

Name

# Composing Grief

## *by Tony Falzano*

There are many articles written by people who found an activity that helped them journey through grief and loss. They range from journaling feelings on paper to taking up something more extravagant, such as hang-gliding. These new found interests have often been the oxygen individuals need to survive.

I recently came across an article written by a woman who used songwriting as a way of working through grief. She claimed not to be a songwriter or a musician. In fact she didn’t know where to begin the process. She just had a desire to express herself and heal her broken heart. She wanted to write her husband a love song. She felt better as she wrote the song dedicated to her soul mate. In fact she so enjoyed songwriting that she composed more songs and then wrote an article to tell others of her experience.

I found this woman’s testament interesting and confirming. I am a songwriter who writes music that is listened to by those grieving loss. I also present a seminar called, Composing Grieffor hospice and grief organizations. In this session, individuals complete simple songwriting assignments to help them come to terms with loss.

This idea of songwriting used in bereavement is not new. For years grief organizations in England and Australia have worked with this concept. The facilitators speak highly of this technique. They say songwriting ‘opened the windows of communication’ with what was going on in and around the patient. Their findings showed songwriting allowed participants to get in touch with their feelings and identify memories of their loved ones. It was highly effective to those struggling with complicated, unresolved grief.  The process of songwriting allowed individuals to identify what made them grieve. Songwriting became a coping strategy and helped people through the silence of sorrow. As a result, these people were more engaged in the grieving process by the mere fact they were attempting to process grief. Participants reported that it reduced their guilt, anxiety, stress and depression while it increased pleasure.

If songwriting is of interest, you may find doing it easier than you think. I’m sure at some point you wrote a poem or a song. You can do it again. You may say, “My work was never any good.” And from a commercial point of view, you may be right. But at this time your intent is not to create art. Instead you are using an art form as a therapeutic vehicle to express feelings of mourning and loss.

And you can still use songwriting to work through grief even though you don’t write music.

Melody can be a powerful means to trigger emotions for your words. So one simple exercise you can do is to write your words to an existing melody. You can use any song. You will not be stealing another’s work. You are using their music as a springboard to work through the grief process. You would steal it if you were going to publish your song with the intent of making money. If that is the case and you did want to explore commercial feedback, I suggest you have another musician compose the music to your words. If you are still bothered by the thought of using a well-known melody, you can use a tune in the public domain.

Once you have identified a song to work from, start to write your words to the melody. What you write should fit comfortably in the notes within the musical line. One popular exercise I use in Composing Grief is to have participants write their words to a title I give them called, “One More Tomorrow”. The melody they work from is, “Rock-A-By-Baby.”  You can write with the melody in your head or if it helps, you can play and re-play the chosen song using an I-pod or CD play. Below is what one individual came up with completing this exercise to, “Rock-A-By-Baby.”

 **“One More Tomorrow”**

One more tomorrow

Is what I would like

One more chance

To hold you again

One more day

To laugh like we were young

One more tomorrow

To kiss you good-bye.

After losing a dear one, many people are swimming in a sea of sadness, looking for help. Songwriting or “composing grief” may be another float you can grab onto until time eventually moves you to a safer place.

***Tony Falzano is a college professor, published author and award winning songwriter who speaks on the powerful impact music can have in our lives. His seminar, “Composing Grief” has been a part of grief conferences.***

***In addition, many people grieving a loss have discovered his music CDs,*Just a Touch Away*and*In Abba’s Arms*. They are original instrumentals created to be an inspirational companion for those searching for healing and hope. This nurturing music has also brought calm, comfort and relaxation to a wide range of audiences.***

***The CD is available through the grief resource company, The Centering Corporation***[***www.centering.org***](http://www.centering.org/)***or phone 1.866.218.0101. For more insight into the album, please visit***[***www.cdbaby.com/cd/Falzano***](http://www.cdbaby.com/cd/Falzano)***.***

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