Life Coach School*. She works specifically with people who are going through grief. Her specialty is widowed moms because that's closest to home. But she works with anyone who is going through the experience of grief. And one of the things that I want to do on this podcast today is just open up that conversation, because I actually think there's a lot of really taboo things when it comes to grief. I think that there's this idea that there's a right way to do it and there's structure to it and there are stages to it and you have to follow them exactly and there should be crying involved and there should be wearing black involved and lots of mourning. I just think it's fascinating how the expectation of how other people grieve is so interesting and I think it can leave us feeling like we're going it wrong. And so, I'm really excited to talk to you about that piece of it.

And I'm going to share the way that I like to start – and I definitely want to hear more about your story of grief and your process that you went through. But I'm going to share my story first and just open it up to get your insight, because I'm kind of fascinated by it. I had three deaths in my life within a six-month period. And my experience of those three deaths was very different. My experience of grief through those three deaths was very different and I learned so much about myself and about grieving and about grief. And this morning, on my walk, I was thinking about this and I was thinking that there is a difference between the feeling of grief and the action of grieving. And I hadn't thought about that distinction before. And everything that I think about and look at is through the lens of the Model now, but when I went through these three losses, these three deaths, I didn't have the Model yet. So it's very interesting to look back. So, the first person I lost was my dad. My dad died of alcoholism, sclerosis; he literally drank himself to death.

My dad was the most hilarious drunk and the craziest most fun guy, but crazy, reckless, and self-destructive. And he went to rehab, he knew that was his last chance, called a cab from rehab – of course he did – to come pick him up and drive him home, and he basically just continued to drink until his body shut down. And my experience of his death was really

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fascinating because I had had such, kind of, a tumultuous relationship with him my whole life, so I feel like I was grieving my relationship with him prior to his death. So my relationship with him was, I would say, very sporadic. I rarely talked to him. He wasn't a big part of my life in the physical sense. I think our dads are a big part of our life always because we're always thinking – or I was – thinking about him a lot and my relationship with him and how it affected me, but I didn't actually have a lot of conversations with him. So when I found out he'd died, it was really fascinating. I had a girlfriend who was coming out of town to visit me, like on her way to my house, right before I found out that he had died. And she didn't know anything about him and we weren't even that close, and I still went out to dinner with her. I still had dinner with her. I didn't really cry when he died.

I didn't have a deep sense of mourning or grief when he died. And yet, I feel like I did it right. So, looking back on it, it felt like, "Shouldn't I be crying? Shouldn't I be more upset? Shouldn't I be handling this different? What about the stages? Shouldn't I be yelling at people?" I didn't go through any of that with him. And so I'll be curious to talk to you about that in a second, but I want to kind of give you all three and then we'll kind of open it up. The second person that I lost just a few months later was my brother to a drug overdose. And with my brother, we had kind of always spent our time – my mom and I, our family and I – worried about his death, worried that he was going to kill himself. And so when I found out that he had died, there was this very strange sense of peace for me because it was almost like the worst that could happen did and there was a relief in not having to worry about that anymore. So fascinating, right? So it's kind of like, although I was very sad to lose my brother and very, very sad that we lost him in such a tragic way, there was also this overwhelming peace that I had and overwhelming relief that I had that I could stop dreading the inevitable worry. And my grief with my brother was very tied up with my mother because I didn't think she was going to make it through, emotionally, through his death.

So there was a lot of mix-up there. I cried with him, but I don't feel like I had a really deep anguish and a really deep mourning. I feel like I had, I guess I

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would say, an appropriate amount of grief. I was very sad and cried a lot. But it was also a calming sense of peace with his death. Right after that, I lost my dog; my first dog that I ever had that was my own dog. We'd had dogs growing up in our family, but I got a dog when I met Chris. When we moved in together, we got a dog and his name was Calvin. And he was a little dachshund and so we took him everywhere with us. We were obsessed with this dog. This dog literally did not leave our side. We took him everywhere. I was always thinking about him, always loving him. I think dogs are an opportunity to love unconditionally at the deepest level. And I took him on a walk one day and he went to get a drink out of a pool. Of course, I didn't have him on a leash.

We were in our neighbor's back yard, walking through our neighbor's back yard. He went to go get a drink in the pool, slipped under the pool cover, I didn't see him, and he drowned. And I have to say, to this day, that is the most pain I have ever felt in my life was that anguish over losing that dog. Like, I could not get out of bed for days. And so I thought a lot about those three deaths and those three experiences and how the loss of my dog was just literally, I could not function. And it wasn't until two years later when I started studying coaching and learning about coaching that I heard Byron Katie say something that really set me free from the pain of losing my dog. And the thought she gave me was that everybody dies right on time. And I don't know why, I don't know how, I don't know when, but immediately, I felt healed of that pain. When I look back on it now, I think what's so interesting about the pain of losing Calvin, my god, was that it was so riddled with shock and regret and blame that there wasn't this pure open-healing grief. And so I'm like fascinated that grief isn't just – I do believe that grief is one of the emotions that we want to experience when we lose someone and that it can be very healing, but when we mix it in with arguing that it shouldn't have happened, which is what I was continually doing two years later, we cause so much unnecessary pain that isn't grief at all.

And so I would love to hear your perspective on me as a person who grieves. And I'm sure you've had this experience too, right, with your clients. It's not just grief. Grief feels amazing and purifying and processing.

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And when there's this arguing with it, I feel like it prevents it from being healing. So what are your thoughts?

Krista: Yeah, so I think what you're articulating, and the way I articulate it, is we're talking about there's pain, and that's what we expect to have in life, and then there's suffering, which we create with our thinking, right? So grief is what it is and we get to make it better or worse with our thinking.

Brooke: Yes.

Krista: So anger is like – I hear clients all the time that are feeling angry. And if anger was all they were feeling, that's a totally normal, natural, common part of grief. But then they make it so much worse by judging themselves for being angry.

Brooke: Now, are they angry that the person died?

Krista: You name it. Sometimes, they're angry at the person. Sometimes, they're angry at themselves, the circumstances, would have, should have, could have. Sometimes they're angry at God. Sometimes they're angry that they lived. Whatever it is, it doesn't really matter.

Brooke: Oh, that they personally lived and the other person died?

Krista: Yeah, you name it. And grief is so different and so unique for every individual. But what I see so much is that instead of just allowing it to be what it is, we just heap all of this judgment and unnecessary pain on top of ourselves and turn that pain into suffering.

Brooke: Yes, and I think, for me, what was so fascinating when I lost Calvin was I thought so much about this, why it hurt so much, and I do think that a huge part of it was a lot of my identity was tied up with him just in the sense that I was this dog's mom and I was with him all day every day. So the experience of losing his presence in my life in kind of a physical way, I think, was so much more traumatic than losing my dad, who wasn't in my life in a physical way at all. And so I think I was still able to maintain a relationship with my dad, even when he died. Like, our relationship didn't

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change very much when he was alive or dead because I was still having lots of conversations and thinking about him, whereas my relationship with my dog – and I almost want to say you can't compare the life of a dog to a human because human life is more valuable, but I actually don't believe that for myself because it's my personal experience. And my ability to love that dog was so limitless and so it made me think, like, what is it that causes us to experience loss on such a deep level?

Like, there's so many layers. And I imagine, when you lose your husband, as you're working with these clients, that is a daily experience. You see your husband every day. You're probably parenting children with them. You're talking with them, you're sleeping with them, you wake up with them. It's a very intense physical experience as well as an emotional experience, versus losing maybe a parent who doesn't live with you and isn't in that presence. I'm curious, do you have any thoughts about that? Do you think that has an effect on it? Obviously, that's wrapped up in your identity too, right? You're a wife, and then all of a sudden, you're not a wife.

Krista: Oh, it affects every area of your life for sure. And that's not to say that it's only just losing a spouse that affects all areas of your life. And you think about the difference between a parent and a spouse or a parent and a child, you know, we have these thoughts that there is a natural order of things. So often, it's easier to think, well okay, they were older than me or they had this issue or we saw this coming or – we just have these things that make certain losses less painful or more acceptable in our minds than others. And it's so interesting because we do this as a culture and we judge each other's losses, and then we try and play this stacking game, and we do this compare and despair thing with our grief versus someone else's. You see so much offence and hurt by people, when really, what they're trying to do is maybe relate to one another, and it ends up causing this, "Well how dare you tell me that your divorce was painful when I just lost my husband..." or I shouldn't be sad about losing my so and so because this person just lost their so and so or the circumstances were so tragic for this versus that. It's just all a bunch of judgment and thought, and not helpful.

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Brooke: You know, that's so interesting. So if somebody tells you that they lost their dog or they lost their grandmother or their second aunt or something, we make, like, an assumption, versus if you lose a child. That pain is worse or whatever. And I think that that's so fascinating, to be able to say well that's worse – it's kind of like there's this hierarchy of pain. And what I've realized is that we create so much of – I mean, if you look at the Model, grief is caused by our thinking. Death doesn't cause our emotion. and it's really hard for people when it comes to death to talk about because they feel this so – and believe me, I know what this feels like, that overwhelming sense of loss that actually feels involuntary. Can you relate to that? Was that your experience of it?

Krista: Oh, it's instant agony. You don't feel like you're choosing that in the moment at all. In fact, you know, it's really off-putting to be told, when it's not a thought that you can understand or agree with, that this happened for a reason and they're better off, or any of these...

Brooke: Or everybody dies right on time...

Krista: Right. Like I remember listening to you and I remember some of the things that you were saying that I was just like, "No, that's not for me. It's great that she thinks that, but I don't think that." And as time went by and as I kind of tested these thoughts and tested them with where I was and my healing and the work that I was doing, it's so fascinating to see how thoughts that aren't available to you immediately, you start to believe in the potential of them.

Brooke: Oh, that's interesting.

Krista: And you start to see, like, I could accept that thought if I wanted it. it could be my choice. It's an option for me. And then, like, you know, all of the options unfold and – what was the quote?

Brooke: Byron Katie said, "Everyone dies right on time." And I feel like had she told me that right when my dad or brother or dog had died, I would be like, "Erm, no..." But I will say that when I heard it, it just let me stop trying

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to control it, which is so asinine, right? I was trying to control the fact that my dog had died. Two years later, I was arguing with it, renegotiating it, “He shouldn’t have. He was just a puppy. He was just so little. I should have paid closer attention.” All of that was just so useless. It was causing me so much pain. And in one minute, hearing that one thought, it was all completely gone. And that’s not to say that it would be for anyone. And it’s not to say that thought would have served me in the moment of losing someone, but I think that what I have seen is that when we argue with what is true and when we worry about what could be, we never win – we never win – and that grief is part of the human experience and it is and can be very healing. And when we feel like we’re accosting ourselves with our own grief, I think that we’re doing it in a way that’s not serving anything or anyone.

Krista: Yeah, 100%.

Brooke: Because I’ve coached people that have been in grief for 25 years.

Krista: Oh, time has nothing to do with it. That’s one of the biggest myths, just give it time. That’s not true at all.

Brooke: Say more about that.

Krista: Well, time can pass. It’s not the amount of time that passes. It’s what you do with that time. It’s what you choose to think during that time. Time in and of itself doesn’t do anything.

Brooke: So I wonder, had I not heard that from Byron Katie, if I still would be in pain. It was like a looping pain that was just agonizing, right? And I got more dogs and they brought me joy, but it was like joy on top of agony instead of...

Krista: And think about how that works and what we know about neural pathways, right. We think a thought, we feel a feeling, we reinforce that and we’ll create a pattern. So, time doesn’t just alleviate that. If we keep thinking the same thought and having the same feeling, we just reinforce it.

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Brooke: Yes, so what do you think about this idea, like when I lost my dad, and I didn't cry, and I don't think I went through a process of grief after he died. I actually think I grieved him and my relationship with him before he died. What are your thoughts on that?

Krista: I think that's very common. So, first of all, people get really hung up, as you mentioned, on these stages of grief. And it is so un-useful. And what most people think they're talking about when they say stages of grief, they're thinking about denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance and all of that, right, Kubler Ross's work. Her work was not on grief. Her work was on death and dying.

Brooke: Okay, what? Stop it...

Krista: Yeah.

Brooke: Let's talk about this because this is what I was thinking about today. I'm like, wait, death doesn't cause grief, necessarily. What causes grief? And I was thinking about this, and I'm like, for me, I think love, like the love that I had is what caused the grief and death didn't cause it. That made my mind explode a little bit. So that's fascinating. So her work was on death?

Krista: Yes, death and dying, the process of death and dying...

Brooke: Which is different than grief – we seem to think they're the same thing, yeah?

Krista: Yeah, and we seem to think there's some sort of linear process that we're supposed to go through and it's supposed to be in order and if we skip a step something's gone wrong. And that's just not true. It's different for everyone. It's unique to the circumstance. It's caused by our thinking and it's totally okay that we don't put a timeline on it and we don't put expectations and we all grieve differently based on the situation and on our own thinking. There are tasks – I think it's more useful to think about grieving as a process, mourning as a process. Grieving is really the state,

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mourning is the process. And in the context of this conversation, we're talking about grief as it relates to death, but of course, we grieve for many other reasons, like divorce or we lose a job. Anytime we have change or loss, grief is typically what we get. But when we think about it in terms of tasks that we accomplish during mourning, accepting reality and processing pain and figuring out how to live in the absence of the loved one and the finding a way to remember them. It's much more useful to think about what is it that we want to accomplish as we mourn, as opposed to how should we do it, what stages we go through or emotions we have to feel – much more useful I think, when we think tasks. And yeah, Kubler Ross, she was not saying – in fact, that's something she later stated that she regretted. So many people used her work to interpret the process of grieving and mourning as opposed to death.

Brooke: Interesting. And like anything else, if it's helpful, use it. But I think a lot of us use things against ourselves in a way that's totally unnecessary when we just get to have whatever human experience that we're having. There's not a right or wrong way to feel an emotion. I think it's on both sides; if you don't cry and mourn and take a week off when someone dies, or, on the other side of that, "If it's been two years, shouldn't you be over this by now..." kind of energy around that. I remember, someone said that to my mom, you know. She lost her son and somebody said to her, like, "Isn't it time to move on now?" And my mom was like, "I will never move on." Like, in her mind, like, "What are you talking about?" And I do think it's one of the things in life that is such a personal experience, you know. It's like, you can have two parents that lose a child and they're each going to have such a personal experience of grief separately that depends on their relationship with themselves and with their child. I find it amazingly fascinating. So, if we have people that are listening and they are struggling with grief, or they have someone in their life that may be struggling with grief, what can you talk to us about that might be helpful? And maybe share a little bit of your experience and what was helpful and hard for you personally.

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Krista: Sure, I think, for me, the biggest thing was that all of my hopes and dreams in my mind were wrapped up in my idea of this relationship. Like, I envisioned my entire life, you know, the rest of my life being spent with this person, and the idea of not having him, really, my secret worry was that the happiness was over, like, it was gone. That was as good as it got and the best I could hope for was just to get to this kind of new normal. And I thought that in this resigned way, like, “Well, I guess I can, like, recover, but it won’t be as good as it was. It doesn’t get better than that.” And so, for me, of course, my immediate call was to my therapist, like immediately, and so, so helpful for me to tell the story. And so I would encourage people, you have to be able to talk about it. You need to be able to just process what it is that happened, be able to tell your story as many times as often as you need to until you’re okay with it.

Brooke: Okay, interesting.

Krista: So, seeing someone, or even if it’s friends or even if it’s paying witness to your own story through journaling or some other creative outlet, you have to be able to tell it and process it and come to terms with accepting it before you can do anything else. And I think so much of it, we tend to think – and I’m really grateful that I had you in my back pocket, because I had been listening to the podcast, and so intellectually I had learned all of these things that I really hadn’t had the chance yet to apply. But I kind of understood this idea that we actually have to process our emotions. There is no way around. And so often, I see people who either want to shove it down because they’re afraid it’s going to be some big black hole that they’ll get sucked into and they’ll never come out of because no one’s ever taught them the skill of how to allow a feeling to be there. Or, in the case of a lot of the moms that I work with, they’re telling themselves this well-intentioned lie that they need to take care of their children first; that they’ll help their children first and there will be time for them to grieve later. And guess what – that time never comes.

Brooke: Wow, yes...

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Krista: But they end up stuffing and stuffing and stuffing, or maybe they had to be strong. Maybe it was a diagnosis and they were the caregiver and they were the one who made all the arrangements, and so it was, “Grief comes later, grief comes later.” And then they really have never allowed themselves to process their emotions. So I think those are some of the main things. And for me, it was the case too, you have to be able to tell your story, you have to learn how to feel your feelings, and then you also have to learn – essentially, it’s called coping self-efficacy. Basically, what it means is you need to understand what you have the ability to control and what you don’t. And you need to believe in your power to exercise that control, which essentially means, you need to understand the Model.

Brooke: Period.

Krista: Seriously, you need to understand how the Mode works and you need to understand what is the C, what is the circumstance that you can’t control, what is the neutral part of it, and then really truly believe and exercise your ability to choose your thinking on purpose and create your emotional state and all of it.

Brooke: Yes, because I think that when you don’t accept the past as it is – and this is for death or for anything – when something has happened that you don’t want to have happened, you can spend the rest of your life negotiating it. You can spend the rest of your life surviving it over and over and over again. And it’s kind of like what you said when you lost your husband. It was like, “Okay, now the happiness is over. It was taken away from me by something I can’t control...” leaves you feeling so powerless and like you just have to survive the rest of your life.

Krista: Yeah.

Brooke: And so I think that’s a huge piece of – it has been for me in all of the areas where I’ve grieved – just understanding that this is part of the human experience and it does happen sometimes. And for me, there’s nothing we can do about it because one of the things – and I think this is kind of that bargaining idea, that we think that there was something that we

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could have done in cases where clearly, like a car accident or something that – like with me, with my dog, I felt like of course it was my responsibility, but understanding that there was no way to change that, what had happened, was so obvious, and yet not to me. I kept trying to change it.

Krista: And for me, it was obviously faster. So, Hugo was killed as the result of a car accident and I had had a flat tire and he pulled up behind me and then he was trying to get my spare tire out of my car and a driver with meth and alcohol in his system came up and hit the back of his car and trapped him in between his car and my car. So I had this dialogue with myself for a while, but I was able to nip it in the bud pretty quickly, that I should have pulled up farther on the road, I could have gone and had my tires checked before the trip. Like, all these things that – I should have convinced him to call AAA, because I had a AAA membership and I should have been more insistent – all of these things, could have, would have, should have. And at a point, you just realize, wait a minute, I can do that for eternity and it wouldn't change anything. And the only thing it actually does is give my power away to something I can't control.

Brooke: And perpetuate pain that serves no processing purpose. So the way that I feel about grief and my experience about grief in life is that it is an amazing healing process to go through when you've lost someone or something. I think that if you do it without all of the judgment, and like you said, the anger and the blame and the pointing of the fingers and the hate, I think that – because a lot of times, we turn hate outwards or inwards, or like you said, to god or to the universe or whatever. I think that when you can process just the purity of grief, it feels very similar. To me, it feels like the flipside of love, because there's no reason to grieve if there is no love. And so, for me, that does feel healing and purposeful and useful in our lives, even though it doesn't feel good at all.

Krista: Yeah.

Brooke: And I do think the other thing was – so you were there at the accident?

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Krista: Yeah.

Brooke: So then there's this whole other piece, right? So I think the fact that I was there with my dog and I found him and I pulled him out and I was giving him mouth to mouth, I think there's all this trauma that is sometimes around death too that has nothing to do with the grieving process, has nothing to do – it's a whole separate kind of processing that needs to happen.

Krista: Yes, for sure.

Brooke: And it's crazy, but it's almost like a different skill set. It's a different focus that I had to kind of process through. And I think that's true for violence and accidents and any kind of trauma that you're experiencing and seeing as part of, I guess what we'd call death, right?

Krista: Yeah, and it's all just so unique. There's so many variables and it's just all unique. And that's what makes overly categorizing or overly simplifying so un-useful.

Brooke: Yeah, or saying that there's a right way to do it or a professional way to do it.

Krista: Yeah, or even that there is – because I think, for sure, we now know that growth can come from loss. It can be a catalyst for higher satisfaction in life, but we have to be really careful with that because it's one thing if the bereaved is choosing that path for themselves because it's what they want. It's another thing if we say, "Well, you should find the gifts of grief."

Brooke: Is that how they say it too?

Krista: Oh, it's very, like, condescending. And if you are – we don't want to imply that there is a right or a wrong way to do it. You don't have to find a gift in this loss if you don't want to. If you want to, you can.

Brooke: So tell me this; when you were going through this and you had all the people around you, and we don't know what to say, we don't know what

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to do, all we do is bake shit and casseroles and we bring them to your house, but what is, do you think – I don't even want to say the right or an appropriate thing because I don't know that there is – but what are your thoughts on that?

Krista: Yeah, so I think most of what we say is very well-intentioned, but because we're not taught, in our culture, that to talk about death, we often don't. And so, when it happens, we're very uncomfortable and we don't know what to say. But what I would avoid doing is comparing. I would avoid comparison and I would avoid telling the person that you know how they feel or you know what it's like, because it doesn't matter. Even if you've had your own very personal experience, your experience is your experience and it's just not possible for me to know how you feel. So, "I love you, I'm sorry this happened. I'm here for you."

Brooke: You can't go wrong with that.

Krista: You can't go wrong with that. And another question that people often ask, which I think is also well-intentioned is, "How are you?" And that can be a difficult one to answer because – so you know, a better one to ask is, "How are you today?"

Brooke: Okay.

Krista: We can grapple with how we are today much easier than how we are. And it's so much easier to open up to someone and be honest when you get the, "How are you today..." versus the inclination that we have with the, "How are you..." which is just to lie about it and say we're fine because we don't want to open the can of worms and we're going to say what we're feeling and that person's going to feel awkward. They're just trying to be nice is typically what the griever thinks.

Brooke: Yeah, interesting. And I think a lot of times, we can make assumptions without just asking, you know, "Do you want to be alone or do you want me to be here?" It's, I'm sure you want to be alone, assuming that

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the person wants to be alone, and that not reaching out to them, or assuming that they want you there or that they need you there too.

Krista: Yeah, asking them what they need most, giving them the opportunity to tell you how to support them.

Brooke: Yes. So you do most of your work, which I find really fascinating, kind of after the fact, right? So you're not dealing, most of the time, I don't think you're dealing with women who have just lost their husbands within the last week or two, is that right?

Krista: Correct, not usually that early.

Brooke: Okay, so you're dealing with, kind of, once they've gone through the initial experience of it. What are some of the things that you are noticing with people that are kind of into the later – I don't even want to say there are stages of it, but kind of once there's been a few weeks that have passed, or even a few months, or I guess sometimes it's a few years, isn't it?

Krista: Yeah, it's all so different and dependent on the individual and the circumstances. Some of the things that I notice are relationship issues, especially family of origin issues, that maybe felt tolerable to the person or weren't actively causing issues when the spouse was alive, that now that has passed, have just either blown up or they're no longer able to deal with it.

Brooke: Fascinating.

Krista: So, before I could deal with my parents, now I can't. I see that a lot. Also, a lot of confidence issues come up. So your confident parenting as a team, making decisions as a team, doing things that – before, you had this person who was doing it with you, and so you had this thought that it was better that way. And now, you have this thought that you can't do it this way. So you're so filled with self-doubt and so much worry about, "Am I going to parent my children wrong?" Or I'm going to do this wrong... So

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concerned about the judgment of others and what will people think if oi – when do I date? What’s the right...?

Brooke: Oh yeah, dating, interesting...

Krista: Should I wear my ring, should I not wear my ring? You know, all of this.

Brooke: Interesting, and of course, you know, wouldn’t it be nice if you could just write a book. Here’s exactly what you do, this is how you parent your children, this is when you take the ring off, this is when you start dating again. It would be so nice if it was all just really clean in a rulebook. And of course, it can’t be that way for everyone. That’s where coaching is so beautiful, because I think that being able to talk to someone about all of the things that you’re experiencing, even if it’s not, you know, something that other people would understand. Like, what if you’re not crying? What if you don’t feel bad? What if you – like, I was imagining, what if you’re in a situation where you had divorced in your mind many years before and there’s just so many – or maybe it’s the love of your life you just met. Like, that’s a very different experience. And to say that, like, losing your husband is the same for everybody is crazy. So, you had said that your experience has – you feel like you’ve really come out of it stronger and different, in a good way. So, can you share with us maybe some ways that you were able to do that?

Krista: Yeah, so I think it’s recognizing what I could change versus what I couldn’t, and then starting to make purposeful choices. So, I think anytime you have a significant loss, we really quickly reevaluate life. Like, “Whoa, it’s shorter than I thought. What am I really doing here? Is this what I want to do with my life?” And so, for me, it was an opportunity to really do an assessment of what am I doing with my life and do I like my career and am I making a difference on this planet and how can I make more of a difference – and just reassess and restructure. And so that’s what I did. And now, I have a sense of purpose that I really never had before. Not that I didn’t actually love my job, because I really kind of did love my job, but I love this even more. So having that new appreciation for life, having a new

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appreciation for the significance of relationships, just being genuinely grateful for so much more that I wasn't seeing before...

Brooke: Yes, I think too, it's like you just never really know. And I think you can interpret that in a way that freaks you out and makes you afraid all the time, or you can interpret that as it's really a gift, right, that you're here.

Krista: Yeah, you know what's really ironic – when Hugo died, when I was in my early 20s, a good friend of mine, a sorority sister, was murdered. She was 25, four people murdered at the same time in our city; very big deal, very ugly. And we created this camp in her memory; a camp for kids who are visually impaired. And it was, like, one of those pivotal moments in my early adulthood where I had the, "Oh my gosh, life is short, what am I really doing here..." moments, you know, created this camp in her memory. So that's where we were. Hugo and I, we were at this camp and we were coming back from it...

Brooke: What?

Krista: Not kidding, right. So here we are, what, I guess it was 16 years at the time later, we've got this camp and it's one of the main things I do. And on the way back from that camp, which we created to bring meaning to someone else's life and make good out of bad, and the same thing happens. So you would think it wouldn't be that much of a surprise, I guess, but it still never ceases, I think, so surprise you when something like that happens.

Brooke: Right, because you go on believing that you were in charge of creating all of it, and in so many ways, you are. And then you realize, in every way, you're not as well. And that's the balance of being alive that I think is so precious and so terrifying all at once. So I think you can grow from experience depending on what you decide to make it mean, which you could have decided to make it mean that this keeps happening, nothing ever works out, you're never going to be happy again, and that should have never happened. Which, by the way, I would never fault anyone that did believe that, that didn't understand that that was a choice, but that truly is a

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choice. And, by the way, I don't think it's the right choice, or the wrong choice.

Krista: Yeah...

Brooke: You see what I'm saying?

Krista: It's just a choice.

Brooke: It's a choice and people start to feel like they don't have choices in terms of how they interpret it. Is there anything else you think has been helpful for you?

Krista: Yeah, just not judging it, I think. Just letting it be what it is and, you know, continuing to make room for it as it evolves. Because it's not something that you just go through and it's over. It's not like you ever just reach this point where you don't think about it anymore or things don't crop up. And so I continue to allow myself to have days, you know, like Hugo's birthday was not too long ago. I struggled that day. But what works for me is just to let myself experience what it is I'm experiencing and not tell myself that I should be further along or it shouldn't be bothering me anymore or whatever it is, and continuing to talk about our loved ones, right? Because if our relationship really just is our thoughts, then they can be dead and we can still have a relationship with them. And in many ways, that can be very healthy.

Brooke: It's so interesting you said that because when my brother died, my mother did not want to ever speak his name. She didn't want to see a picture of him. She didn't want to talk about him. She didn't want there to be like any acknowledgment. And what's so interesting is, in my life, I wanted to talk about him, you know, I wanted my kids to know about him and know about his life because he's still part of my life, even though he's passed. And I think that's such an interesting thing that I've learned being a coach, that people can die and we can grieve their death, and then we still have very, very active relationships with them, especially our mothers and our fathers and our parents. I notice that in my clients so much. And I think,

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when you lose someone unexpectedly, I think there is a relationship. So I think it's interesting to ask yourself, if you are struggling with someone's death and it was and has been something that's ongoing, a struggle with, ask yourself, what is your relationship like with that person?

Because I think there is this misconception that your relationship ends once they pass or once you get divorced or once there's kind of an ending to the physical relationship, then there is no more relationship. Now, I'm not talking about a spiritual relationship. I'm not even going there. I'm just talking about the thoughts that you're having about your mother who passed away 10 years ago; that is a relationship you're having with your mother. And your relationship that you're having with your husband that passed is a relationship. And you can ask anyone – and I'm sure you know much more about this than I do – but I read this book by Geneen Roth, and she married a man that had lost his wife to cancer. And she talked a lot about how she always felt like it was the three of them in this relationship, right? She felt like it was her and her husband, and then her husband's other wife that he had lost and still had such a strong relationship with. And I always found that so fascinating, like she was still very much alive in the relationship. And she didn't make it sound like it was in a bad way, but I think it's just an important acknowledgment that death isn't really an ending to your experience of that person. And sometimes, I think those relationships still need healing. Have you found that in some of your work?

Krista: Yes, for sure. A lot of times, there's things that went unsaid that people really need to say or communicate, either through writing, or even just imagining the person is in front of you and telling them what you need to tell them and really just closing that loop. And that can still be done, even if the person has died.

Brooke: Of course, yeah, or feeling like the relationship should have been different, or that, like, you know, "Oh I shouldn't have been mad that day..." or, "I shouldn't have had this situation that day." And I love the way you talk about it, like, the relationship isn't over. You can still say what you need to say. You can still have the experience that you need to have. And I think,

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for me, like losing my brother was not as hard as it could have been because we lost him so many times in our mind first. And I think the same with my dad. It was different because I kind of grieved my relationship with him as my dad first, that I was able to find peace, I think, in the moment much easier. And I think an unexpected death creates a different kind of experience. You know, we lost Chris's mom, she was in hospice in our house, and it was kind of a long grieving process. And by the time she had passed, it was kind of almost bitter-sweet because it was time and she was ready. And it's just that every experience is so different and I love to just let it unfold. And I think the most important thing – and this is why we're not having, "The three tips on how to grieve better..." that's not going to be useful here because you're going to think I'm doing it wrong – I think my only tip would be, you know, obviously, recognize the Model and how your mind affects you and how you can make it so much worse by beating yourself up for any reason. But also, then just letting your experience be what it is and not judging it in any way, whether you're sobbing for three years, or you don't shed one tear. I think it can be beautiful.

Krista: Yeah, and you know, when I think about how we use the model as it relates – that's certainly a huge portion of it; understanding what we can control and what we can't. But also, we can't overly intellectualize what it is that has happened.

Brooke: Right.

Krista: And we know, just from how our brain works, that the capacity to use the executive functioning part of our brain after someone dies is diminished tremendously. That's when we talk about this fog that we get. Because our brain is like, "What just happened?" There are changes in our brain that make it very difficult for us to process intellectually all of these things that have happened and decision fatigue and all of this stuff. And so equally as important as doing the, quote en quote, work of grief, it's also just this element of distracting from it...

Brooke: Interesting, okay.

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Krista: In a healthy way, in a purposeful way, not in an, “I don’t want to feel the feelings...” way. But you know how your best ideas come to you in the shower kind of thing? It’s that kind of distraction. It’s like, we don’t want to always just focus on what we’re thinking and feeling and really doing the work of grief. We also have to just make space to just exist and enjoy and whatever that means for the individual is so unique, but creative outlets and hobbies and continuing to live, and that’s equally as important.

Brooke: And I think sometimes – and I’m sure this is where coaching is so useful, is just to know that that’s okay. It’s almost like, “Can I have permission to do this my way, in a way that works for me?” Like, “I want to go walk my dogs and I want to go to work.” Or, “I don’t want to go to work...” or whatever, and just knowing that our journey is ours and that’s okay, and also having someone help us when we’ve lost our way a little bit and we’re arguing or beating ourselves up or adding suffering to really clean processing of pain. So, tell us how you work with clients. Tell us how that process works, especially for people who aren’t really familiar with life coaching. What would it be like for someone to hire you?

Krista: So, I always meet with people first, because not everyone is a good fit for what I offer. So I always want to make sure that I actually do believe I can help the person first. So once I understand what it is that they want and what they’ve tried and where they’re stuck and I think that I can help them, then it’s a combination of a few things. So it’s, of course, individual coaching. I always tell people – and I do a lot of coaching with clients who still are in therapy and have me as their coach. We work together and we’re doing very different things. So their therapist is going to do a lot more listening and letting them vent and letting them process and tell this story, whereas I’m going to be looking for ways that they are making their grief harder on themselves with their thinking or because they lack the skills that they need on how to feel their feelings and those kinds of things, and helping them see what’s going on in their mind that they do have the ability to control. So it’s very different. So it’s a mix of coaching individually. I work with people one on one. And then also just teaching them the tools that they need so by the time we’re done coaching, they’re not dependent on

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me, you know, they have a solid self-coaching practice and they understand the basics of what they need to do to continue to support themselves in this process.

Brooke: Yeah, one of the ways that I like to describe the difference between therapy and coaching, and why I have found it very effective to work with clients that are in therapy, is let's help the therapist help you process what happened and I'll help you start to consider the future. And that's a very, I think, challenging thing when you've had a huge loss, and there's timing, you know, when you're ready for that. And then, once you are ready, it might feel scary and there might be a lot of different emotions going on with that. So I think life coaching is one of the most amazing gifts for grief and for people that are grieving and going through this, because like you said, there's so many different components to it that you may not process in therapy. Just the little things, like even when you said, when do you take the ring off and what about the closet and the bed and all of the little things that you may not want to discuss with your friends. And I think that's the other thing about coaching that you provide, is just holding that space for them to come up with their own answers. Whereas your friend, I feel like, as a friend, I'm always like, "Well this is what you should do and this is how you should do it, I'm sure of it..." versus just, it's harder for me to let – because I just want to fix everything when it comes to my friends. And then when I'm a coach, I feel like there's nothing to be fixed.

Krista: Right, yeah.

Brooke: Okay, so if people want to know more about what you offer, maybe they want to hire you as a coach, what should they do, my best guest that I've ever had in the world?

Krista: They should do one of two things. They should either go to my website, which is coachingwithkrista.com or just email me at krista@coahcingwithkrista.com and we'll get on the phone and we'll see, you know, where they are struggling and if it's a good fit and how I can help.

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Brooke: I love it. I love it. Thank you so much for coming on the podcast. I can't believe how long we talked. This is such a fascinating topic though and I think it's an important one that isn't breached on a lot of podcasts where there's laughter going on.

Krista: Yeah, I feel like we could talk for hours on this. I feel like we scratched the surface.

Brooke: We did. We just, like, opened everything up. And I'm sure that we'll open up a lot of questions for people. And you can just email Krista directly, which I think you're insane, she just gave her email so give - ask her any questions that you have. She's awesome, amazing, I love her. Thank you for being on the podcast. I appreciate you. We'll talk to you guys all next week. Take care, bye.

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