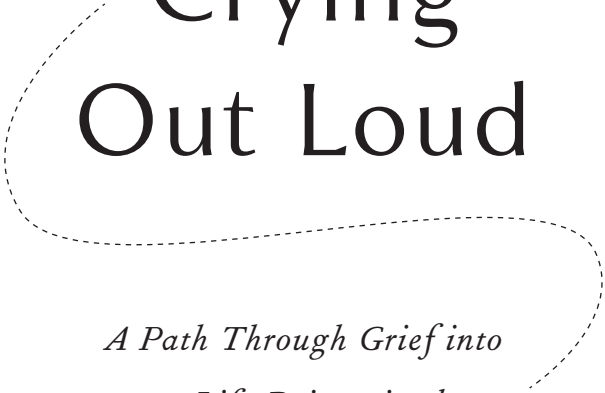


Crying Out Loud



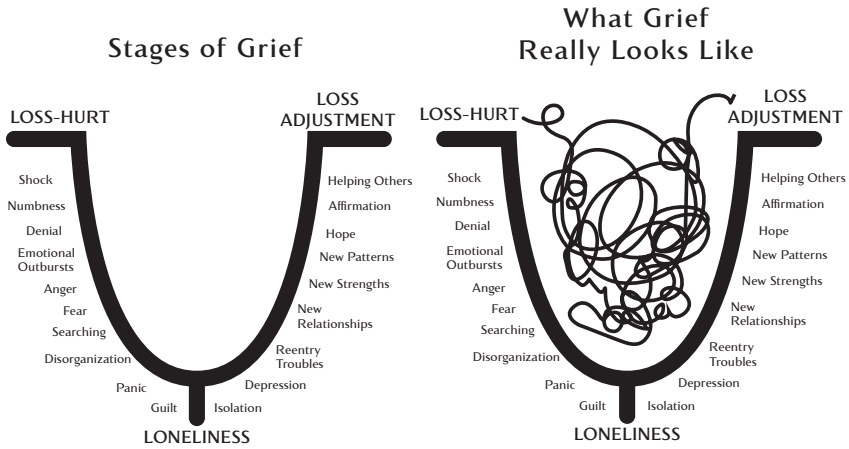
*A Path Through Grief into
a Life Reimagined*

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CHAPTER 1.

The Path Through Grief Is Never Straight



WHAT WE THINK HAPPENS TO GRIEF OVER TIME



WHAT ACTUALLY HAPPENS



EXERCISES TO EXPLORE

GENTLE TRIGGER AWARENESS

In your mind, ask yourself these three gentle questions, knowing there are no right or wrong answers:

1. “What emotion am I feeling the most today?”
2. “Is there one thought or memory that keeps coming up for me?”
3. “If my grief could speak, what would it say to me right now?”

You don’t need to analyze or judge the answers. Just let whatever comes up be okay. Allow yourself to acknowledge where you are without trying to change it.

EMBODIED GRIEF CHECK-IN: WHERE AM I TODAY?

Grief is constantly shifting, and it can be hard to know where we are during it. This short practice is a way to check in, not with your thoughts but with your body. It’s a gentle way to meet yourself where you are at this exact moment on your grief journey.

Find a quiet place. Sit or stand comfortably. Let your feet rest flat on the ground if you’re able. Close your eyes if it feels safe to do so. Place one hand on your heart, one on your belly. Breathe slowly and deeply three times, just noticing how your body moves with each breath.

Now bring your awareness to your body, slowly moving your attention from your head down to your feet. As you scan, ask:

- “Where do I feel tenderness?”
- “Where do I feel tension or tightness?”
- “Where do I feel pain, or maybe even peace?”

When a sensation draws your attention, pause there. If it helps, place a hand on that part of your body. Then ask:

- “What emotion might be living here right now?”
- “Is this sadness? Anger? Fear? Longing? Relief? Something else?”

You don’t have to name it perfectly or explain it. You don’t have to fix it. Just notice it. Breathe into it. Acknowledge that this is part of where you are today. When you’re ready, return both hands to your heart or belly. Say to yourself (out loud or silently), *“This is where I am today in my grief. I welcome myself here with care.”*

WRITING A DIALOGUE WITH YOUR GRIEF

Create a comfortable space: Gather a pen and paper or open a document on your computer.

Imagine your grief as a person or entity: Visualize your grief as if it were a character, a presence, or even an object. What does it look like? How does it act? Does it have a name or a certain way of speaking? This could be anything from a shadowy figure to a gentle guide or even something abstract like a color or shape.

Start a written dialogue: Begin a conversation with your grief, writing it down as if you were talking to another person. Let your grief speak back to you. Here's a prompt to get you started:

- You: "Hello, Grief. I'm here, and I'm ready to listen. What do you need me to know right now?"
- Grief: (Let it respond with whatever comes to your mind.)

Continue the dialogue, allowing your grief to express itself fully. Ask it questions like:

- "Why are you here today?"
- "What do you want from me in this moment?"
- "How can I work with you rather than against you?"

Reflect on the dialogue: Once you've finished, take a moment to read back through the conversation. What did your grief reveal to you? How does it help you understand where you are on your grief journey right now? Thank your grief for the conversation, acknowledging that it's a part of your journey.

CHAPTER 2.

When You Still Have to Function: Containing (but Not Restraining) Your Grief

EXERCISES TO EXPLORE

TRY THE COMFORTING OBJECT TECHNIQUE

Find one thing in your home or your surroundings that brings you comfort. Preferably it's pocket-size or can easily be slipped into a purse. It might be a piece of your loved one's jewelry, a pretty stone or crystal, or a folded-up piece of paper with the lyrics to your loved one's favorite song. It could be a small photo of your loved one or their key chain. If you have a lock of your loved one's hair or their ashes, you can even create jewelry with it.

Whenever you feel a wave of grief or you need to feel grounded and connected, hold your comforting object in your hand. Close your eyes, and take a few slow, deep breaths. Focus on the texture, temperature, and weight of the object in your hand. Let this tangible connection ground you in the present moment. This practice helps contain your grief by giving it a gentle, physical anchor that you can come back to whenever the emotions feel too overwhelming.

BUILD A SAFE INTERNAL SPACE TO REST

Create an internal imaginary safe space you can enter whenever grief feels overwhelming. In this space, your grief can be present with you, but in a way that feels contained and manageable.

Make it comforting and beautiful. My safe space is a round treehouse with big windows, a wraparound balcony, and a giant bed piled with blankets and pillows. Nearby there is a natural pool, a waterfall, and a quiet beach I can reach by a beautiful garden path. Friends, guides, pets, and even fictional characters visit me there, offering protection and love.

Your safe space might be a cottage with your grandmother, an underwater castle, or a cozy coffee shop filled with music and laughter. Populate it with whoever makes you feel supported, whether loved ones, spiritual guides, animals, or imagined beings.

When you need to put your grief aside, picture placing it in a container in this space: a jar, a box, or a chest. You can open it when you're ready, or close it when it feels too heavy.

TRY SOME TRE SHAKING

TRE stands for Tension and Trauma Releasing Exercises. The one I'm recommending here involves shaking your whole body. Research shows that shaking can help people cope with the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder.³

Shaking can help you shift some big feelings from your body and move them back to homeostasis. As the body shakes, it sends signals to the brain that help turn off the stress response and bring the body back to a more balanced, calm state.

This process is called downregulation, in which the heightened state of alert is gradually reduced.

Just like stretching or a massage can reduce muscle tension, shaking can stimulate the muscles to release stored-up tension in the body.⁴

As the body calms down through shaking, the mind can also begin to relax, creating a more balanced state of being. This grounded state can make it easier to process emotions without feeling flooded.

Here's how to shake yourself back to center:

1. Stand with your feet hip-width apart in a space where you feel comfortable and can move freely. Ensure you have sufficient space to stretch and shake without bumping into anything.
2. Begin with your hands, shaking them out vigorously (like trying to flick water off your fingertips). Let your fingers spread wide and move your wrists. Follow with your arms, shaking them from the elbows to the shoulders. Let your body move naturally.
3. Next, bring in the lower body. Shake out your legs, feet, and ankles. Try twisting your ankles gently as you lift one leg and then the other off the floor. Gently but firmly shake each leg out. Finally, shake your whole body.
4. Shake your hips. Bounce gently on the balls of your feet, trying to shake every limb and part of your body. Make sure to keep breathing. And most of all, don't worry about how it looks!

5. After two to three minutes of shaking, come to a gentle stop. Take a moment to check in with your emotions. Notice if any changes have occurred. Are you feeling more grounded? Are you feeling looser and more relaxed? Whatever you feel is valid. Let yourself rest in this new space of emotional release.

Return to this technique whenever you feel overwhelmed and need to ground yourself.

CHAPTER 3.

Grief Is Trauma. Period.

EXERCISES TO EXPLORE

ENGAGING YOUR VAGUS NERVE

Try one of the vagus nerve stimulation techniques described on pages 46–47 or use one of my favorites: making the sound “vooooooo” in the lowest pitch you can manage. This long, drawn-out sound engages both the vocal cords and the diaphragm, which activates the vagus nerve and signals to your brain that it is time to relax. Take a deep breath in and slowly exhale while making the sound, aiming to hold it for several seconds and feeling the vibration in your chest and throat. Repeat as often as you like, and with each exhale, imagine releasing tension and anxious energy from your body.

MATCH-YOUR-STATE BREATH RESET

Breathwork is your built-in regulator. A few slow, intentional breaths can signal safety to your nervous system faster than any thought can. When you are spun up, lengthening your exhale helps the body downshift. When you are flat or far away, a steady, balanced breath gently wakes you up. The point is not perfect technique. It is a simple, repeatable way to come back to yourself. Here’s how to use it.

Check your state. Place one hand on your chest and one on your belly. Ask: Am I revved up, or am I flat or foggy? Choose the track that fits.

If you feel revved up (hyperarousal):

Try box (or square) breathing: Inhale for a count of 4, hold for 4, exhale for 4, hold for 4. Do four to eight rounds. You can also try a physiological sigh: Inhale through your nose. Then take a quick sip-inhale through the mouth. Exhale slowly through your mouth until empty. Repeat three to five times. Then shift to a paced breath: Inhale for 4, exhale for 6, for one to three minutes.

If you feel flat or foggy (hypoarousal):

Sit or stand tall. Inhale through your nose for a count of 4 while gently lifting your chest. Exhale for 4. Add small shoulder rolls or a slow arm sweep on the inhale. Continue for one to three minutes.

Safety note: If you feel lightheaded or uncomfortable, shorten the practice, remove breath holds, and return to easy natural breathing.

TAPPING

Tapping (also known as EFT: Emotional Freedom Technique) can be very effective in treating anxiety, depression, and PTSD in the moment. To practice EFT, you tap on acupressure points with steady, firm pressure. Eastern medicine teaches that there are twelve main meridians, or passageways, that run through the body. Our qi (or energy) flows through these meridians.

Tapping can take anywhere from five to twenty minutes, depending on how many rounds you want to do and how slowly you tap. You can find a guided video for tapping at healwithlaura.com.

Begin by gently tuning in. Do a quick body scan. Where do you feel tension or unease? What thoughts or memories might be contributing to

those sensations? On a scale from 1 to 10, with 10 being extremely distressed and 1 being calm, where would you place yourself?

Once you've taken your emotional temperature, bring that specific feeling or thought into focus. EFT begins not with denying pain, but with naming it. You will state a version of the following setup phrase while tapping a specific point:

*Even though I feel [insert honest emotion, like
scared, overwhelmed, lonely, etc.], I deeply and
completely love and accept myself.*

Next, take your dominant hand and keep the fingers straight and together like you're about to do a karate chop. Use the index and middle fingers of your other hand to tap the soft outer edge of your karate-chop hand (just beneath the pinky finger). Repeat your setup phrase two to three times while tapping here. This is known as the karate-chop point, and it helps initiate the emotional shift.

From here, move through the following acupoints in order, tapping each with your nondominant pointer and middle fingers five to seven times. As you tap, repeat short reminders of the emotion or thought you're working on (e.g., "this sadness," "this memory," or simply "this feeling"). The goal is to stay present with what is real for you in the moment.

1. Top (crown) of the head
2. Between the eyebrows (above the bridge of the nose)
3. Sides of the eyes (on the bone at the outer corner of both eyes)

4. Under the eyes (on the bone directly under both eyes)
5. Under the nose (between the nose and upper lip)
6. Chin (in the indentation below your lower lip)
7. Sternum (in the center of the chest, just below the collarbone)
8. Under the arm (about four inches below either armpit)

Once you've finished, take a body scan and see if you notice any changes. Usually, you'll need to repeat this exercise several times consecutively to notice the benefits. If your number from 1 to 10 doesn't drop after a round, that's okay. Just name what's here even more specifically (e.g., "this tightness in my throat," "this fear about sleeping") and try one more round.

The beauty of tapping is that you can do it anywhere, at any time. All you need is your fingers and a few minutes of intentional tapping, and you can create powerful, lasting calm in your body.

CHAPTER 4.

Why Grief Makes You So Damn Angry

EXERCISES TO EXPLORE

TRY A LION'S BREATH

Sit, stand, or even lie down in a relaxed posture, ensuring your back is straight so you can breathe in and out easily. Take a slow, deep breath in through your nose, filling your lungs. Now exhale with intention: Open your mouth wide. Stick your tongue out as far as is comfortable, open your eyes wide, and exhale forcefully with a loud “haaaaa” sound. As you do so, imagine that you are huffing out your feelings of helplessness and “stuckness” until your lungs are empty.

Lion’s breath is more than just theatrics. It is a nervous system reset. When we’re holding on to anger, our bodies contract; our jaws tighten, our throats close, and our bellies grip. Lion’s breath creates an opening, activating your vagus nerve and beginning to calm your nervous system. The heat of the breath, the open mouth, and the roar all bypass the thinking mind and tap into something ancient and instinctual. It tells your body, “I’m allowed to feel this. I don’t have to hold on to this anymore.” You might feel silly at first, but you may be surprised by what gets stirred up and released.

SCREAM IT OUT

For this exercise, you need a place where you can scream without restraint or worry that someone will hear you and become concerned. Perhaps you need to smash your face into a pillow to ensure this. Maybe you can drive somewhere secluded and yell in your car, or even out the window while driving on the freeway.

All you have to do now is take your inner fury and make it *outer*. Release the chained-up fury that is dwelling inside your belly. Let it be known. Take a deep breath into your belly and scream . . . as loud as possible. Or shout one word over and over, such as *why* or *no*. You can have a specific chant you scream at the sky, like a battle cry. Let it all out.

Pro tip: Try to scream from your chest rather than your throat so it doesn't get sore! Visualize the sound originating from deep in your chest, pushing air out powerfully from the belly rather than the throat. Begin with a low, deep sound, like a roar. Keep your throat, neck, and jaw relaxed, avoiding any tightness in these areas. Start at a lower volume and build gradually to keep control, practicing in short bursts if needed, allowing you to release intense emotions safely without throat discomfort.

After your scream session, reward yourself with some deep, slow breathing and a warm cup of tea. Be gentle with yourself as you come down from the “high” of that shouting. Notice if you feel lighter or freer afterward.

BOX IT OUT!

Hitting something feels really, really good when you're angry. Take a baseball bat or tennis racket and pile a bunch of pillows up and go to town hitting them with all your might. If you want, play some loud music to get you in the mood, and start with some angry dancing or punching the air.

Some cities even have “rage rooms,” where you can pay a tidy sum to go bash things with a sledgehammer. This can be an enjoyable activity to do with your friends or family, but if you’re shy about connecting with your inner angry beast, you may want to try it solo. Remember, the goal is to give it your all. Hold nothing back. You want to move the anger, shake it out of you, and let it be felt and released in a big, loud whoosh.

CHAPTER 5.

Grief Brain

EXERCISES TO EXPLORE

CHOOSE ONE THING

Choose just one thing this week to help with your Grief Brain. If it's not too hard, try to do that thing daily for a week. And if that works, go for three weeks. You can try something you learned in this chapter, like spending time in nature or limiting caffeine, or if you'd like to get my free guide "25 Brain-Boosting Habits to Heal Grief Brain," go to healwithlaura.com. After that one thing, add in another. Before you know it, you will be gently building habits that support not only your brain but also your healing!

MINDFUL WALKING

Mindful walking combines gentle movement with awareness, grounding you in the here and now. Grief often pulls us into mental spirals of past and future pain, but walking mindfully reconnects us to our body and surroundings. Walking is one of the most healing things you can do for global cognitive function.

To begin, find a quiet place where you can walk without distractions, for just ten to fifteen minutes. Start by standing still, noticing the sensation of your feet on the ground and the rhythm of your breath as it flows in and out. As you walk, focus on the physical sensations of each step, the lifting of each foot, the movement through the air, and the placement back on the ground. If your mind wanders, gently bring your attention back to the

rhythm of your steps or the sounds and sights around you. Move slowly and intentionally, allowing yourself to fully experience the act of walking with awareness.

PUZZLE IT OUT

It can be hard to imagine using your brain for any heavy lifting when in the pain of grief, but clinical research has demonstrated that cognitive training exercises can harness the neuroplastic potential of the human brain and promote cognitive rehabilitation.¹⁰ These activities can create a sense of accomplishment and offer a distraction from emotional distress, giving your brain a productive workout.

So, when you feel a little more energetic, find a mental challenge that speaks to your strengths. Spend just fifteen minutes engaged in one of these brainy activities today. Maybe you opt for a jigsaw puzzle. If you're a word lover, it might be Wordle, Scrabble, crosswords, or word searches. If you're a numbers person, consider sudoku, Moscow puzzles, logic puzzles, dot-to-dots, or chess.

CHAPTER 6.

The Healing Power of Telling Your Story

*Owning our story and loving ourselves through that
process is the bravest thing we'll ever do.*

~BRENÉ BROWN

EXERCISES TO EXPLORE

GRIEF DOODLES

For a grief doodle template you can print and use, go to healwithlaura.com. Otherwise, grab a notebook and a pencil or pen. Find a comfortable place and turn on some music without words, something calming and peaceful.

Take a few breaths in and out and connect with yourself. Now, without writing any words, use your pencil and paper to describe your loss. Pretend you are trying to communicate with someone who doesn't know your native language or can't read.

How would you express your grief?

Perhaps a series of broken hearts. An empty room. Angry, swirling scribbles. A face with tears on it.

The only thing you need to do is take what is inside you and get it onto the paper. Imagine you are an early human in a cave, etching your story on the walls. What would you leave behind for humans thousands of years from now?

FREE ASSOCIATION

For this exercise, gather some photos of you and your loved one. Try to choose images in which the two of you are the focus. Now, look at each picture and write down the first words that come to mind. Don't worry about naming objects like "beach" or "Christmas tree." Instead, focus on the emotion in your faces, the energy between you, and the memory that surfaces. You might write words like *joy*, *longing*, *confusion*, or snippets like "my best friend and playmate" or "taught me to ride my bike." Let it be free association. There's no wrong answer.

Do this for every photo. As you go, jot your words beside each one. Then look back over everything you wrote. What stands out? What themes repeat? What kind of story have you uncovered? Chances are, it's a love story, one of laughter, heartbreak, connection, and growth. You'll see it not just in the images, but in the memories that emerged. They are still with you, in the quiet space between photos and in every word you wrote.

WRITE A LETTER

For this exercise, you can write a letter to your loved one about a specific memory that feels especially close to your heart right now. Maybe it was a vacation you took, a quiet afternoon together, or your last holiday meal together. Begin with "Dear (Name)" to help break through any writer's block and bring them closer as you write. Don't worry about grammar or structure. Just focus on what you want to say. After describing the memory, shift into sharing how you've been doing lately. Speak as if they are sitting with you, listening with love and understanding. When you have finished, place the letter in an envelope, write the date on it, and store it in

a safe location. The next time you feel the need to reconnect, take it out and read it. Flip the page over and write a new memory or message; just a quick check-in from your heart to theirs. Over time, you'll build a living conversation, a story still unfolding between you.

CHAPTER 7.

How to Forgive (Including Yourself)

EXERCISES TO EXPLORE

THE TONGLEN MEDITATION

(For a guided audio version of this meditation, go to healwithlaura.com.)

Tonglen, meaning “sending and receiving,” is a Tibetan Buddhist meditation practice of compassion, popularized in the West by the amazing Buddhist teacher Pema Chödrön. It’s a heart-softening exercise to dissolve away guilt and shame. Set aside five to ten minutes and find a quiet place to sit comfortably. Focus on your breath, inhaling deeply and exhaling fully.

On each inhale, imagine breathing in the heavy weight of your guilt; visualize it as a dense, dark cloud.

Notice where it rests in your body.

Acknowledge this guilt with compassion, allowing yourself to feel its presence without judgment.

As you exhale, imagine transforming that heaviness into a soft, radiant light filled with forgiveness, love, and understanding.

Visualize this light spreading through your body and outward into the world.

With each breath, let go of guilt, sending out healing energy to yourself *and to anyone else connected to your grief*, and to the millions of others in the world who are feeling guilt just like yours in this moment.

Repeat this process, inviting relief and self-compassion with every exhale.

Over time, this practice can help you release guilt and create space for healing and peace.

RELEASE AND REWRITE JOURNALING EXERCISE

(For a downloadable PDF, go to healwithlaura.com.)

This exercise involves acknowledging your feelings of guilt, reflecting on them with compassion, and transforming them into self-forgiveness. Find a quiet and comfortable place to sit with a journal or piece of paper. Take a few slow, deep breaths to center yourself.

1. **Write the guilt down:** At the top of the page, write, “*What am I feeling guilty about?*” Let yourself write freely for a few minutes, describing the situation and the emotions you’re experiencing. Be as honest as possible, without judgment.
2. **Identify the source:** Reflect on the origins of your guilt. Is it coming from something you *truly* could have controlled? Are you holding yourself to an unrealistic standard? Would you forgive someone you loved in your position?
3. **Rewrite the narrative:** On a new page, write a response to yourself as if you were a kind friend or mentor. Acknowledge the pain, but offer words of understanding, forgiveness, and love. For example: “*I see how hard you’re being on yourself, but you were doing your best with the knowledge and resources you had at the time. It’s okay to let this go.*”
4. **Symbolic release:** If you feel ready, take the paper with the

guilt written on it and rip it up, or safely burn it as a symbolic act of release. Imagine the guilt leaving your body as you do this.

5. **Close with a mantra:** Repeat a mantra or affirmation to yourself, such as: *“I am worthy of compassion and forgiveness. I release this guilt and open my heart to healing.”*

LAY DOWN THE STONES OF GUILT

This is a walking meditation to release the weight of guilt. As you begin your walk, gently bring awareness to the thoughts of blame and guilt that haunt you. Look for small rocks or sticks along your path, objects to represent those heavy thoughts. You may find just one or collect several, each symbolizing a different story you’ve been carrying. Hold them in your hands, pockets, or bag as you walk. Keep a slow but steady pace, breathing deeply in through your nose and out through your mouth. Feel the physical weight of the objects and let it mirror the emotional weight within you. Choose one thought like “I wasn’t a good enough daughter” or “I should have been a better husband” and hold it with compassion. Thank the thought for existing. Understand it is rooted in love, even if misdirected.

Now you are ready to release it. This thought may have served you before but now it only weighs you down. Set the object gently on the path or toss it safely away, symbolically releasing its hold on your mind. Notice any lightness or space that begins to open up within you. Continue your walking meditation, letting go of each burden as you did the first. When you’re finished, thank yourself for your courage. You faced your guilt, honored your grief, and made space for healing to begin.

CHAPTER 8.

Turning Pain into Purpose

EXERCISES TO EXPLORE

OPEN TO PURPOSE WITH GRATITUDE

Gratitude is often the first quiet doorway to meaning. Begin by offering a simple prayer or lighting a candle in honor of your loved one. You might read aloud a poem they loved or sit in silence, breathing deeply and giving thanks for the gift of having known and loved them. Let that gratitude wash over you.

Then, gently shift your awareness to your present-day life. What small beauty can you notice right now? A warm drink, a kind gesture, a patch of sunlight? Write down three things you're grateful for, both about your loved one and about this moment.

As you continue this practice, you may begin to notice patterns: memories that inspire, moments that spark curiosity, tug you toward something meaningful. These are the breadcrumbs. Gratitude doesn't just soften grief; it illuminates the path to purpose.

SMALL ACT OF KINDNESS

What are some of the kind things your loved one used to do? Maybe your sister always remembered your family members' birthdays and sent beautiful cards or flowers. Perhaps your son was always extra gentle with animals and loved visiting the zoo. Maybe your friend loved surprising your office with baked goods.

Use that inspiration to commit to creating good in their memory. Maybe you will become the person in your family who remembers birthdays and sends out special cards. Perhaps you could volunteer at the local nature center and help other children learn about the natural world. Maybe you will surprise someone with your friend's signature brownies.

These small acts of service allow you to keep your loved one's memory alive, and they will also bring you closer to them. Living their values connects you to them, even in death.

TAKE ACTION TOWARD SERVICE

Start thinking about how you can take your meaning-making to the next level. Play with the possibilities and think big, but start small. You don't need to take on a massive project to make an impact. Think about the ideas that resonate most with you and begin with one simple action.

If you'd like help walking through this process visually, I've created a free, printable Purpose Mapping Worksheet that guides you step by step, from exploring your strengths and your loved one's passions to identifying small, meaningful ways to move forward. You can download it at healwithlaura.com. Otherwise, begin by making a list of your strongest skills and natural talents, the things that come easily to you and bring you joy. Maybe you have a gift for public speaking, a talent for writing, a knack for organizing, or a deep ability to listen and hold space for others. Next, make another list of the values, passions, or causes that mattered most to your loved one. It doesn't have to be tied to a specific organization or movement. Maybe they believed in generosity, making people laugh, or standing up for those in need. When you lay these two lists side by side, you may start to see natural connections, the personally meaningful ways your abilities can honor their legacy.

CHAPTER 9.

Choosing Life (Even If You Don't Yet Know How)

EXERCISES TO EXPLORE

SOUND HEALING

Explore the healing benefits of a sound bath. All you have to do is lie there and let the waves of sounds envelop you. It's even okay to fall asleep if that happens. You are still getting the benefits.

Depending on where you live, you might have the opportunity to attend a sound bath session in person. Many yoga studios, meditation centers, and wellness facilities offer sound baths, which can be attended in a group session or booked privately for a slightly higher fee.

If you don't want to go to a sound bath in person, you can find many free options online, including a beautiful sound bath at healwithlaura.com, recorded by my gifted friend and healer, Genevieve Deely. You can also look on YouTube for sound bath meditations. There are even some specifically made for grief.

JAW TENSION SOMATIC RELEASE EXERCISE

Grief and stress often show up as tightness in the jaw. This simple practice can help soften it:

1. **Notice.** Sit comfortably and bring awareness to your jaw. Are your teeth touching? Are the muscles tight?

2. **Massage.** With your fingertips, gently circle along the hinges of your jaw, just in front of your ears, moving down toward your chin.
3. **Release.** Let your mouth slowly open like a soft yawn, then close without clenching. Repeat a few times. Place the tip of your tongue behind your upper front teeth, then gently press it up toward the roof of your mouth. Hold for a few seconds, then let your tongue drop to the floor of your mouth. Notice the release.
4. **Rest.** Take three slow breaths, exhaling with a sigh, and notice the ease spreading through your face and body.

If emotions arise, let them. The jaw often holds back words and feelings, and softening it can help them move through.

ECSTATIC DANCE

Have a spontaneous dance session with yourself today! There are many ecstatic dance playlists you can access for free online, including mine at healwithlaura.com, and all you need are headphones or a small speaker. Or just choose the music that speaks to you in the moment. It can be fast and upbeat, or slow and sad. Just put on some music and let your body take over, dancing like no one is watching.

Or, if you are up for it, consider attending an ecstatic dance event. You can visit ecstaticdance.org to find an organization near you that hosts ecstatic dancing events. You can also search social media or utilize tools like Meetup. However, if you're going that route, just ensure you follow basic online safety practices, meet in a public place in a safe area, and let your loved ones know where you are going.

Following the Breadcrumbs of Joy

EXERCISES TO EXPLORE

LEARN WHAT FULL-BODY YES AND NO FEEL LIKE

If you'd like to be guided through a brief meditation to determine what your full-body yes and no feel like, you can find it at healwithlaura.com. Otherwise, find a quiet space where you can focus without distractions. Sit comfortably, take five to seven deep breaths, and imagine a light flowing through every cell of your body, then extending deep into the earth like the roots of a tree on the outbreath.

From this grounded place, say “yes” aloud or silently several times, noticing how it feels. Do you sense openness, lightness, or expansion? Now repeat “no” and observe any changes. Perhaps there is tightness, heaviness, or contraction in your chest or other parts of your body.

To deepen the practice, recall a moment that felt like a wholehearted *yes*. Maybe it was holding your child for the first time, a long-awaited kiss, or the thrill of a big adventure. Then, remember a clear *no*, declining a risky situation or walking away from something misaligned. Notice how your body responds as you think about each scenario.

Once you recognize these signals in your body, you'll be able to just tune in and ask your body if it's a yes or no with ease. Then you can start to apply this awareness to daily decisions. Start small, like choosing a meal. Ground and feel your body. Does it feel like a yes? If it's neutral, it's likely a no. Over time, trust this instinct for bigger choices. Your body won't lead you astray.

LET IN A LITTLE JOY OR LAUGHTER

Set an intention to do one small thing that brings some delight today. It could be meeting a friend, taking a luxurious bath, watching a favorite childhood movie, or rereading a beloved book. Even better, let in a little laughter.

If laughter feels far away, try inviting it in gently. Watch a funny movie, listen to a comedian you once loved, or spend time with someone who always makes you laugh. Even if it feels forced at first, let yourself smile. Try laughing. Even simulated laughter can awaken something real inside you.

MOVE WITH JOY

Movement can be a powerful way to reconnect with yourself. Find a private space, put on uplifting music you love, and take a few grounding breaths. Maybe even smile.

Start gently. Sway, stretch, roll your shoulders, letting your body lead. If it feels right, express emotions physically: Press your hands down to release heaviness, reach wide to invite openness, or spin to feel lighter.

When you're ready, shift toward joy. Try skipping. It's almost impossible not to laugh or at least smile when you skip. Bounce, spin, or simply move with playfulness, imagining grief lifting off your shoulders. Even simulated laughter can spark real joy.

As you slow down, return to stillness, hands over your heart or belly. Breathe deeply and notice any shifts. Thank yourself for choosing movement. Each step forward is a step toward healing.

CHAPTER 11.

Telling Grief to Get the Hell Out . . . side

EXERCISES TO EXPLORE

TRY SOME FOREST BATHING

Take a blanket or a yoga mat and find a quiet place outside to “be,” even for a few moments. Place your bare feet on the ground and take a few deep breaths. If you feel called, you might try strolling using what’s known as the “fox walk,” an ancient method of walking softly and deliberately through nature. Instead of stepping heel-to-toe, let the outer edge of your foot touch first, then roll inward and let your heel follow last. You’ll move almost silently, with each step grounding you deeper into presence. This kind of walking is less about reaching a destination and more about arriving in your body, moment by moment. Whatever arises, honor it. You’re not just walking through nature, you’re letting the forest walk you back to yourself.

SEND A MESSAGE THROUGH NATURE

Write a note to your loved one on biodegradable paper. It might be just a few words, a poem, or song lyrics. It could be a drawing. Take the paper to the ocean or a lake (or similar body of water near you). Sit by the water’s edge and set an intention that releasing this paper will be your commitment to releasing into your grief journey, no matter where it takes you.

This message symbolizes letting go of fear and embracing your grief. This is you wading in and letting the water gently hold you as you traverse into the unknown. You might say a prayer or meditate and then release the paper into the water. If you don't have any water near you, you can also do this same exercise by safely burning Flying Wish Paper or with memorial lanterns.

LET NATURE HOLD YOUR PAIN

Go on a walk, hike, or bike ride into a nature preserve, wooded area, or state park near you. You might invite a soul friend or two, but remember, this is about going into your grief as deeply as you can, so only invite friends you can be 100 percent vulnerable with. This time in nature should be an intentional journey into your grief, a time when you are allowing your pain to come through. It can be helpful to bring grounding items with you, such as calming essential oils, a blanket, or your loved one's sweatshirt or another cherished item. Don't try to force anything: Let what happens happen. Maybe you won't even shed a single tear, and that's okay. The process will always look different for everyone, every time. Follow your body and lean into nature.

CHAPTER 12.

Letting Go of Their Things Without Letting Go of Them

EXERCISES TO EXPLORE

The following are some exercises to help you build ritual and remembrance into your grief journey. You can also download the Rituals of Remembrance Companion at healwithlaura.com. It includes digital memorial ideas, a guide to creating your own ritual, and a grief altar starter template to help you move through this sacred task with creativity and intention.

THE ONE-ITEM RITUAL

Choose a single object that belongs to your loved one or that reminds you of them. It might be something you've already kept close: a sock, a note, a ring, a pebble. Sit with it for a moment, wherever you are. Place it in your hand, next to your bed, or in your heart.

Close your eyes. Breathe. Let this one item become the container for your love. Whisper their name. Say one thing you're missing or one thing you're grateful for. That's it.

You can even place the item in a small cloth, bowl, or pocket you can return to. It doesn't need a special altar. It just needs your attention.

LETTING-GO OFFERING

Choose one item of theirs, or even a note or memory, that you feel ready to let go of. Hold it gently and speak aloud what it represents to you: the pain, the joy, the weight of your missing them. Then offer it back.

This could look like:

- Burning a note in a fire-safe container
- Placing an item in a creek, stream, or other body of water (if biodegradable and respectful of the environment)
- Burying something in the soil
- Donating something with a blessing: “May this keep someone else warm, as you once kept me.”

You don’t have to let go of everything. Just one thing. One weight. One breath.

Let your grief exhale.

MAKE SOMETHING THAT CARRIES THEM FORWARD

When your hands want to move and your heart wants to honor, create something lasting from love.

Select a few items that remind you of your loved one. These could be their belongings, materials that symbolize them, or even found objects. Then create something with the items, or inspired by them, that lives on. Some possibilities:

- **Memory box:** Decorate a small box and fill it with letters, photos, a scent, or small objects they touched or loved. Add to it over time.

- **Legacy quilt or pillow:** Use pieces of their clothing (T-shirts, scarves, pajamas) and sew them into something new. You can do it by hand or with the help of a friend or a professional. It doesn't need to be perfect.
- **Handwritten art:** Find a phrase they always said or a line from a letter they wrote you. Trace their handwriting or rewrite it yourself. Frame it. Or paint it onto wood, stone, or fabric.
- **Wish totem or spirit mobile:** Combine natural objects (shells, feathers, stones) with small personal items (keys, jewelry, fabric) and string them together. Hang your creation near a window or outside where wind and light can move through it.

This is an invitation to cocreate with your lost loved one. Not to trap them in the past, but to carry their presence into the present. You're not just remembering them. You're building something with them, something that still breathes.

CHAPTER 13.

Who Helps You Heal? Assessing Your Support System

EXERCISES TO EXPLORE

REIMAGINING SUPPORT WITH ANIMALS AND NATURE

If you have pets, take a moment to spend some quiet time with them today. Sit or lie beside them. Notice your breath. Let your body soften against theirs. Imagine your grief energy being held in their presence. Speak to them, either aloud or silently, about what you're carrying.

If you don't have pets: Visit a dog park, animal shelter, or natural place that feels safe to you. Sit against a tree or watch a flock of birds. Ask the natural world: *Can you hold this with me for a little while?* Notice what changed, even slightly, in your body or mood after this interaction.

ANCHORS, BUOYS, AND BOATS MAP

If you'd like a printable PDF to use for this exercise, go to healwithlaura.com. Or you can draw three concentric circles on a page, like a bull's-eye.

- In the center, write the names of your anchors: those people who consistently show up, listen without fixing, and can hold your grief.
- In the middle ring, list your buoys: those who care but may be inconsistent or uncertain how to support you.

- In the outer ring, list your boats: those who drift in and out, offer occasional gestures, or are not dependable.

Who surprised you? Who moved into (or out of) the center after your loss? Are there people in your life you'd like to bring closer? You don't have to act on this map today. However, having clarity allows you to stop overextending yourself toward people who can't meet your needs right now, and instead turn toward those who can.

FRIENDSHIP INVENTORY THROUGH THE LENS OF GRIEF

Grab your journal and reflect on the following prompts:

- Who do I feel safe being messy or silent with right now?
- Are there any relationships that drain me more than nourish me since my loss?
- Are there friends who are *trying* to be there but don't seem to "get it"? What might I need or want to express (or let go of)?
- What kind of friendship feels most healing to me now, and have I communicated that to anyone?

End by writing a note or text to someone who has shown up for you—just a line of gratitude or acknowledgment can reinforce connection.

CHAPTER 14.

Cultivating and Curating a Supportive Community

EXERCISES TO EXPLORE

If you'd like some extra guidance as you begin opening to connection again, you can check out the Grief & Friendship Survival Kit I share on the Grief Healing Collective at healwithlaura.com.

ONE BRAVE BOUNDARY

It's time to reclaim a small piece of your energy by setting a boundary that reflects who you are *now*, not who you were before your loss. You don't have to explain yourself. You don't have to confront anyone. You're simply choosing one small no or one gentle yes and honoring it.

First, identify the leak: Ask yourself, Where in my day or week do I feel a small drain I've been tolerating? Is it a group text that feels overwhelming? A friend who calls and talks without asking how I am? An obligation I say yes to out of guilt? A social media app that leads me to doomscroll?

Set the soft boundary: Choose *one* of the following (or your own), and put it into quiet action:

- Mute or pause a text thread or group chat for twenty-four hours.
- Let one call go to voicemail without guilt.

- Decline an invite with a simple “I’m not up for this right now, but I appreciate the invite.”
- Unfollow or silence one social media account that triggers comparison or discomfort.
- Tell one person: “I’m not taking calls or visits right now, but I’ll reach out when I have the energy.”

Ask yourself: How did it feel to choose myself in that moment? What did I fear would happen versus what actually happened? Did any part of me feel a sense of relief?

FRIENDSHIP INTENTION MAPPING

Reflect on three areas to guide you in forming your grief-informed village. Journal or list your thoughts for each:

1. **What do I crave in friendship right now?** What feels most nourishing in this season? Emotional safety, shared experience, deep conversation, or simply someone who “gets it”?
2. **What do I bring to friendship right now?** Even in grief, you offer qualities like authenticity, humor, depth, creativity, and compassion.
3. **Where might I find aligned connections?** What spaces attract people with this energy? Make a list and consider grief groups, yoga or writing classes, retreats, volunteer work, spiritual circles, or healing-centered online communities.

Look for natural overlaps. For example, you might be craving spiritual depth or want to offer a heartfelt presence. Maybe you are being drawn to women's circles right now. There's a place to start. Let this be your map, and take one small step toward connection.

TAKE ON SOME GENTLE SOCIAL CHALLENGES

Start stretching the edges of isolation with low-stakes connection. Connection doesn't have to be loud or super social. Pick one of the following this week. No pressure, just an invitation.

- Reconnect with someone safe from your past and send a quick text or voice note: "Hey, just thinking of you. Would love to hear how you are."
- Say yes to one invitation, even if it's just for thirty minutes. Let your body be your guide.
- Ask for support in a low-key way: "Could we grab coffee or take a walk together soon? I don't want to talk about everything, but I'd love some company."
- Join a grief-specific online forum or group and simply read; you don't even need to post. Let yourself just receive.

CHAPTER 15.

Your Relationship on Grief

EXERCISES TO EXPLORE

If you'd like a printable PDF of tools along with a few prompts we use in the Grief Healing Collective, you can download the Grieve in Love Connection Kit at healwithlaura.com. These gentle tools and exercises are designed to help you reconnect, even when words feel hard.

THE TEN-MINUTE CHECK-IN

The goal is to reconnect with your partner when you're too exhausted for deep conversation. Set a timer for five minutes. Each partner takes a turn answering one of the following:

- What's one thing I'm carrying today?
- What do I need most right now?
- What's something I appreciate about you at this moment?

No responses, no solutions, just presence and listening. A nod, a hand on the heart, or a hand squeeze is enough. You don't need to fix anything; simply witness each other.

LOVE IN THE AFTERMATH: A LETTER TO THE NOW

Write a short letter, just a few lines if that's all you have, to the love that's still possible. You might write to a future partner, your current partner, love it-

self, or yourself. Start with: “Dear Love, here’s what I know today . . .” Then use the following prompts:

- One thing grief has taught me about love is . . .
- I still long for . . .
- I want to be met by someone who can . . .
- I promise to show up for love by . . .

You don’t have to share it. You don’t even have to reread it. Just let the words be a reminder that grief hasn’t emptied you of love. It’s deepened your reservoir for it.

THE STATE OF OUR UNION

Open a deeper dialogue with your partner about how grief is affecting your relationship and where hope still lives. Each partner reflects on and answers the following prompts. When you feel ready, come together to share what feels safe to say out loud. You can speak your answers, write them down, trade, or create a ritual around it (such as lighting a candle, sitting face-to-face, or taking a walk).

- One way I’ve changed since the loss is . . .
- One thing I wish you understood about my grief is . . .
- One fear I’ve had about us is . . .
- One hope I have for our future is . . .
- One way I want to show up for you now is . . .

Optional: Close with a shared commitment, such as a daily ten-minute check-in or a weekly grief walk together.

CHAPTER 16.

Your Kids on Grief

EXERCISES TO EXPLORE

Here are some exercises to try with your child(ren) that can help support them (and you) through loss. You can also download my Crying Out Loud Parent Companion at healwithlaura.com for simple, soul-nourishing activities, prompts, and tips designed to support their healing while honoring your own.

THE FIVE-MINUTE HEART CHECK-IN

Sometimes, all you can manage is to be there. This practice offers a simple way to connect with your child (or your own heart) in less than five minutes. Sit together quietly, placing one hand on your heart and the other on your child's heart. Breathe together slowly. Say aloud, "I'm checking in with my heart right now. It feels [insert feeling: sad, tired, okay, heavy, etc.]. How does your heart feel today?"

You can journal their answer, draw it, or just acknowledge it. The goal is presence, not fixing.

CREATE A MEMORY STONE

This gentle, tactile activity can be done indoors or outdoors and gives kids (and adults) a way to honor and remember their loved one.

You'll need several small rocks or stones, along with paint pens, markers, or stickers. Let each person choose a stone. On it, they write the name of the

person they miss or a word that reminds them of them (“funny,” “sunshine,” “hugs”), or draw something that makes them think of them.

Keep the stone on a bedside table, on an altar, or in a special jar. Continue to add to the collection over time. These stones serve as anchors, a simple and tangible way to stay connected.

CREATE A “FEELINGS FORT” TOGETHER

Build a fort together with blankets, pillows, flashlights, and cozy items. This is a full-sensory activity that lets kids (and you) engage their bodies while creating a safe space for emotional expression. Let the child decide how it looks and what goes inside. Bring in a journal, coloring pages, snacks, music, or stuffed animals. Once inside, create a ritual around using the fort as a “feelings space.” Use prompts for catalyzing discussion, like:

- “Let’s each share one memory of our person.”
- “Let’s name a feeling we have today.”
- “If this fort had a name, what would it be?”

This becomes a sacred play space, where grief and imagination can safely coexist.

CHAPTER 17.

When God Owes You an Explanation

EXERCISES TO EXPLORE

BORROW SOMEONE ELSE'S FAITH

You don't necessarily have to have faith to be held by it. You can borrow someone else's belief, just for a moment, like slipping on a coat that doesn't belong to you but keeps you warm. Pick a spiritual phrase, a line of scripture, a poem, a mantra, even if it doesn't feel totally true to you right now. Let someone else's wisdom or devotion be a placeholder for your own until you're ready to find it again.

You can whisper the words aloud, write them down, or play them on audio while you lie down or rest. For example:

- Psalm 34:18: "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit."
- Rumi: "Try not to resist the changes that come your way. Instead, let life live through you."
- *A Course in Miracles*: "You are never alone."

SIT WHERE FAITH LIVES FOR A BIT

You don't have to believe. You don't have to pray. You don't even have to speak. Sometimes, the first step toward rebuilding faith is simply placing yourself in a space where faith exists. When you have very little energy but a

deep ache for something more, try going where the faith lives. This could be as simple as:

- Sitting quietly in a church, synagogue, or mosque during off-hours
- Lighting a candle in a chapel or cathedral
- Attending a Zoom prayer circle (even with your camera off)
- Meditating in a temple garden or mosque courtyard
- Visiting a spiritual center or retreat space to breathe and listen
- Playing a recording of someone else's prayer, chant, or poem

You don't have to participate or even understand the process. Just be in the presence of devotion. Let the music, the stillness, the words, the architecture, or the ritual work on your nervous system in the background. Faith is contagious in the most beautiful way. It can brush up against you when you're not even trying.

In time, you may feel something shift. Not a lightning bolt of belief, but maybe a softening. A moment of stillness. The tiniest sense that you are being held, even if you don't know by what.

LEAN INTO THE UNKNOWN

What would happen if you got into your car and drove with no set destination? If you followed your gut, letting intuition guide you, rather than a plan? Or if you took a walk with no route, staying open to whatever possibilities arose?

Take some time to step outside your comfort zone—no preplanning, no

researching, no safety net. We often overestimate how much we truly know because we surround ourselves with familiar ideas, people, and experiences, which reinforce our existing algorithm. But real growth happens when we disrupt those well-worn neural pathways, challenging ourselves to embrace the unknown.

As you move, notice the discomfort that arises from not knowing. Breathe into that discomfort. Let yourself feel how unmoored we are when there's no clear route, and how alive we become. Grief strips us of the illusion that we're in control. This exercise helps us step into that unknown with intention. Not because we have answers, but because we're willing to trust in the mystery. That is the beginning of faith.

CHAPTER 18.

Why Meditation Is the Last Thing You Want to Do, but Exactly What You Need

EXERCISES TO EXPLORE

RESTING IN THE GRIEF MEDITATION

As you lie in bed, close your eyes and let yourself take a few thoughtful inhales and exhales. Maybe listen to one of the guided meditations on heal-withlaura.com, with no expectations. You can try to find some silence or stillness within you, even if only for a few seconds. Visualize gentle ocean waves lapping on a beach, or beautiful golden light shimmering all around you. If you have the desire, perhaps you could offer a few words of prayer. It doesn't have to be complicated. You might say something like "Please let me feel held right now," or "Please let me feel loved right now." You might repeat an affirmation or mantra, such as "I am loved. I am love."

TOUCHSTONE MEDITATION

Choose an item that grounds you and reminds you of your loved one—a rock, a piece of jewelry, an article of clothing, a Bible, or any meaningful object. Hold the item in your hands and take a few deep, centering breaths. Notice how it feels, the weight, texture, and temperature. Let your focus settle there. As you inhale, imagine drawing in your loved one's essence. With each breath, feel their presence gently filling your body.

Sit in this quiet connection for a few minutes. You might speak to them, offer a prayer, or simply *be*. No effort or expectation, just presence. When you're ready, release the item and open your eyes. Notice how you feel in your body, your heart, your mind. Return to this practice anytime you need comfort, connection, or a moment of peace.

WALKING WITH YOUR LOVED ONE

Try moving meditation in nature at a park, beach, hiking trail, or even in your backyard.

Start strolling, with no destination in mind. Let go of future thoughts, gently releasing distractions as they come. Tune in to the present by noticing one thing you can see, smell, hear, touch, and taste.

Imagine your loved one walking beside you. Or if that's too tender, look for signs of them in nature: a favorite bird, flower, or tree. Maybe even a buzzing bee that brings a memory and a smile. Let whatever comes, come. Don't search for anything, stay open. Allow doubt to exist, but lean into curiosity: "What if I just try?"

Let this walk be a gentle experiment in presence and receiving grace. When you're done, take a moment to notice how you feel. What shifted? What soothed? If anything helped, jot it down so you can return to it when you need it most.

CHAPTER 19.

Signs from Beyond: Who Are They Now?

EXERCISES TO EXPLORE

CHOOSE YOUR SIGN

Find a quiet moment to close your eyes and place a hand on your heart. Think of your loved one; feel their presence, hear their voice, or recall a special memory. Now gently ask, “What is a sign we can choose to let me know you’re near?” Allow whatever comes to mind—a symbol, object, animal, number, or song—to arise naturally.

Stay open in the days ahead. Signs may appear in unexpected ways, through nature, media, dreams, or conversations. If nothing comes immediately, keep watching with a gentle heart. Your job is not to force it, but to invite and receive.

TUNING IN TO YOUR SOUL SIGNATURE (AND THEIRS)

(For a guided meditation of this practice, go to healwithlaura.com.)

Find a quiet, comfortable space. Light a candle, hold a meaningful object, or sit in stillness.

Close your eyes and take a few deep, grounding breaths. Bring your attention to the center of your chest. Imagine a small flame there, like a steady, quiet pilot light. This is the seat of your soul, your eternal essence. Gently place your awareness there. Let it grow. Feel the warmth and let the light get brighter and bigger, until the energy fills your entire body.

Notice what that energy feels like. It's pure and vibrant beneath the thoughts, the grief, the stories. Is it bubbling or still? Fast and fizzy? Slow and syrupy? Expansive? Soft? Just notice, without judgment. This is your soul signature, always present, always whole.

Now gently bring your loved one into your awareness. Picture them at their best—their humor, their kindness, their essence. Imagine being with them in a moment you treasured. Feel into that memory as if it's happening now. Sense their presence. How does *their* energy feel? Warm, sparkly, calm, strong? Let it rise gently around you and anchor the feeling of it. Notice the difference between their soul signature and yours.

You don't need to force or understand anything, just receive. It may be subtle at first, but with practice, you will begin to discern the difference between your soul signature and theirs. You can also try to tap into the energy of loved ones who are still here, when near them, and notice the difference between their frequency and yours.

A JOURNEY TO THEIR WORLD

(I find this exercise works best when you're guided through the experience. To do so, go to healwithlaura.com.)

This visualization is a sacred journey into the realm where your loved one now lives. It's a space of beauty, creativity, and continued connection.

Begin by finding a quiet, comfortable place where you won't be disturbed. Take a few grounding breaths and let your body settle. Imagine yourself standing at the top of a long, winding staircase. You begin to walk down a set of thirty stairs, counting by tens as you go, each step taking you deeper into stillness and presence. At the bottom, you find a doorway. Open it and step into a breathtaking garden of your own creation; lush, peaceful, vibrant with color and life. Notice all the details. Spend some time there.

In the center of this garden is a bridge, and at the far end of that bridge, just beyond a soft, glowing veil, is your loved one. Begin to walk across the bridge. As you near the veil, take a moment to pause. Then step through gently. On the other side, your loved one is waiting.

You're now in *their* world, the one they've created with thought, feeling, and spirit. Here, anything is possible. Let them show you what they've built. A home, a landscape, a memory brought to life. Be open to whatever arises. Trust what you see, feel, or sense.

When it feels complete, thank them. Let them guide you back to the veil. Step through, cross the bridge once more, and return through the garden. Climb the staircase slowly, carrying their love with you. This practice can be revisited anytime. Each journey may be different.

CHAPTER 20.

Building a Relationship with Your Loved One on the Other Side

EXERCISES TO EXPLORE

LIGHT AND PRESENCE RITUAL

Candlelight is ancient and symbolic. It gently calls the soul forward. Light a candle with intention. As you do, say something simple like, “This is for you. Come close.” Then sit and look at the flame. Let it be the placeholder for their presence. Imagine them sitting across from you, holding that same stillness. You can do this for two minutes or twenty minutes, whatever you have to give. Just welcome whatever comes to or through you as you sit, away from distractions or technology, with the light.

CHANNELED (OR AUTOMATIC) WRITING

If you’d like to be guided through automatic writing, you can find a printable PDF and a guided meditation at healwithlaura.com. Find a quiet space, light a candle, and take a few slow, grounding breaths to come into your body. Imagine moving all your conscious awareness from the left, analytical side to the right side of your brain, the intuitive side. Place a hand on your heart and invite your loved one close. When you feel ready, set a timer for ten minutes and write this at the top of the page: “What would you have me know today?”

Then begin writing whatever comes. Just scribble if needed. Write nonsense if that’s what comes out, without editing, overthinking, or judging. Let

the words flow freely, even if they start out sounding like your own voice. Trust what you feel. When the timer goes off or the message feels complete, pause, read it over, and thank your loved one for coming close. Just like love, the words may surprise you.

ENERGETIC BLENDING

This practice gently guides you into resonance with your loved one's energetic soul signature. It's not about imagining, it's about *feeling*. The steps are below. If you'd like to listen to a guided meditation, visit healwithlaura.com. And remember, every experience is different, so if you don't feel anything, keep opening your heart and mind and keep practicing.

First, find a quiet, comfortable place to sit. Close your eyes. Take a few slow, deep breaths, grounding into your physical body. As you breathe in, imagine light flowing in through the top of your head. As you breathe out, imagine that light shooting from your tailbone deep into the earth, grounding you there. Bring your awareness to your heart center and imagine a soft light glowing there. This is your energy.

Next, tune in to your soul signature as you learned to do in chapter 19. Notice how your energy feels. Is it still? Expansive? Heavy? Light? There's no right or wrong answer; stay curious. Once you are attuned to your energy, invite your loved one closer. With a whisper from your heart, ask them to stand behind you. You may experience warmth, tingling, or emotional sensations. Don't force anything, allow. Imagine their energy like a warm blanket or radiant light gently wrapping around your shoulders. Maybe you sense their hands, a familiar scent, or a deep calm.

Now invite your loved one into your energy field, to blend with you. Imagine their energy entering your body from behind. Feel what it's like to be filled with their essence. Their strength. Their love. Their soul signature. Breathe them in.

When you feel ready, thank them for coming close. Gently return to your body and breath. You may want to journal what you felt or sit in the afterglow.

Resources

In this section I am including some recommendations for books that are classics as well as trauma-informed resources to get you the help you need, but I encourage you to go to healwithlaura.com, where I have included a living list (I'm always adding to it). There you will find online grief-healing communities I believe in, some of the best grief podcasts, breath-work facilitators, mediums, and healers I have found to be the real deal.

For more resources and information on the Grief Healing Collective, go to drlauraberman.com/griefhealing.

Helpful Books to Read After Loss

- Bloomfield, Harold H., Melba Colgrove, and Peter McWilliams. *How to Survive the Loss of a Love*.
- Bowler, Kate. *Everything Happens for a Reason: And Other Lies I've Loved*.
- Cacciatore, Joanne. *Bearing the Unbearable: Love, Loss, and the Heartbreaking Path of Grief*.
- Carlson, Kristine. *From Heartbreak to Wholeness: The Hero's Journey to Joy*.

- Devine, Megan. *It's OK That You're Not OK: Meeting Grief and Loss in a Culture That Doesn't Understand.*
- Didion, Joan. *The Year of Magical Thinking.*
- Fernandez, Carla. *Renegade Grief: A Guide to the Wild Ride of Life After Loss.*
- Gould, Melissa. *Widowish: A Memoir.*
- Jackson, Laura Lynne. *Signs: The Secret Language of the Universe.*
- Jackson, Laura Lynne. *The Light Between Us: Stories from Heaven. Lessons for the Living.*
- Jarvis, Meghan Riordan. *Can Anyone Tell Me? Essential Questions About Grief and Loss.*
- Keefauver, Lisa. *Grief Is a Sneaky Bitch: An Uncensored Guide to Navigating Loss.*
- Kessler, David. *Finding Meaning: The Sixth Stage of Grief.*
- Kushner, Harold. *When Bad Things Happen to Good People.*
- Leiner Grant, Barri. *Remember & Reflect Deck.*
- Lewis, C. S. *A Grief Observed.*
- Moorjani, Anita. *Dying to Be Me: My Journey from Cancer, to Near Death, to True Healing.*
- Myss, Caroline. *Entering the Castle: Finding the Inner Path to God and Your Soul's Purpose.*
- O'Connor, Mary-Frances. *The Grieving Brain: The Surprising Science of How We Learn from Love and Loss.*
- Smith, Claire Bidwell. *Conscious Grieving: A Transformative Approach to Healing from Loss.*

- Walsch, Neale Donald. *Conversations with God: An Uncommon Dialogue*.
- Zukav, Gary. *The Dancing Wu Li Masters: An Overview of the New Physics*.

Somatic Experiencing Resources

EMDR International Association (EMDRIA): Directory of certified therapists who use eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR), a powerful trauma treatment. Many offer virtual sessions and combine EMDR with other healing modalities. You can search for a certified EMDR therapist at emdria.org, the website of the EMDR International Association.

Hakomi Institute: A global community of practitioners who use the Hakomi Method, a gentle, mindfulness-based approach to healing. Hakomi helps you explore the body's wisdom to uncover and shift unconscious patterns that may be shaping your grief and life. You can find practitioners and trainings at hakomiinstitute.com.

Trauma-Informed Therapy Resources (National and Accessible)

Inclusive Therapists: A trauma-informed-therapist directory centering marginalized communities, including BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, neurodivergent, and disabled folks. Offers many virtual options and filters for trauma-specific specialties. inclusivetherapists.com

Open Path Psychotherapy Collective: A nonprofit network of trauma-informed therapists offering affordable therapy (usually forty to seventy dollars per session) for those who are uninsured or underinsured. Filter by trauma specialty or somatic approaches. openpathcollective.org

***Psychology Today* Trauma and PTSD Therapist Directory:** The most comprehensive, searchable therapist directory. Filter by “Trauma and PTSD” or “Somatic Therapy” to find licensed professionals who specialize in trauma-informed care, including EMDR, Somatic Experiencing, and internal family systems. Many therapists offer telehealth. psychologytoday.com

Somatic Experiencing International Practitioner Directory: The official directory of certified Somatic Experiencing (SE) practitioners trained in body-based trauma resolution. Search by location or choose virtual-only to find SE therapists across the country and internationally. traumahealing.org

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN): A national network providing trauma-specific treatment for children and teens. Offers a searchable list of trauma-informed providers and specializes in child and adolescent care. nctsn.org

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