

## 'Forgiveness ~ A Bridge to Healing'

For the past 3 years, the summer months have been a chaotic time for me. While trying to cope with several personal growth issues and the responsibilities and stress of being a sometimes 'single parent' (Dan travels a lot) to two active boys, as well as being a graduate student, I was also in the midst of 'releasing and being released by' my daughter, Kristen. For a variety of personal and professional reasons, it has been a very long and complicated grief process for me ~ a process that many bereaved parents are all too familiar with.

As a parent, I felt it was my responsibility, as well as my privilege, to raise my daughter to adulthood. I also felt it was my duty to protect her at all times. As **unrealistic** as that expectation was and is I'm sure any parent can fully understand what I am saying.

**When Kristen died on July 21, 1985, I felt I committed, in my mind and heart, the ultimate act of failure.** I had broken the promise I made on my wedding day ~ to love, to cherish, and to raise our children, if we were blessed with any, to be giving, productive, healthy, and happy adults. With Kristen gone and having no other children at the time, I could no longer do any of those special things. It was that **sense of failure and guilt that has kept me anchored in my grief** in varying degrees for several long years.

It was not until the Spring of 1994, when I experienced what I call my 3rd '**spiritual awakening,**' that I began again the painful process of unshackling myself of my self-imposed anchor. Very early one morning, I abruptly **awakened to the feeling of being pulled apart.** There were some things in my life that were moving in a positive direction, yet at the same time I felt that I was being tugged in the other direction ~ to a time and place where things 'used to be.' It has been this **feeling of being 'stuck' between two worlds** that I have lived with, and chose to live with, for a long time. It was as if it just was never the right moment for me to freely move forward without feeling 'tied up.' However, when I awoke that morning, I had a sense that was about to change. I had consciously made the decision to begin to make that move.

Cognitively, I had acknowledged my sense of failure all these years. Yet, that morning I was about to fully acknowledge it and express it emotionally. **I was ready to let my mind and heart fully connect. That was a pretty scary feeling, yet very empowering.**

As I was resting on the couch very early that morning, thinking about my life and listening to my music, I literally came to the point in my mind of dropping to my knees and sobbing out loud (silently), "God, help me and forgive me!" Even though I knew God had always been there waiting patiently for me, I just hadn't been ready to allow Him back into my life. That morning I felt I had nowhere else to turn, but to God. And He answered me.

Spontaneously, **I visualized in my mind holding a closed yellow rose.** I literally raised my rose in my hands toward 'heaven.' Instantly God 'touched' me and the rose ~ and **I felt this overwhelming love and sense of self-forgiveness and forgiveness from God infuse my entire being.** As that occurred, I could see **my closed rose fully open ~ a symbol of me being open to healing and growth.** It was as if all of my anger and

guilt that I had been holding in all these years and hiding behind had burst forth as the rose opened. **I was overcome by a feeling of being cleansed and released from my bondage.** My guilt and anger had served its purpose of getting me to this point ~ giving me the impetus to get through graduate school and to begin my counseling practice ~ but now it was time to begin to be open to new feelings.

**This 'spiritual awakening' was another turning point in my grief process.** It didn't mean that it was over, however. It was a small, but powerful step, toward seeking a new and different sense of 'wholeness.' Unfortunately, it hasn't been all smooth sailing since that experience. Over the summer, I experienced not only an 'anniversary reaction' to Kristen's death, but I opened myself up to working through unfinished business concerning my father's death, as well as some family of origin issues I had begun to deal with much earlier in the year, and some other personal issues. To say the least, it has been a 'heavy' few months for me, as well as for my family.

Then came another decision. Even though I felt that God had forgiven me that Spring morning, I felt the need to 'confess my sins' and past regrets before Him in a church ~ a place I had not frequented much since Kristen's death. So one Saturday afternoon I went to a local church, stood before God, and 'told my story.' I asked for forgiveness from God, from my father, for being angry at him for abandoning me, from Kristen, for not protecting her and for being angry at her for leaving me and for not allowing me to raise her as my daughter, from Mary, the mother of God, for it was with her that I made the promise to protect and cherish my children, a promise I felt I had broken, from other individuals in my life, whom I felt I had disappointed and failed, and finally from myself for not being the 'perfect child, woman, and parent' I **unrealistically** thought I should have been.

Afterward, I felt not only that connection between my mind and heart, but also with my spirit. Nine years ago **I was so wounded that I felt the bridges between my mind, heart, and spirit would never mend** ~ that I would never again experience that feeling of oneness that I had once felt. As with my other 'spiritual awakenings' (described in other Coping and Healing articles), I now feel that those experiences have given me the strength to begin to rebuild my bridges within myself, as well as with others I care about, albeit with some different and painfully restructured 'beams.' **Forgiveness is truly the vital key to unlocking one's own bridges to healing and is a necessary connecting link to inner peace and wholeness.**

Deb Lee Gould  
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***"Your pain is the breaking of the shell that encloses your understanding."***  
*The Prophet* by Kahlil Gibran

**"Building up the shell was the answer, but in the end, it was a rotten answer; and until that shell could be smashed, there was no hope for personal growth. I was left vulnerable and when one is vulnerable, one has the humility to learn."**  
*Blessings* by Mary Craig