

The Only Way Out Is Through

The first step in getting through and over anything is becoming fully aware of what is going on. As you've seen in my SNS letters, when I first confronted the reality of my situation, I was unable to keep my mind off anything but worst-case scenarios for my son's future. Dreams were tortuous. I went over and over little things, reviewing in self-deprecating ways what I may have done too much or too little of in my son's upbringing. Angry and even vengeful thoughts about who or what appeared to be blocking me arose. Fantasies of his doing harmful things bubbled up.

“Don't go there,” everyone told me but that didn't help. To stop worst-case scenarios on your mind screen, they told me, “Focus on the next best thought, look for something beautiful around you.” This worked in little spurts.

I kept busy with my work in the world, and searched my bag of spiritual self-help books for months. Charlotte Kasl's *Finding Joy: 101 Steps to Free Your Spirit* and *Dance with Life* helped me rise above the drama of self-absorption in my own little predicament, and see it in perspective as a “cosmic blink in time.” In spite of how serious my problems felt, the earth still turns on its axis, the sun rises, stars come out and life goes on.

Ann Lamott says there are two kinds of prayer: “Help” and “Thank You.” I prayed every day. Sometimes when things are out of your control, turning it over to whatever higher power you believe in is the only thing you can do. At one point, every morning for 21 days, I put headphones on and listened to a twenty- minute guided visualization from a CD set: The Kabbalah Centre’s *Power of Kabbalah* by Michael Moskowitz. It had me imagine a split screen where I could put on one side images of where Brad

was at the time, but on the other, with light from “the creator” or whatever god source I could imagine; I was to see my son thriving, my grandchildren growing up healthy and sound, my wisdom imparted to them. Eventually this helped me come to accept what was going on and begin to hold hope for a positive outcome. Each little step towards healing helped me avoid depression and moved me in the direction of getting well.

What a Great Grandparent You Would Be!

When I realized that my phone calls requesting visits to Annie were deliberately not being answered, and I started to fully grasp that I was being denied access to her, I was disappointed, shocked and then pissed. When I finally “got it” that I was being kept from participating in the life of a four-year-old I’d seen regularly since she

was born, my first reaction was to get angry and self-righteous.

As I started to “feel my feelings,” rather than go crazy and take them out on something or somebody else, I wrote in a journal about them. I shouted out all the good things my grandbabies would miss out on. It was an ego-centered diatribe about what they would never get by not having such a cool grandmother as me.

Bruised ego aside, I discovered that making a list of what my grandkids would miss helped me handle my feelings at the time. Here’s my list:

- ▣ An intelligent presence, mine! One that can intuit a way to ask kids questions and support their growth, without having to be the direct disciplinarian;
- ▣ Lessons in cooking, cleaning, organizing, playing, and living life fully;
- ▣ Trips to places they might never have gone: Washington, D.C., New York City, Monterey, California, even across the ocean;
- ▣ Financial help with college costs (God knows what that’ll be in 2019!);

Healing 147

148 Invisible Grandparenting: Leave a Legacy of Love

- ▣ Widened perspective on gender roles, history, dress, love, movies and politics.
- ▣ Exposure to many spiritual perspectives: all the different ways “god” is in ours and other cultures; and
- ▣ Help at critical passages like menstruation, marriage, menopause, dying, death.

It might be useful for you to write a list of all the tangible and intangible experiences your grandchildren may not get, should the worst case scenario happen and you never see them again. However take a positive stance. Feel free to brag, pat yourself on the back. Get imaginative. Don't let restrictions on money limit you. List your “grandma gifts” as if in the best-case scenario, they could happen.

Read your list to yourself out loud, proudly. Observe how you felt as you did this. Did you feel different at all? Did it lighten your mood or darken it? Did you feel any better or worse? Did it bring up anger? Did anger, sadness, or joy come up? But most importantly, did you get any insight into your own goodness and greatness? Hang on to that. This is the grandparenting vibration we want to send to all future generations.

Find Something to be Grateful For

As I've grown older I have developed a widened

perspective on all of my life's experiences. Many of my worst turning points turned out to be "cosmic triggers" for something better. Gratitude has become an essential part of my daily life. One morning when I was mired in confusion as to why at this was happening to me, the daily meditation I read every morning (no accident) was titled: "Don't Focus on the Missing." It was spot on:

When we focus on what we are missing, we are focusing on lack, loneliness, longing and loss of some kind. The energy of that focus is really poisonous, diminishes our relationships, makes us sad, and generally brings more unhappy experiences to us.

I discovered that whenever I feel myself missing my family, my grandbabies, my friend, if instead I gave thanks for those people I loved so deeply, I felt better. The sadness would leave and in its place, the appreciation for my life grew. In most cases the love grew, connections deepened, and I discovered a great gift: love knows no borders, barriers, or conventional distinctions. Love is love is love. Let the active art of not missing give you its gift. I am so grateful.

© *Science of Mind Magazine*, September 2010 Rev.
Barbara Leger

Since then, with help from my friends and more than a few therapy sessions, I came to see how my self-righteousness and the residual anger behind it didn't

help anyone. It especially didn't serve me.

Not without difficulty, I began to “do the work” of healing. When I was feeling particularly sad or mad, and came to realize that there was nothing I could do about it right then, I looked around me and found something in my own life to be thankful for. There is always something, closer to home than you think, to be grateful for.

In difficult times try to get to the next best thought. Look around you. Find something to be glad for, even if it is that you are not somebody or somewhere else. Today, for me, it's the sun that has just broken through Monterey's thick drizzly fog earlier than usual this morning at 8:43 a.m. Today I am not in the cold Northeast, or a victim of a hurricane that flooded my house, or without heat or water. Today I am alive and well. Thank you, God!

In my workshops I ask participants to share at least three things they are glad to have in their lives, at that very moment. I also suggest they think of someone who, long ago, played an important role in their life, or did something that they would like

Healing 149

150 Invisible Grandparenting: Leave a Legacy of Love

to thank them for and suggest they actually find a way to do it. At the very least they can write an invisible

letter. The energy of acknowledging gratitude goes a long way, even if not expressed in person.

Forgiveness is Not the Final Frontier

I took a workshop I found very useful at Omega Institute with Colin Tipping, whose books *Radical Forgiveness* and *Radical Self-forgiveness* and free Internet worksheets are available at www.colintipping.com. He helped me to say silently to myself or another person “I’m sorry this happened to you/me,” while, at the same time, being grateful in some small way for part of it. He helped me to consider that “divine destiny” or “karma” might be operating in my situation.

At first it was difficult to swallow, that this heart-wrenching healing work I’d been doing, this book I was writing, may have been part of what I’m supposed to be doing on this planet this time around. No situation is perfect. Tipping helped me learn to honor my own *willingness* to go beyond my initial reaction, and do something with this that might help others.

Finally I began, as you have witnessed in the chronology of my letters, to be able to forgive not only Suzie, but also my ex and his wife Julie, and understand where they were coming from. I also learned to forgive myself for whatever “miss-take” I might have made in my parenting that could have contributed to this situation. I did the best I could do at the time, which is

all any parent can do.

And Finally, Grandmother Yourself!

I end my workshops with Karen Drucker's song "Gentle With Myself"

I will be gentle with myself. I will be gentle with myself. And I will hold myself like a newborn baby child.

And I will only go as fast as the slowest part of me feels safe to go. And I rock myself like a newborn baby child. I hold myself like a newborn baby child. I love myself like a newborn baby child.

May we all take the time to rock ourselves, like the proverbial grandmother soothes a baby, in order to rise above whatever situation is in our face, and move on.

If separation of any kind haunts you, I suggest you grandmother yourself ! We called my father's mother, "Ga Ga" when I was little, and later "Red" for her strawberry blonde hair. She was always there for me on a level my mother, sisters and even early husbands never were. As a child she took me to Broadway plays and lunches in places as wonderful as the Top of the Sixes in New York City. I could ask her anything and get straight answers.

At 25, when I returned at Christmas to my family after what I thought was a "simple divorce," I found myself crying all day long. My grandmother was the only one

who not only acknowledged my tears, and she also comforted me by sharing stories from her two previous marriages. So, whether you are an invisible grandmother or auntie, or have some other separation in your life that is pressing, think of whispering things in your own ear that only a grandmother who unconditionally loves you could.

Recently I woke up after a dream with the words to a letter from my “Ga Ga” in my head. She’d be 114 now:

Dear Pattycakes,

*You’re doing a great job of Invisible Grandparenting.
Lighten up!*

Your kids grew up in a loving home; you sat and read to them, raised them to know right from wrong, to value honesty and kindness, all that good stuff. You need to know that at a certain age, perhaps any, your kids’

Healing 151

152 Invisible Grandparenting: Leave a Legacy of Love
choices are not your fault! Forgive yourself. Remember you did the best you could at the time.

Our kids come through us, they are not of us. Kahlil Gibran, remember?

And finally, you need to Grandmother yourself! Go find

something fun that you love to do and do it! Love, Ga Ga P.S. And I have a secret to tell you. Brad, now 32, is getting married in September to that girl he met on the mountain four years ago who first got him to re-contact his family. You may still get a chance to do the real thing!

The expression “time heals” is accurate in my case. I hope my story of this often-dark decade in my life will be an example that may help you find the light in your own. Take each day like it is a special birthday and give yourself special treats only an understanding grandmother could provide. Make every moment precious, now. You, too, can leave a legacy of love whether you can be there or not.

