

The Healing Power of Unselfish Giving

People in pain usually want to stay home, lock the door, draw the shades, climb into bed and pull the covers over their head. I suggest a way to overcome this desire to isolate is to step toward the pain by doing something that feels completely unnatural... take charge of your grief journey by refusing to make your pain the focus of your life. Push back against gravity and do something completely unselfish for someone else.

That's easy to do in the holidays because the act of gift giving is normal and an expected part of the culture. Your assignment however, is not to do the normal or the expected. Your work will be to create an unexpected happy experience for someone you find deserving of a secret blessing. Most likely it won't be a close friend or relative, certainly not someone who expects a gift from you.



When I was young and raising my little girl, we lived on a tight budget and used an envelope system where every month we put money in specially marked envelopes to pay our bills and expenses. If there was money in the envelope, we could pay the bill, and if there wasn't, we had to take money from another envelope to afford it. Our favorite envelope had written on it the word, "Others". Every month we would take the money from that envelope and do something

unselfish for an unexpected person. Our challenge was that no one was to know who the gift came from, and to be as creative with our giving as possible!

If you have lost someone you love and you're feeling the excruciating pain of your loss, maybe you could offer this act of unselfishness in honor of your loved one. It could be a tribute to their memory and a way of remembering them and their impact on your life. You could include something specific to your loved one's memory as you design your free, no-strings attached gift.

Here are a few ideas you might consider as a starting point...

- Buy a stranger an appetizer, drink or meal at a local restaurant, and select something your loved one would have enjoyed.
- Pay for the person's food behind you in the drive through line – ask the cashier to share a quote or line your loved one always said.
- Place some cash in a greeting card, and without signing the card, write an encouraging message appropriate to your loved one's personality. Mail it with no return address from a generic location, or place it in a mailbox, or hand it to a random stranger on the street – and walk away of course!
- Buy the ingredients for a favorite meal or dessert and place them in a basket or decorated box. Be sure to include a recipe and something uplifting that represents your loved one's memory and deliver it in a way the recipient won't know where it came from or discover your identity.

(Do your best to protect the integrity of the food – you’d hate for them to toss it not knowing if it was good or not!)

- Buy a copy of your loved one’s favorite book and inside the cover write a message appropriate for the person you choose to give it to. Without revealing any names, write about what the book has meant to you and your loved one, and the hopes you have for what it might mean to the recipient. Wrap a bow around it, or in tissue paper so it has the feel of a present to be opened.
- On a snowy day in your neighborhood, or any neighborhood for that matter, bring your snow shovel and clear sidewalks, drives and walks for a few houses of your choosing. Be careful not to disturb any plants or create any problems as you work. If you are discovered, just state you felt like doing a good deed for the neighborhood and move on!
- Visit an assisted living or nursing home that allows visitors and deliver holiday appropriate cards or gifts to residents. Be sure to check in ahead of time with management, and share your purpose and plan so you may receive permission.
- Pay attention to what’s going on with the people around you, and become an expert at finding a way to creatively and unselfishly give.

The pain of grief and loss often has the effect of turning us inward to focus only on what is important to us – the alleviation of pain. The problem is the pain of grief doesn’t go away quickly. Months and years can go by before we feel “normal” again and ready to fully engage in life again. These ideas for unselfish giving are simply ways to move beyond the selfishness pain creates and positioning you to see the world outside your own pain.

Unselfish giving can create a sense of euphoria and a feel-good hormonal reaction as you see others benefit from your efforts. Primarily it has the effect of centering attention and focus outside of your pain and your own wants and broadening your world to include the needs of others. What you may discover is a more direct track to healing from the pain of your grief.



Peaks & Creeks Life Development ♦ PO Box 1596 ♦ Evergreen, CO 80437
<http://peaksandcreeks.com> ♦ (720) 382-9420 ♦ karl@peaksandcreeks.com