

## **Q&A**

An interview with  
**Judy Brizendine**  
author of ***STUNNED by Grief: Remapping Your Life When Loss Changes Everything***  
and ***STUNNED by Grief Journal***  
BennettKnepp Publishing

### **Question: What was your motivation for writing the book(s)?**

**Judy:** When my husband died in 1998, I was caught completely off-guard. He died unexpectedly of a heart condition while on an ordinary mountain bike ride. I knew nothing about grief, and I didn't know anyone my age who had experienced the same kind of loss. I didn't have any idea what to expect, and I certainly didn't know what was normal.

Losing my husband was the toughest experience I've had in life, but grief was much more challenging because I had to struggle so hard to figure it out. I spent lots of uncomfortable moments thinking there was something wrong with me because of what I thought or how I felt. I read various books and found bits and pieces of helpful information in different ones—but it was a *search!* And during that time of grief, I was not up to the task of searching.

Years after my own grief experience and after facilitating grief-support groups, I really wanted to find a way to take all that I had learned (along with the unique insights and experiences of support-group members) and do something to smooth the path for other grievers. Writing the book and journal was my way of reaching out to help others by sharing with them what I had to learn *under fire*. If my books can prevent even one person from struggling the way I did, the effort was worthwhile.

### **Question: How does your book differ from other books on grieving?**

**Judy:** My book takes grievers down a personal path through the pivotal questions and issues that arise out of the experience of grief. Everything is written from the *perspective* of the person who is grieving. We look at critical issues together, i.e., typical questions and fears; relationship issues; unexpected changes; isolation; anger; and other factors that can be stumbling blocks to healing.

Often grievers have difficulty reading a book all the way through, so I created a book that enables readers to turn directly to any chapter to find information on a specific topic without having to read the entire book. Each chapter stands alone—*or*—one can read the book straight through. The book was also custom designed for easy reading with sidebars, breakout boxes, lots of white space, interactive questions, and encouraging words and examples from fellow grievers.

I explain grief in terms of a new concept called remapping that breaks the process down into six basic elements for easy understanding. Remapping (grieving) is not easy, but seeing at a glance what is involved makes the subject easier to grasp.

A typical way of explaining grief is in terms of stages, but that explanation created confusion for me and grief-support members. A “stage” leads one to believe that once he has faced the stage, it’s over. With grief, that’s not the case. One may go back and forth between stages numerous times. When this happens grievers do not understand and they get discouraged, so I approach the process differently.

The book is filled with real life examples and straight talk from people who have been there, so readers get a realistic picture. Once grievers genuinely know the truth, they can start to take steps to get well. And, unlike me, they will know their thoughts and feelings are not unique—and will understand what they can do to reach a full and reconnected life.

**Question: Why did you write the journal?**

**Judy:** If someone wants help in trying to understand grief and really doesn’t want to consider reading a book, the journal is perfect. However, the journal is also a great tool to use along with the book for extra help.

Journaling is a powerful tool for accessing and releasing thoughts and feelings that are buried inside. By writing about whatever is on one’s mind, these things can be brought to the outside and released. Facing grief and releasing it brings healing. Among other things, each day contains a thought from the book and a personal reflection from me about the grief journey. These concepts give the reader related ideas to think and write about as they work their way through grief.

Grief-support groups are not available everywhere, and some people will not attend a group even if one is available. Journaling is another grief recovery tool. Different people will be comfortable with different tools. The journal is an option, and when used in conjunction with the book, the benefit of each is enhanced.

**Question: Grief is not a popular subject to discuss. Why get involved?**

**Judy:** You’re right, people are uncomfortable with grief and with grievers. Generally, they don’t even know what to say when the subject is raised and are eager to put it to rest.

We (my husband and I) know how critical unresolved grief is to future health and happiness, so we are passionate about bringing the subject out into the light—so people will begin to think and talk about it *honestly and openly*. The way people handle grief affects their entire lives and the lives of their friends, families, and coworkers. Also, many of the problems people struggle with (and don’t even realize it) are connected to unresolved grief.

We are committed to helping change the way people view one of the toughest experiences each of us will eventually face.

**Question: What is the significance of the title?**

**Judy:** To me, the title, *STUNNED by Grief*, vividly and accurately describes one’s feelings when a major loss strikes. And the reaction is not a fleeting one.

Even when we know in advance that loss will come, we're seldom prepared for the toll it will take on us or how it changes everything. I hope the title will immediately establish a point of contact between the griever and me because we both can relate to it.

**Question: Was it difficult to write about something so personal and painful?**

**Judy:** It would have been impossible for me to write these books early in the grief process. I will never forget the raw emotions and the moment-by-moment struggles during the first months and years—and early on, I was just trying to survive. Writing a book then would never have occurred to me.

I needed time to gain perspective about what I had been through, and didn't start writing the book until almost eight years after my husband died. However, because I wanted to relate to people in a real way, I included some of my journal writings from the first couple of years after his death. The journal took me back to the most painful and vulnerable time of my life. I'm generally a private person, so sharing intimate details publicly was something I had never done before. As hard as it was—I think transparency is crucial. Unless people trust that I understand, why would they listen to what I have to say?

Time and distance were needed for me to be able to rationally think about what happened, how I faced the grief, the emotional ups and downs, and the positive things I learned. I had lots of sifting to do—over time—to pull out what might be helpful for someone else going through a major loss. The process was also one of self-discovery, courage, and hope for the future.

So, to answer your question, there were moments of reliving the unthinkable—but those times were overshadowed by the ultimate goal of writing a book that would help others escape the agony I went through in trying to figure things out myself.

**Question: What would you say to those who may be reluctant to read a book about grief?**

Both books are filled with hope and encouragement. Some may hesitate to read books about grief for fear that the subject is uncomfortable or depressing—but I challenge you to pick up the books and read. You'll find positive examples of courage and persistence in the face of pain and sorrow. Yes, you will shed some tears, but you'll also smile and find reasons to 'keep on keeping on.' The book is honest, personal, and down-to-earth. While I never would have chosen this path for myself, it changed my life in a positive way. Tragedy is not the end of the road. It's a new beginning triggered through loss and change.

**To schedule an interview contact Judy Brizendine, 949.281.6933, or email: [jbriz@StunnedByGrief.com](mailto:jbriz@StunnedByGrief.com)**