

Other Losses

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“But I can’t! Look at me! I’ll never be able to dance again!” My client felt heartbroken and lost after a car accident left her unable to continue in a 25-year career that she had loved.

And she was right. The extent of her injuries and disabilities meant she would likely never be able to perform, choreograph, or even teach dance again. Everyone understands that we need to grieve when we lose a loved one, but we forget that losses occur in many forms – the loss of a relationship, career, home, or even the idea of how we thought our life would be.

When a loved one dies, we have rituals. We have funerals, friends bring food and tell us cherished stories about our loved ones. They send prayers and cards of condolence. These are acknowledgements, both public and private, that something has been lost that can’t be recovered. When we’ve lost a loved one, even when we are in the midst of intense grief, OUR life doesn’t end. We may feel sad, numb, lost, but we live, even with the heartache that our world has changed without the person of our love. Over time, and with healing relationships and healing work, we are able to incorporate the loss and reengage in the world and our lives in positive ways.

Similarly, when faced with other types of loss, such as that of my dancing client, our lives don’t end, even if parts of our life and even our identity do. However, if we can make space to grieve what we have lost, we are more fully able to embrace what comes next.

My client and I spent time thinking about what rituals might help her let go of her career, to let her ‘hang up her dancing shoes’ for the last time. She settled on a potluck gathering with dance friends, new and old. It was much like a wake to say goodbye to her cherished career and professional identity. After eating and socializing, she announced to the group that she would no longer dance. She even presented her favorite dance shoes to a dear friend and colleague. There were more than a few tears and stories before everyone left for the evening. But the event she planned allowed her to establish the importance of her career in her life, to enjoy the warm supporting spirit of her friends in saying goodbye to it, and to close the door on that chapter of her life.

Of course, she still misses dancing, and she’s less passionate about her current job than her work as a dancer and choreographer. But, she has cultivated and channels her passion into other things – family, volunteer work, etc. And until she could let her dance career go, she couldn’t move wholeheartedly into this new phase of her life.

Our life chapters start and end. What do you need to grieve and let go of in order to turn the page to your next chapter?