

One of the most awkward and painful parts of grieving, one of those sneaky little things no one warns you about, is that you lose yourself to the grief. It's as if parts of you died, too. You forget your strengths, your passions, and the things that used to bring you joy. And as you start to come out of the fog of the initial grief storm, you realize you have to rediscover who you were and decide who you'll be.

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Whether or not you've experienced loss, you can imagine the pain of grief. You can understand the sadness and disorienting feeling of someone you love being gone. And if you've watched someone have to let go of hopes for their life or letting a dream die, you know the feelings that come with grief are complicated. But until you've been the one grieving, it's hard to understand or even imagine how the grief takes over your brain: the brain fog makes even simple tasks impossible and obscures just about everything.

I've spent years lost in that grief fog. I forgot what makes me laugh. I forgot what fun feels like or how to have it. I forgot what I'm good at, how to be a friend, and where I fit in to the world around me.

Grief left me a shell of myself and I had no clue if I'd ever recover.

One of the scariest parts of grief is reaching the point when you start to discover yourself again. Part of it might be because you're worried that finding parts of yourself means you're trying to go back to life before loss (even though

you know it's impossible). Finding yourself in the grief fog might feel like a betrayal.

Life after grief is scary. Loss changes us forever and it's hard to imagine any of those changes should be good. As you take tentative steps out of the fog, you have no way of knowing what you'll find.

But when you do finally start to rediscover yourself after loss, there's nothing quite so sweet. It's one of the most exciting things I've ever experienced.

So, how do you find yourself again after loss? I don't know what will work for you, but here's a bit of what I've found helpful:

In almost every season of grief I've found myself in, part of my healing and processing has been re-discovering old joys: hobbies, movies, activities, people and places that have brought me joy in the past. Grief (and the depression that sometimes accompanies it) often gives me some kind of amnesia where I forget what fun feels like and can't remember what things I even like. Things, places, and people that have brought joy in the past are often a comfortable place to trigger my joy muscle memory and once it's activated I find myself wanting to discover new hobbies and activities as well.

After my husband died, I tried reconnecting with memories, activities, and people from before we had met. What brought me joy in childhood? College? Who were the people who knew me then, who could remind me of who I was before all the loss? Where were the places that made me feel most alive then?

There were some places I still haven't revisited because they're too painful, still. You don't have to force yourself to open old wounds. Finding joy after grief is about curiosity and exploration. Yes, it'll be uncomfortable. Yes, you'll have to step outside your comfort zone. But the end goal is to relight that spark in you that makes you who you are, not to make you more miserable.

I re-discovered those old joys — like traveling by myself and choreographing high school musicals and singing and making homemade Christmas gifts — and I found new things, too — hosting retreats and camper camping and heated mattress pads and naps — and they've all helped me peel away the layers of

grief and loss and survival that have distorted my understanding of who I am.

The other major step in rediscovering myself after loss has been remembering (and learning) what my strengths are. Personality profiling systems like the Meyers-Briggs Type Indicator, the Enneagram, the DISC survey, and others (there are so many others) gave me the starting point to explore who I am and what is most important to me. The Strengths Finder assessment refocused my understanding of what my natural strengths are and helped me identify where I need to grow and which skills I naturally have and should lean into. Knowing my strengths and weaknesses gave me a starting point for where to ask for help. Knowing where I begin and end has helped me be able to learn how to connect with people who fill in my gaps, making healing and rediscovering myself after loss a group effort.

Just like stoves, ovens, and boilers have pilot lights, a small flame to initiate the heating process, I tend to think we do, too. And just like mechanical pilot lights sometimes need re-lighting, sometimes our own personal pilot light needs a restart, too. I'd love to hear about some of the ways you've found to help get that pilot light back.

Life after grief often feels like you're walking around as a shell of yourself, merely a sketch of who you once were. And part of the hard work of grieving is filling that space back in again and watching yourself come back to life in full color.

Here are a few books to help you begin to rediscover yourself after loss:

- [StrengthsFinder 2.0](#) by Gallup
- [You are Your Best Thing](#) by Tarana Burke and Brené Brown
- [The Next Right Thing](#) by Emily P. Freeman
- [You Owe You](#) by Eric Thomas PhD

You'll find links to these along with a full transcript of this episode at BeckyLMcCoy.com/podcast/85

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If you found this episode encouraging or helpful, share it with a friend and remember: all you need to rediscover yourself after loss is a little bit of curiosity. You're doing great.