

Surviving Death

stories of grief

A National Film Board of Canada Production



*"If I could recommend one film on coping with grief, it would be **Surviving Death**. Not only does it brilliantly understand the deepest meaning of pain and loss but the remarkable reach of the human spirit when responding to great challenge."*

—Rabbi Dr. Earl A. Grollman, author, *Living When A Loved One Has Died*

When a loved one dies, the process of making the loss real can be a lonely and confusing experience.



Surviving Death: Stories of Grief is about people negotiating a new relationship with life after losing a loved one. Seven people—parents, children, siblings, partners and friends—reveal how they have been affected by the death of someone close to them.

The people profiled in **Surviving Death** come from different cultural backgrounds; they hope their stories will allow others to begin expressing and understanding their own grief. They speak about the pain and powerful emotions they have experienced, about their need to reassess values and relationships after a death, and about the ways they have found to survive their loss.

Recognizing that there is no single or easy path to recovery, this video is a useful resource for those in grief and for those lending support to people who are grieving.

Director: Elizabeth Murray
Producer: Gillian Darling Kovanic

47 minutes, 8 seconds
Order number: C9198 029



Closed captioned.
A decoder is required.

TO ORDER
NFB VIDEOS,
CALL TODAY!
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1-800-267-7710
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1-800-542-2164



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death

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Jerry Pender & Lynda Boyd

When Jerry was only two, his father died; his mother died when he was nine. Now 12 years old, Jerry lives with his mother's sister, Lynda Boyd. Although he loves his new family, he misses his mom all the time. In their own way, Jerry and Lynda have helped each other come to terms with their loss.



"I would start to cry sometimes and Lynda would be like, 'what's the matter' or whatever. And then I'd tell her and we'd get to talking, and then I'd be fine. So then it actually felt better after we talked." —JERRY PENDER

Felicia Quon

When her mother died 15 months ago, Felicia Quon says she lost her connection to the earth, and a link to her cultural heritage. She speaks of the enormity of that loss, of the tremendous guilt she feels for not having taken more of an interest in her mother's life, and of how she is still struggling to find her footing.



"I would go down to Chinatown, and I still do. She has a certain dialect that she speaks, and I sometimes hear that when I'm walking through the streets of Chinatown. And when I hear that I can see her. I can feel her. I can feel her spirit almost." —FELICIA QUON



Wally Awasis

Wally's sister Geraldine died of cirrhosis of the liver at age 29. Her death was to become a turning point in his life. In the pain of his loss, and on the verge of destroying his own life, he reached out for help. Through the traditions of his First Nations heritage, he found the courage to turn his life around.

"I thought I could never come back, you know, to straighten out my life . . . but when my sister passed away, something changed." —WALLY AWASIS

Joe Average

Joe Average has been living with a heightened awareness of mortality for well over a decade. Many of his close friends have died of AIDS, and he was diagnosed as HIV-positive in 1985. Joe's awareness of death reminds him that he is **alive**, and it has pushed him to realize his dream of becoming an artist.



"I spent a lot of time planning my funeral, and designing my funeral. And that stopped quite some time ago. I just realized I've got to decorate my life, and design my life the way I want it to be. . . Everything dies. When you accept death it gives you the freedom to live. And that's what I've been doing" —JOE AVERAGE

RELATED VIDEOS FROM THE NFB

Children Speak An animated film that explores children's personal beliefs about birth, life and death. (1996, 9 minutes, order number C9196 079).

Where's Pete? Documents the response of a seven-year-old to the death of his teenage brother. (1986, 26 minutes, order number C0186 061).



Elizabeth & Gary Gray

When Rob Gray was killed in a car accident just before his university graduation 8 years ago, the loss left his parents overwhelmed. Elizabeth and Gary Gray speak of struggling—independently and together—to find ways to express their grief, and to move forward with their lives while keeping alive the memory and legacy of their son.



"I had this incredible physical pain that I cannot even put into words . . . like somebody had taken this part of my heart and just ripped it right out." —ELIZABETH GRAY

"When I lost complete control, it was a feeling that I've never experienced. . . I had to help myself before I could help my wife, before I could help my children. And I've never been in a situation like that before." —GARY GRAY

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Pre-screening Discussion Questions

1. What are your own experiences of grief? Share the first time you experienced grief from a death. What was helpful and not helpful for you?
2. Research on grief suggests that people often experience denial, depression, bargaining, anger and acceptance. How have you experienced these stages in your life as you have worked through a loss?
3. How comfortable do you feel when you think about helping someone through the grieving process? What would you find hardest to deal with (examples: the death of a child, a parent, or someone from suicide)?
4. How do your own unique personality, culture and beliefs affect your experience of grief?
5. Sometimes people have a sense of how long one should grieve, or the manner in which someone should grieve. What are your ideas or thoughts about this? What would you define as "normal" grief? Is there such a thing?

Post-screening Discussion Questions

1. What had the greatest impact on you in the video? Whose story did you identify with the most and why?
2. In the video, people used different rituals to help them grieve. How do they vary? Discuss the importance of rituals in the process of grief. What rituals would be important for you? How can you help other people create and honour their own rituals?
3. What changes did you notice as people began to move towards healing and dealing with their grief?
4. How has the video changed how you view grief?
5. What similarities and differences did you notice in how men, women, and children grieve?

Director/Writer
Elizabeth Murray

Producer
Gillian Darling
Kovanic

Editor
Ileana Pietrobruno

Cinematographer
Kim Derko

**Sound Design/
Composer**
Dennis Burke

Sound Recordist
Jeff Carter

Executive Producer
Graydon McCrea

Order number
C9198 029
47 minutes

RESOURCES

For more information on grieving, or for help finding someone in your area to assist you with your grief, contact one of these organizations:

1. Your local funeral home
2. Your community's information and referral service
3. A bereavement society
4. Your regional psychology association
5. A chapter of The Compassionate Friends
6. A mental health association

The World Wide Web also contains many helpful resources. Use your favourite search engine and conduct a search using the keywords grief or grieving.