

Drawing Through Loss

Telling Your Story in Line and Color

“All sorrows can be borne if you tell a story about them”
--Karen Blixen

Using expressive art to discover and tell the stories of our losses is a way to answer destruction and loss in our lives with creativity and love. It is a way to honor the people and things we lose. It is a way to find meaning in loss and to reconstruct ourselves after shattering events. This response to loss is a powerful tool in maintaining our physical and emotional health.

In this session, we explore ways to begin the process of learning our stories and one way of telling them: through drawing and color.

Discovering our stories and symbols

Stories about our losses can be difficult to tell because they are so emotional and complex. It is useful to imagine them as myths or legends, archetypes and symbols. Imagine your story being told generations from now. What elements of your story are the most powerful and enduring? What symbols will carry its meaning?

Pay attention to dreams - to people, objects, animals, places and actions that recur in them. Pay attention to these things that recur in your waking life.

Imagine you might get a small tattoo to represent your loss - this is an unusual way to discover those symbols and words that resonate and best represent your story. You do not have to actually get a tattoo! However, it is a useful exercise merely to consider what you would choose to so permanently honor your loss.

Note dream images in a journal. Draw them. Draw that tattoo. Take some time to ponder why a particular symbol stands out for you, how it connects to and conveys the story of your grief and loss.

Remember, too, that there may be many stories in your loss and many ways to tell them.

Drawing our stories

It is important to understand that you don't need to be An Artist to use drawing to assist you on your journey through loss. Don't worry about being “artistic” or feel pressure to be original. Some of the symbols to which you will be drawn are universal. If you want to draw a broken heart, it will be your own unique broken heart.

You do not need expensive or large amounts of materials and space. In fact, it is best to keep those things as simple as possible. You want your drawing supplies to be accessible at a moment's inspiration or need. You don't want to worry about elaborate preparation before drawing or cleaning up afterwards.

Basic Materials

bound sketch book, loose drawing paper, 4" X 6" index cards
waterproof ink pen

for color work, any one of these:

pan watercolors or watercolor pencils and a brush
crayons
colored pencils

Some suggestions for getting started:

Sometimes you may have no difficulty in picking up your drawing pen and creating a drawing that will express and release your emotions about your loss. Sometimes you may be feeling so much emotion that it is an overwhelming task to even think about where to begin a drawing. Yet this may be the moment that you most need to be able to draw!

- words and quotations - simply write a meaningful word or quotation and embellish the letters, draw symbols and designs around it.
- body map - This is a useful tool for connecting with your body and learning where you might be holding emotions in the form of pain or tension. Draw a basic body outline as your map and, starting with your head, take a moment to focus on physical sensations and represent them visually on the body map.
- mandala - Some people find it easier to create a drawing within the framework of a circle. Begin with a focal image in the center and add images around and outward. For the center you can use a photograph or a picture from a magazine as well as draw something.
- music and motion - put on some music and allow yourself to simply move your pen or brush to the music. This is best done with a larger sheet of paper, even poster board. You might choose to do this lightly and use it as background for further drawing.

Honoring Your Art

It is important that the drawings you create are treated with care, and stored or displayed in a way that honors your story and allows you to look at them or share them easily. Simple is again the keyword. A bound sketchbook, such as those made by Moleskine, is preferred by some, but will not allow you to rearrange drawings or display them separately. If you are using 4" X 6" index cards, you can keep your drawings in a card file or photo album. For larger drawings, there are inexpensive presentation folders that have sheet protectors bound in or you can use a 3-ring notebook and sheet protectors. For display, there are frames available that allow you to change the artwork easily. A piece of wood with a groove cut into it can serve as a stand for index card art.

Resources

Books

Loss and Mourning

Coryell, Deborah Morris. HEALING THROUGH THE SHADOW OF LOSS, Healing Arts Press

Fitzgerald, Helen. THE MOURNING HANDBOOK, Fireside

Expressive Arts

Wooldridge, Susan Goldsmith. POEMCRAZY : FREEING YOUR LIFE WITH WORDS, Three Rivers Press

Williams, Heather C. DRAWING AS A SACRED ACTIVITY Simple Steps to Explore Your Feelings and Heal Your Consciousness, New World Library

Malchiodi, Cathy A. THE SOUL'S PALETTE Drawing on Art's Transformative Powers for Health and Well-Being, Shambhala

Labrum, David. THE HOLE IN ME SINCE THE DAY YOU DIED, Center for Hospice and Palliative Care

Web Sites

<http://touchdrawing.com/>

<http://www.gratefulness.org/>

<http://www.brightcreationsart.com>

