**EXAMINING THE EXPERIENCE OF GRIEF**

*There is no right or wrong way to “do grief”. Nor is there a specific timeline to follow or on which to rely. Every individual is unique and it is to be expected that his or her journey of grief will be unique. It has been said that one cannot truly understand this experience unless he or she has gone through it. Strength and insight can be gained as people share their personal reflections of this shared experience.*

The first thing we think of when we hear the word grief is death and indeed the loss of a loved one can be the most difficult burden one will ever bear. We can also grieve the loss of other things – a relationship, a home, a job. We may still be bearing the burdens of loss that happened years ago – the loss of someone close to us, the move to a new home or school, the loss of innocence.

Elizabeth examines the subject of grief and loss from the perspective of transition. Change and transition are two different things. A change is a major life event, a transition is the period that follows as people make sense of their lives, letting go of old realities and embracing new. A change is an event, chosen or imposed; a transition is a process. If we do not do the difficult work of transition, we will not have successfully adapted to the change, which can prevent us from fully living our lives. William Bridges, an authority on transition, has said that a transition begins with an ending and ends with a beginning. The time in between can be confusing and difficult as old assumptions no longer hold true but, as yet, there is nothing to take their place. During this time individuals can become or feel isolated and sometimes turn to potentially self-destructive behaviors. It is important to understand the nature of transition and journey with others while on this uncharted course. It is also important to define what it means to have successfully negotiated a difficult life transition. A definition of success is when you can move onto a new reality, understanding that the change is part of who you are, but does not define who you are. When this work is left undone, the past often comes up to complicate the present. Understanding grief and the nature of transition not only helps to make sense of past and current grief, but provides tools for dealing with future grief and loss.

We will touch on some of the themes of transition which are:

* Telling my story (story and truth)
* Understanding/Accepting the “Why?” (Faith inevitably comes in to this piece)
* Letting Go
* Voice (finding, using and listening)
* People along the Way (Team Helpful and Team Hurtful)
* Self-Care