

The Chrysalis of Grief: Emerging from Loss Like a Monarch Butterfly

Grief is one of the most profound transformations a human can experience. It is a passage through pain, darkness, and uncertainty, much like a caterpillar's journey into the chrysalis. When we lose someone we love, we enter a space that feels suspended in time, wrapped in sorrow, unable to move as we once did. Yet, just as the monarch butterfly must hang upside down after emerging from her cocoon before she can take flight, grief requires us to surrender to the process before we can fully heal.

Dr. Alan Wolfelt, a renowned author and grief counselor, writes, "Mourning is the open expression of your thoughts and feelings regarding the death of someone loved." Mourning, like the butterfly's struggle, is necessary for transformation. In the same way the butterfly cannot rush her emergence, we, too, must move through grief with patience and trust.

This metaphor of the monarch butterfly offers four essential lessons about healing from loss:

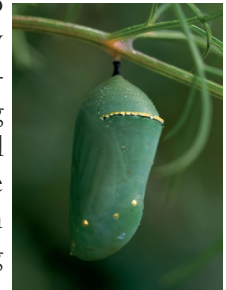
1. The Chrysalis: A Sacred Space for Transformation

Before she can become a butterfly, the caterpillar must surrender herself entirely to the chrysalis. Inside this protective cocoon, she dissolves, breaking down into something unrecognizable. The old form must be undone for the new to take shape.

Grief, too, is a process of dissolution. When we lose someone we love, we feel as though we are unraveling. Our sense of identity, stability, and purpose may dissolve, leaving us feeling formless, lost, and vulnerable. This can be terrifying, yet it is

an essential part of healing.

Dr. Wolfelt reminds us, "You don't heal from the loss of a loved one because time passes; you heal because of what you do with that time." The chrysalis phase of grief asks us to honor our pain, to allow ourselves to break down and reform. It is not a passive waiting period but a time of deep internal work. Though it may seem like nothing is happening, beneath the surface, we are being transformed.



2. Hanging Upside Down: Surrendering to the Process

When the monarch finally breaks free from her chrysalis, she does not immediately fly. Instead, she hangs upside down, her wings still crumpled, wet, and fragile. In this vulnerable state, she must remain still, allowing gravity to stretch her wings, letting them strengthen before she can take flight.

Grief often turns our world upside down. What once felt solid and predictable suddenly feels disorienting. We may resist this feeling, trying to force ourselves back into normalcy before we are ready. However, like the butterfly, we must embrace this period of vulnerability. It is in this surrender that true healing begins.

Hanging upside down requires patience. It is a time of deep mourning, where we allow ourselves to feel the full weight of our loss. We may cry, withdraw, or question everything. Others may expect us to "move on," but our grief has its own timeline. We must trust that, like the butterfly, our strength is building, even if it is not yet visible.

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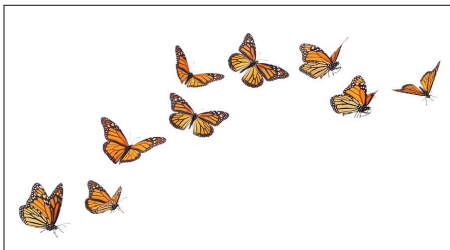
3. Strengthening the Wings: Honoring the Pain and the Love

The butterfly's wings do not become strong without effort. She must slowly work them open, stretching and flexing, even though they are still tender. This gradual strengthening is what allows her to fly.

Grief, too, requires active engagement. Healing does not come from ignoring or suppressing pain but from honoring it. This means creating space for remembrance, expressing emotions, and finding ways to carry the love forward.

Dr. Wolfelt states, "Grief is not a disorder, a disease, or a sign of weakness. It is an emotional, physical, and spiritual necessity, the price you pay for love." Mourning is not something to be avoided; it is a testament to the depth of our love. By telling stories, creating rituals, or engaging in acts of kindness in memory of our loved ones, we strengthen our wings.

This phase is not without struggle. Just as the butterfly must push through discomfort to stretch her wings, we, too, must work through our grief. There will be days of exhaustion, setbacks, and unexpected waves of sorrow. Yet, with each moment we honor our grief, we grow stronger.



4. Taking Flight: Embracing Life with a Transformed Heart

Finally, the monarch reaches the moment she has been preparing for—she opens her wings and takes her first flight. Though she carries the memory of her past, she is no longer bound by it. She has been transformed, no longer a creature crawling on the ground but one who soars.

Healing from grief does not mean forgetting. It means integrating the love, the lessons, and even the pain into a new version of ourselves. We do not emerge unchanged; we emerge with a deeper understanding of life, love, and resilience.

When the time comes to fly again, we may still feel afraid. There may be moments of doubt, days when grief resurfaces. But just as the butterfly was made for the sky, we, too, were made to live fully, even after loss. Carrying our loved ones in our hearts, we move forward—not leaving them behind, but bringing them with us in a new way.

Conclusion: Trusting the Process of Grief

The journey of the monarch butterfly mirrors our own journey through grief. The chrysalis represents the deep transformation that loss brings, the upside-down hanging symbolizes surrendering to the pain, the strengthening of wings reflects the active work of mourning, and the first flight signifies the integration of love and loss into a renewed life.

Like the butterfly, we may not recognize ourselves at first. Grief changes us. But if we allow ourselves the time and space to move through it, we, too, can emerge with wings, ready to embrace life once more.

As we navigate the uncertain, painful path of loss, we can find comfort in the knowledge that just like the monarch, we are being prepared for something new—not to erase the past, but to honor it with every beat of our transformed wings.

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**Be patient toward all that is
unsolved in your heart and
try to love the questions
themselves.**

-Rainer Maria Rilke



**When we are no longer able
to change a situation, we
are challenged to change
ourselves.**

-Viktor E. Frankl

TAKE THE TIME: LET YOUR FAMILY KNOW YOUR STORIES

"I wish I'd spent more time talking to Dad," Sam admitted. "He was always there; my first call if I needed advice. But I was always in a rush to get to school and deal with my own life. I knew he loved me. I know a few stories, but frankly, now that I'm older, I wish I'd known him better. I guess I thought he'd always be there, but he died and now I don't have that chance."

Everyone has and loves stories. At Locke, we have packs of cards called **"Talk of a Lifetime."** These are designed to bring people together and share their thoughts, memories, joys, sorrows, and life lessons. Stop by Locke Funeral Services and we will give it to you. In the meantime, make a game of these:

- What was your favorite television show? Why?
- Who was your best friend in school?
- What are you good at? How are you doing that now?
- What are two things that are important to you?
- What makes you mad? Sad? Happy?
- What is one thing you refuse to eat?
- If you could be someone for a day, who would that be? Why?
- When you're alone, what do you think about?
- What is something you wish to happen in your life?
- What does it take to truly love somebody?
- What does it mean to be an American to you?
- What made you laugh so hard you cried?
- Who has been the most influential person in your life?
- How do you want to be remembered?



MOURNERS' RIGHTS

You deserve to heal. Grieving takes time. Be gentle with yourself. Go at your own pace and know you have rights as a mourner. It's okay to say 'no' when you need to. Or say 'yes' too. This will help you clarify and firm up your boundaries. Try reading them aloud.

- ♦ I have the right to experience my own unique grief.
- ♦ I have the right to feel what I am feeling, regardless of how those feelings shift from moment to moment.
- ♦ I have the right to be angry.
- ♦ I have the right to be treated as a capable person.
- ♦ I have the right to say NO.
- ♦ I have the right to privacy.
- ♦ I have the right to ask for help.
- ♦ I have the right to be listened to.
- ♦ I have the right to be treated with respect.
- ♦ I have the right to socialize when ready.
- ♦ I have the right to cry--or not.
- ♦ I have the right to express my feelings.
- ♦ I have the right to be upset.
- ♦ I have the right to be supported.
- ♦ I have the right to express my needs.
- ♦ I have the right to talk about my grief.
- ♦ I have the right to experience joy.

Love them now, don't wait till they've gone away. Love them now while they're around. Love them, hold them, laugh and cry with them...Love them now before they're just a faded memory. Love them now. Love them now.

-Donald Marsh & Richard Avery

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- Dates of Continuous Care Support Group Meetings

JOIN US every week!

2025 Continuous Care Support



Grief Support Daytime Meetings

TIME: 1:00—2:30 p.m.

LOCATION:
Cabin Coffee, 2040 Kimball,
Waterloo

Grief Support Evening Meetings

TIME: 5:00-6:30 p.m.

LOCATION:
Locke at Tower Park,
4140 Kimball, Waterloo

Thursday Dates:

April 3, 10, 24
May 1, 8, 22, 29
June 5, 12, 19, 26

Suicide Grief Support Meetings

TIME: 5:00-6:30 p.m.

LOCATION:
Locke at Tower Park,
4140 Kimball, Waterloo

Biweekly Wednesday Dates:

April 2, 16, 30
May 7, 21
June 4, 18

*Please feel free to bring a friend. All groups are free & open to the public!
Call with questions 319-233-6138.*

WEATHER ALERT: If schools are closed due to weather, the meeting is canceled.

Want to be on our e-mailing list? Call and we'll add you to our quarterly newsletter list.

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