

## **Loss, Grief, and Finding Your Way Home**

by Ruth Gerzon, co-ordinator Ngā Pou Herenga: The Funeral Guides Collective  
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Loss and grief are universal experiences that leave no one untouched and I fear the loss of those closest to me, of how my life might be when I am next bereft. So, I was heartened by the title given by two counsellors to the next of our fortnightly Sunday hui: Loss, Grief and Finding Your Way Home.

How we travel through grief can vary, influenced by the circumstances, as well as the support we receive. There is a vast difference between sudden tragic loss of a child or young person and a celebration of a life well lived of older people. I have seen unresolved grief stay with whānau for decades, and sometimes resurface many years later at a time of further bereavement. Queen Victoria never recovered from the loss of her beloved, and, closer to home, people I know are mired in grief, finding it hard to focus on life over a decade after a momentous loss.

Yet death is part of life. This is more visible in Māori tikanga than in western cultures. In Māori contexts those who have gone before are ever present. Every time I go on a marae the pōwhiri gives me a space to remember, grieve and honour those I have lost. The unveiling, a year or so after the death, is another opportunity to mark a milestone along with the community of friends and whanau.

The two counsellors who will share their stories of bereavement are Anihera Tahu-Hepworth and her tane, Ron Hepworth. Ron is a retired systemic family therapist. He sees how circumstances may affect the grieving process. We may not be able to be present with others at a time of grief, because of the lockdowns, immigration, incarceration, family dysfunction. These all exacerbate our sense of loss.

Anihera Tahu-Hepworth, Tūhoe, Ngati Porou, has stories and ideas of how we can journey through grief. We need to know we're not going mad, we need to nurture ourselves. She says grief often transforms us for the better. It can make us softer, more human, more understanding.

In Pākehā culture people may face grief very much alone. My older generation emphasise independence. We don't want to be a burden, so we don't call out enough. We also may not have the knowledge within our family as to how to face death, especially a sudden death. Ron reminds us to ask for assistance. "Your community is waiting for you."

We all seek ways to keep those we have lost present, to spend time with them and to nurture our memories. These rituals may be at a grave, with flowers or a roadside cross, a tree in our garden, a space in our home with photos and candles. Ron and Anihera will bring some elements that encourage practices to honour those who have passed on.

At the Sunday afternoon seminar, they plan to "give everyday ways to claim ownership of the grief and loss process with stories of personal experiences and observations to share." I look forward to this opportunity to learn more about how I might cope when I face bereavement and how I might better support my family and friends facing loss. Everyone is welcome to join me at the hui.

Anihera and Ron will facilitate the seminar on Sunday 28 May, 3-4.30 pm 2023 at the Disabilities Resource Centre (side entrance) 141 King Street, Whakatāne. All are welcome. There is no charge, though a koha or baking for our cup of tea afterwards is always welcome.