

## Transforming grief into peace: the normal grieving mind-- memory construction, deconstruction, and reconsolidation

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### ABSTRACT

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of September 2020 Ernest Rossi, my husband, professional partner, and best friend of 30 years left this mortal world. His passing was a comparatively rapid process of dissipation extended over a period of approximately six days. In addition to the complex of emotions and physical responses, I experienced grief. This grief affected me more than any prior loss or sadness in my life as my consciousness was altered into fluctuating quantum trance states characteristic of hypnosis while dancing on the spacetime continuum. As I transformed grief to peace, I utilized established "Rossi" principles as guidelines for effective therapeutic hypnosis and developing a satisfying life. In the tradition of our life together, I was the "operator" who had a subjective experience and yet, at the same time, I was also the "observer" who would watch, learn, and discover new knowledge. This paper is the emergent outpouring of the dynamic interplay between the *observer* and the *operator*, which is, therefore experiential, revealing, revelational, and numinous.

### KEYWORDS

Grief; hypnosis; Milton Erickson; quantum consciousness; ultradian rhythms

### Natural grief

Grief is an altered state of consciousness. Contained within it are windows to many other frames of consciousness – or consciousnesses – and memories that live within them. Milton H. Erickson, M.D., wrote from an experiential orientation in his many papers on therapeutic hypnosis (Rossi, Erickson-Klein, & Rossi, 2008-2014). He understood most people relate to a personal experience perspective and thus this paper reflects his spirit. The linear reality frame of consciousness is also the least helpful for transforming grief. From the quantum perspective, a particle and wave exist at the same time. Similarly, in hypnosis we often encourage multiple simultaneous consciousnesses as new perspectives on perplexing problems evolve and change. Our linear mind cannot fathom two seemingly contradictory events simultaneously, even though we know they coexist within quantum biological cellular energy expressions (Rossi & Rossi, 2011, 2018) and subjective experience. Each consciousness and each memory operate with their own individual experience of the dimensions of time and distance. These are linked perceptually as "spacetime," where time and three-dimensional space are regarded as fused in a four-dimensional continuum. Things take shorter and longer and are bigger and smaller as spacetime overrides consensual clock time and distorts the distance from here to there. Experiencing grief is relative in the context of every death. Now that nine months have passed in my grieving, it may be useful to learn applications of Rossi discoveries of therapeutic hypnosis intermixed with the

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spacetime continuum (Minkowski, 1908/1920) and in response to Einstein's Theory of Relativity (Lorentz, Einstein, Minkowski, & Weyl, 1952). Time matters. Time has unique relationships to each nuance of memory, and how we reconstruct memory to move through grieving.

Grief is the natural response to loss, particularly to the loss of someone or some living thing that has died, to which a bond or affection was formed (Mughal, Azhar, & Siddiqui, 2021). Although conventionally focused on the emotional response to loss, grief necessarily has physical, cognitive, behavioral, social, cultural, spiritual, and philosophical dimensions. Grief is different from depression. Grief seems to be an emptiness with lots of memories, while depression is hollow emptiness (Robert Sachs, 2021, personal communication). Grief is an active mind, flooding with memories. Depression feels vacant. In some ways, they are opposite reactions to real or perceived loss. A set of grief guidelines created by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1969/2014), hypothesized five stages of grief designed for the dying and not survivors. I found that only acceptance applied to my situation. I had to uniquely create an atlas, a new roadmap to peace. I suspect this is true for others.

In grief the overactive mind is fruitlessly looking for familiar markers of state-dependent memory, learning, and behavior that are largely absent and so ripe to be relearned and reset. It is akin to a phantom limb pain or tinnitus as both embody an overactive neuronal response to loss (Flor, Nikolajsen, & Jensen, 2006). Can transcending from grief to peace be stimulated in the context of nature's heuristics for healing? Can we gently come to understand and appreciate, again and anew, the spirals of growing consciousness and become a better adapted person living in a newly discovered reality and way of being? While "I will never be the same" is true, a new mantra of "I could be better" may harken peace to return.

### **Rossi fundamentals**

Ernest Rossi was a trance master of therapeutic hypnosis and a trance master who guided himself through his own death. He was a profound synthesizer of literature for hypnosis and the ways that hypnotic realities reach beyond emergent scientific understandings. Insatiably curious, he lived life in the present moment, treasured "not knowing" as seeds for creativity and invited the Novelty-Numinosum-Neurogenesis Effect (Rossi, Rossi, & Erickson-Klein, 2008), to interact with underlying biology of life processes and memories. According to Ultradian Theory (Rossi & Rossi, 1991/2021, in press) new discoveries are possible every ~90-120 minutes throughout the day and night. Cascades of genes express themselves in new ways, as described in PsychoSocial Genomics (Rossi, 2002, 2004; Rossi et al., 2008; Rossi & Rossi, 2008). This stimulates new brain growth and plasticity. Gene expression and brain plasticity are daily expressions of "I am alive!" All of this is embodied in the 4-Stage Creative Cycle which the careful observer/operator monitors moving forward (Hill & Rossi, 2017, p. 64, Appendix B; Rossi & Rossi, 1996/2021, in press). In our last decade together, we explored ways the experience of mindful yoga might interface with the deepest levels of hypnotic trance. We discovered surprising pathways of serenity and inner peace (Rossi K., 2017, 2018; Rossi & Rossi, 2015). My Kriya Yoga teacher, Sri Prakash Shankar Vyasa (Guruji), (Wyder, 2003/2014) offered four timely heuristic guidelines to consider as Ernest lay dying and through grief: Make Your Heart Free (6 days prior to passing), Celebrate Ernest (upon passing), Sit and Accept (one week), and Be Your Pure Self (one month after death).

## How time heals: the 4-stage creative cycle

While conventional folklore would like us to believe that grief lasts for one year, the scientific truth is more complicated, as we simply do not know. Every grief is different. Carnelley studied the time course of grief reactions to spousal loss and found durations ranging from several years (typical), to a lifetime of daily thinking about one's spouse, but agrees the first year is the most salient (Carnelley, Wortman, Bolger, & Burke, 2006). How then will the first year be experienced, practically speaking? Might grief take less than a year, or more? What physical and emotional elements contribute to the time interval? How does one know when grief is complete? It takes time to grow new brain and body tissues, redirect neurons, and come to equanimity. Life experiences, such as grieving, produce pressures mediated through messenger molecules on cell receptors that signal our stem cells genomes to become new neurons and for old neurons and tissues to die (apoptosis; Cozzolino et al., 2006; Tang, Kang, Vanden-Berghe, Vandenabeele, & Kroemer, 2019). It takes approximately three to six weeks for a neuron to mature in the adult human brain (Ernst et al., 2014; Ernst & Frisé, 2015; Vadodaria & Gage, 2014). Mood, mind-set, and behavioral change takes longer than neurogenesis as these transformations involve populations of neurons, and their downstream effects on the embodied mind. It is reasonable to add two to three months to the timeframe to connect the brain and body. Conceptually it takes about a season, with the heaviest work done in the first month or so. Thus, one can choose to look at personal changes seasonally rather than daily. Time becomes distorted and undependable in grief. Familiar anchors of spacetime are blurred into everchanging, introspective, and naturalistic trance states that are in constant search of new and adaptive evolution. It is through spacetime searches that one becomes recalibrated. As Martin and colleagues put it,

The way we experience and estimate time is subjective and does not systematically correspond to objective time (the physical duration of an event). Many factors can influence subjective time and lead to mental expansion or compression of objective time. The emotional valence of stimuli or the levels of attention or expectancy are known to modulate subjective time even though objective time is constant. Hypnosis too is known to alter people's perception of time (Martin, Sackur, Anlló, Niash, & Dienes, 2016, p. 1).

A fundamental element of Rossi's exploration into hypnotic principles involves the integration of the 4-Stage Creative Cycle with trance states. Once one is familiar with these natural chronobiological rhythms, they can effectively be implemented to enhance therapeutic responses – both in hetero-hypnosis and in self-exploration through autohypnosis.

The Stages range from (1) questions or concerns, (2) working through confusion and complexity, and if all goes well (3) to have a breakthrough moment(s) of clarity, insight, and direction followed by a burst of creativity based on this breakthrough, before (4) applying this new wisdom into daily life (Rossi & Rossi, 1996/2021, in press). Nature offers opportunities to heal and process problems twelve times a day in these ~90-120-minute increments. Often people come to therapy stuck in the equivalent of Stage Two – the continuing spirals of self and other examination, sometimes deeply frustrated and emotional. It takes courage to let go of fear and journey through the difficult parts of Stage Two. Nature builds a rest in each ultradian that often lasts for ~20 minutes. The active searching and sometimes painful phase also lasts ~20 minutes.

Through understanding nature's time signature, I was confident the depths of my worst despair would typically last around 20 minutes (at the most 90) and tested it for personal validity. I had no fear of surrendering to these lows to allow insight and/or relief to eventually come. There is no virtue avoiding pain, as this delays resolution. What you do not solve in one 90–120-minute ultradian cycle you may in the next. Every week offers 84 chances to find a productive resolution to life's perplexing problems. A season has over 1000 chances to come to peace and grow into the person you hope to be, for a life in higher consciousness.

Grief is physically and emotionally painful. It is life-giving to understand that pain can be time-limited and modifiable. Just as rhythms are variable with highs and lows, can one focus attention on the lower end of pain and simply wonder how long it will last? Creative change often results from such vacillations, in this instance from high to low, before finding a comfortable resolution. Milton Erickson mastered engaging with this vacillation, what he called fractionation, to encourage a more meaningful subjective response and elicit a willingness to explore or confront even the most avoided sensations such as deep grief (Rossi, Erickson-Klein, & Rossi, 1985/2014).

Looking for the absence of pain can be a numinous (fascinating, tremendous, mysterious: Otto, 1923/1950) practice yielding surprising results. Ernest expressed that Erickson "would have loved you" when I told him how I healed from a slip-and-fall injury I had experienced years earlier resulting in a serious and painful neck fracture. Every day for nine months I faithfully looked for the absence of pain morning, afternoon, and evening. I knew the truth that if I could experience five minutes without pain, I then could experience a lifetime without pain. I did experience five glorious minutes without pain after nine agonizing months. It took three years more to be completely free of that pain, which has never returned. Could my experience of looking for the absence of pain be applied to grief?

We stimulate the observer/operator response (similar to a conscious/nonconscious split) in every therapeutic hypnosis session through almost every technique whether we realize it or not. In *Mirroring Hands* (Hill & Rossi, 2017) this polarity is employed to create what Ernest referred to as fail-safe approaches for explorations in healing where both therapist and client can explore freely without limitations or fear of failures. These polarities often are appositions of opposites. The observer simply, uncritically, and impartially observes what is happening in the moment while the operator chooses to act, or not.

Hence, while grieving one can become absorbed in memories, or simply watch them as they pass by. One can listen to inner voices and choose to apply those that offer comfort and strength. Spiritually, one can access the observer/operator that can wisely oversee the parades of the many consciousnesses dancing into a new peaceful life.

Gene expression underlies all new beginnings through the body to create adaptable pathways for living successfully in the moment. Neuronal pathways are broken down, redirected, or metabolized and eliminated when no longer relevant. Gene cascades are turned on to signal for apoptosis cell death in selected cell groupings as nature's ways of cleaning the healthy embodied mind.

The process of apoptosis accelerated as Ernest's organs began to shut down, as happens in all deaths due to natural causes. As I was attuned to him, especially during his last days, our mirror neurons continued to reflect each other. Because of our close bond, and Ernest's accelerated process of apoptosis, it likely stimulated apoptosis gene expression in me. After Ernest died, at times, I genuinely did not know if I was alive or dead – asleep or awake. I did

not know if I dreamed Ernest up in my mind and maybe he never existed in reality? I did not know who I was, where I was, and could not feel my feet on the ground. The only thing I knew in advance was the intensity of this “surreal” experience would not last forever. I held to the confidence that the most intense pain would lift in a month or so, and did not fight or fear it.

Focused attention and expectancy are hallmarks of hypnosis. But focusing one’s mind while grieving feels aberrant. One encounters a plurality of frames of consciousness in which to focus. Each has its own dimension of spacetime. As a result, focus is fractured. Grief brings one to their knees questioning the very foundations that once were solid.

Focusing on a single point, or idea, is a learned skill developed within hypnosis, along spiritual paths of meditation, and through mindful yoga. Yoga offers eight foundational developmental principles to encourage transcendence of union of one’s mind into a single focus to live a more satisfying, clear and peaceful life through considering how one can: (1) fit in society, (2) develop personal moral and ethical foundations, (3) take care of one’s body to sit comfortably, (4) breathe freely, and (5) turn inward to (6) focus on (7) a single point, and find (8) resolution, contentment and happiness (*yama niyama-āsana prāṇāyāma pratyāhāra dhāraṇā dhyāna samādhayo-’ṣṭāvaṅgāni*, Yoga Sutra 2:29). These guiding yoga mindfulness principles and practices for a satisfying life can operate within each ultradian cycle, underlying both need and comfort to find one’s true self to welcome continuing levels of inner focus and higher evolving consciousness.

### Multiple worlds

Ernest Rossi led a life of higher consciousness and died a conscious natural death. He had no illness. His body had simply run its course. While traveling in Japan in 1993 a Zen master gave him a fan with the numeral one, a character drawing of Confucius, and a common garden ant. Ernest resonated most with the garden ant as he knew how hard he worked daily throughout his lifetime to advance, learn, become aware, and teach others the complexity of the cosmos within one’s own psyche and beyond. He independently discovered self-hypnosis as a young boy by changing the color of his eyes. One day he asked, “Ma, what color are my eyes?” She replied, “Shit-brown.” Horrified, each day he repeated to himself, “Ernest has green eyes” after noticing tiny specks of green within his brown eyes. Much to his surprise, many years later, his first date said, “Oh Ernest, you have beautiful green eyes.” He could not wait to get home to look in the mirror to discover it was true! There was his life’s ant-ish diligence: discovering and exploring domains of change even into death.

Ernest believed in the power of dreams to guide him into inner hypnotic trances of spirituality (Rossi, 2000). Numinous dreams opened what he referred to as extraordinary “multiple worlds” in his final year. It was as if other worlds welcomed him by offering gifts to prepare and seed both of us to grieve the death of his body but not his spirit. Ernest often recorded his dreams, sharing them along with early morning thoughts each day. These quotes are excerpts from these last dreams.

14 Nov 2019

Through eternal singing I entered another multiple world where people lived forever. I decide to let ivy grow up the rock foundation of my home. We, or at least I, live in multiple worlds. Sweet singers → found new world through singing.

7-8 March 2020

*Walking fantastic in a multiple world dream journey into a wonderful garden of delight ... multiple worlds ... Huge Mount Everest.*

22 March 2020

*Lost in a dream garden.*

30 March 2020

*I was in a nightmare of terror to myself and others.*

1 August 2020

*I meet my guru. Will I follow him?*

Ernest's diligent living through multiple worlds and moving toward higher consciousness provided me with comfort in my grieving and modeled hope for moving through it with grace and dignity.

### **Make your heart free**

Complicated grieving involves prolonged and debilitating symptoms. This is perhaps informed by the reemergence or persistence of prior unresolved grief (Shear, 2015). Before Ernest died, I set a personal goal to experience simple grief, i.e., I only wanted to grieve him and not those who passed before. Panicked, three weeks prior to his actual death, I got serious about completing grief of treasured family members: grandparents, father, mother. It was a wrestling match of misery and tears until I realized that only my mother's death remained unresolved for me. I loved her unconditionally for the last 10 years of her life, as she did me. Prior to that, however, circumstances and choices she had made seemed hard for me to let go of as she had abandoned me in my teenage years after my father died – leaving me alone to chart my own life's course. In processing my unresolved grief for her, I came to terms with the understanding that *if you genuinely love someone then you love all of them, not just the parts you like*. In the end, I accepted that my mother became the lovely person she was because of her past experiences. She grew. She changed. This process involved four principal elements:

- Stay with the pain and confusion long enough for the transformation to occur.
- Gently welcome simplicity over complexity.
- Recognize that once you find true love, it will endure infinitely.
- Open to wholeness and healing. It is life-giving.

These realizations and resolutions completed all previous griefs. Focus shifted to Ernest's impending death with hopes for a conscious and peaceful one. As previously noted, these four principle elements came into play through processing grieving Ernest's passing.

## **Celebrate Ernest!**

I had no idea how I would live without Ernest or how I would react to his death. I responded with shock, surprise, and a sense of vertigo. My head continually reeled backwards as if it was being sucked into an unseen black hole behind me. I could not walk or stand safely. No coordination felt available to me. I sat securely in my “stressless” Ekornes chair gazing at the horizon line of my fireplace mantle which offered a steady focus. The vertigo sensations continued – caused not by my inner ear, but my inner mind. I realized that brain neurons were retracting from connections no longer necessary in my daily life, as the “mirror” of Ernest was gone. Nature is kind in the way it allows us to continually rewire to changing and evolving realities. But the cruelty of losing connection to the life I had known for 30 years felt unbearable. Time had no meaning. Space had no meaning. The spacetime continuum was both abstract and vivid. I floated. I wondered, “When would my feet touch the ground?”

I was not prepared for the intense physical pain of grief. Memories surfaced, seeming to arise at the rate of one per second, both day and night, for three months stimulating neurons to rewire and grow. None arrived in chronological order. It was as if memories were pulled out, considered, and refiled in the order I might need them in the future (Rossi, Erickson-Klein, & Rossi, 2008a). My mirror neurons searched for Ernest, but he was not there to reflect upon. Internal mind connections were broken. My conscious, unconscious, preconscious, and other quantum minds surrounding the neural networks of my body operated in their own space and time separate from each other. I was destabilized: mind, body, and soul. My inner observer watched with fascination, welcoming the novelty-numinosum-neurogenesis effect and anticipating the opportunity to create a new reality.

## **Sit and accept**

I simply stayed in the present moment as much as possible to see what would come next. Ernest’s transition was conscious, peaceful, and beautiful. In other words, he died the death we all hope for. He lived a spectacular life of wonder, discovery, and love. To sit and accept the abrupt absence of someone who lives this way is easier conceived than done. My body parts (head, heart, gut, genitals, and more) were not in agreement with each other. My mind could accept Ernest had died but questioned the truth that he would not come home. Peace and comfort were available for at least five minutes of every ultradian cycle. As Ernest would say, “Simply tune in with great sensitivity . . . to what happens next?” I followed this guideline to invite the reality of the present moment, no matter how painful, to successfully transcend grief into peace.

I needed quiet, private time. Waves of physical and emotional pain were followed by predictable waves of relief in an ultradian ~90-120-minute time frame of reference. Depths of despair rarely lasted more than 20 minutes, and certainly not more than 90 minutes before a blessed relief break. I lived alone. The sounds of silence were deafening. I heard echoes of Ernest’s heartbeat and labored breathing that were no longer there. My hypervigilant cats alerted me to every nuance of sound. Gone were the daily parades of sweet hospice workers defining normalcy. Where were the hospice musicians to play soothing music for me, the widow? The rising COVID-19 infections precluded any community grief traditions. I could not bear to tell others of Ernest’s death. I could barely take care of myself, so how could I comfort anyone else’s pain?

The process of grieving within my embodied mind progressed from concentrated neuronal network engrams in my body, from my head, to heart, gut, and then genitals. As I came to understand only cognitively that Ernest had died, in turn, the other systems that contribute to consciousness had to writhe in their own reorientation. So they did.

- (1) Mirror neurons intensely and painfully retracted before being rebuilt or redirected for one month in my brain. Rebuilding and rearranging neuronal networks takes time. This is a statement of fact, but the experience is subjective.
- (2) After one month, I felt a blissful inner peace that dwelled freely for five days. Then it seemed as if neural networks around my heart painfully reared up to vehemently disagree with my mind. My heart hurt physically with angina pain, palpitations, and irregular heartbeat rhythms. It was as if my heart tried to reach out for Ernest's body and would not accept that Ernest was not coming home. I then understood the Cartesian gap between mind and body in a true physical experience. The heart neural network had to create new communications with mind. Tenderly I held my heart in my mind's embrace, rocking gently, and encouraging its own independent conclusions of what was true. Fifteen excruciating days passed before agreement between heart and mind.
- (3) Inner peace again dwelled freely for two weeks before gut neural networks (enteric brain, primarily vagal, and home to ~200,000 genes), who initially would not take sides in the argument between heart and mind. My gut churned with nausea and pain vehemently disagreeing that Ernest would not come home. Tenderly I soothed my stomach through gentle touch and encouraged its own independent conclusions of what was true. After 10 nauseous "gut wrenching" days, harmony was reached between mind/heart/gut.
- (4) Next, inner peace prevailed for a month. I thought I was home free until genitals lit on fire with intense heat, physical pain, and longing. This is when I understood the need to reach beyond limited concepts of mind-body connections. Of course, it is logical that neural networks surround every organ to feed new information and experiences to integrate body with mind.

These four embodied neurosensory cascades took five months to complete. Each center seemingly disagreeing with the other until reaching full and independent acceptance. Severe migraine and tension headaches encouraged me to satisfy items on my "to do" list of correspondence, cooking, cleaning and self-care. I participated in daily physical exercise and good nutrition. I met with my Rolf practitioner every 10 days to two weeks to help my body through structural integration (Rolf, 1978/1990). This helped unknot from body tensions and not become stuck in any maladaptive posture resulting from the cascades of neuronal network restructuring and recalibration.

### **Be your pure self**

It took effort to disengage from the process of death and embrace the process of living. I was vulnerable and alone 24 hours a day. How could I snap out of it? The telephone and internet are pale cousins to in-person gatherings and touch. Some relationships needed reorganization. I bolted straight out of bed; startled, eyes wide open, heart pounding, gasping for air after my first dream.



An imposter priest attempted to rape me in an elevator while I was trying to get to Ernest and help him die. I had never had a rape dream before. I fought him off mightily telling him, "NO. YOU WILL NOT DO THIS TO ME." Although he was able to pin my arms down, I succeeded in disabling him with my legs, thereby freeing my arms and the clutch he had over my mouth. I screamed. He was a predator.

For me, the clear signal from this dream was to wake me up and identify who was a predator in my life. I also looked for other cautions: suckers and saviors. I found one predator, one sucker, and one savior. All three were eliminated from my circle. I no longer left my house if I felt vulnerable so as to not broadcast my pain and attract the unsavory. Many widows and widowers describe instances of people taking advantage of their pain and vulnerability.

My thoughts danced, questioning how to make sense of my new world? With time these thoughts transformed from past to present:

*"Ernest, come home!?"* Ernest is home now in my heart/mind.

*"I am never going to be the same, but I could be better."* I AM better and have much to offer.

*"I miss your touch."* Your touch is my touch.

*"I loved Ernest with all my heart."* I love Ernest more each day, as I always have.

*"Once I love, I will always love – past, present, and future in the current moment."*

Ernest and I frequently said, "Every day we are in kindergarten" as we looked forward to what we would learn next. We shared dreams and early morning thoughts as a daily heuristic to stimulate emerging consciousness. We knew the truth that we are a different person in the evening than in the morning, and different after a night's sleep due to constant growth and newly emerging awareness. In these ways, we mutually encouraged our unfolding and deepening consciousness and utilized, as Milton Erickson taught, our immediate environment to help grow increasingly deeper understandings.

Animals can be great teachers and comfort in grief, particularly when one lives alone. There is little if anything in the clinical hypnosis literature about the therapeutic benefits of our oldest mammalian symbiotic relationships (e.g., with cats, dogs, and horses). Katmandu and Inka-dinka-doo were our first brother and sister Ragdoll cats. As our pets will do, they taught me about love, loss, adaptation, and change. I had never seen an animal so grieved as "Dinks!" when her brother died. She wailed as her eyes glazed over. Her back sagged as her stomach reached the floor. I would gently hold her until her muscle tonus returned to normal. Then, slowly after three weeks she changed. She gradually took on the best qualities of her brother. She asked for what she needed when she needed it. She no longer took a "paws at a distance" approach. She absolutely loved being an "only" cat. In the months before she died, at age 18, she insisted on being held for a minimum of two continuous hours every evening – and would have preferred 24. Her purr was so sweet and long lasting. The evolution of my embodied minds' expressions of grief seemed much the same. I learned through Inka-dinka-doo that I would put the best parts of Ernest in me. I take comfort through purrs and eye-contact with our current cats, Katmandu Too and Ruby Rosebud Rossi. Daily, they harken new beginnings.

Ernest and I cultivated our shared understanding that happiness lives in the present moment, as does clarity. The past may have joys, regrets, and unsolved issues. The future may be full of hopes and fears. Coming to appreciate one's true and pure self is to realize, more often than not, that one does the best they can do at any given time. Upon thoughtful

reflection, one can assess areas to improve. It was now my turn to find happiness in the moment without Ernest's physical presence while keeping the best of him within me.

Recognizing when grief has lifted is a subjective art. Five months passed when I found most days were peaceful and happy. I had a non-defined "gut" sense that grief had lifted. I knew that future waves of sadness from time-to-time were inevitable. Intuition is hard to quantify. Emotionally, I was not yet ready to let go of the all-encompassing passion grief brings as it felt so vital. Would a calm and single-focused mind feel empty in contrast to the many quantum worlds of surging and emerging consciousnesses? Would I lose connection to Ernest? There was only one way to find out: accept the truth of the present moment. My mental orientation has changed toward Ernest becoming more vast and richer. He is no longer restricted to his beautiful body. More broadly, he is a part of my emerging and cohesive consciousness. As I take daily walks, I feel his presence and hear his loving encouraging words, as is his true nature. I am always happy thinking about Ernest and am no longer so sad for myself. I never experienced depression. Most days are occupied with creative original thoughts. Giving and receiving love with friends has increased, reflecting on all that Ernest and I created during our lifetime together. I am more grateful for him each day.

### **Implications for hypnosis**

Ernest Rossi was a trance master personally and professionally. He successfully guided his own death process to be conscious, harmonious, numinous and peaceful, as continues to be true for my personal grief recovery. He dedicated his life to find innovative ways to overcome suffering. With the eye of a pharmacologist from his early days, he progressively sought to uncover the smallest biological building blocks that underlie all of life processes. Together, with our colleagues, we founded a new field of PsychoSocial Genomics (Rossi, 2002, 2004; Rossi et al., 2008; Rossi & Rossi, 2008) to successfully test if we, as mental health specialists, can quantify change on a cellular level from a top-down conscious mind approach for healing. We imagined a better world whose quantum consciousnesses extended to the cosmos in decoding the Chalmers hard problem of consciousness (Chalmers, 1995; Rossi & Rossi, 2011). Ernest believed these investigations could help people to live fuller, happier, and more satisfying lives.

As a psychologist his journey began with dreams (Rossi, 2000) before meeting his most profound mentor and colleague, Milton Erickson. Working together they detailed innovative building blocks to expand therapeutic hypnosis from Erickson's many cases (Rossi et al., 2008-2014). In his last meeting in 1980, Ernest asked Erickson to help him "Open my mind to learning everything I need to know to become a good practitioner of therapeutic hypnosis." (Rossi, Erickson-Klein, & Rossi, 2008b, p. xi). Erickson and his personal physician/friend, Marion Moore, responded with twinkling eyes and offered dual hypnosis. They must have been exceptionally good that day as Ernest continued to foster an open mind. He knew this involved being curious while living in the present moment and welcoming the novelty-numinosum-neurogenesis effect to grow new neurons. He valued comfort, surprise, psychological shocks (Rossi, 1973), and the gift of "not knowing" as seeds for creating new consciousness. Success in hypnosis is defined as a coming together, a union and harmony with one's own mind, satisfied with a clear direction for the future. This coming together is exemplified by the tenets of yoga (union) philosophy for living a good life.

“What is your greatest contribution to hypnosis?” I asked Ernest in his final days. Without hesitation he replied, “the 20-minute break.” Fundamental elements of hypnotic principles involve integration of the 4-Stage Creative Cycle within trance states. Once familiar with these natural chronobiological rhythms, they can effectively be implemented to enhance therapeutic responses. The ~20-minute rest phase is when integration happens.

Ernest’s genius as a hypnotist was to understand the duality of problem-solving and its implications. He brilliantly facilitated this duality by suggesting, “While one part of you experiences the problem in one hand . . . could another part of you simply observe? . . . I wonder what you experience by way of contrast . . . could you experience the opposite of your problem in the other hand?” (Hill & Rossi, 2017; Rossi & Rossi, 1996/2021, in press). He came to understand this is an entry point for quantum consciousness where simultaneous internal minds begin the dialogue of discovery.

Through details of this subjective grief experience, and the healthy growth beyond, a pathway is forged upon which clinicians may better prepare clients for loss and facilitate grief. I successfully utilized these principles to build a new and satisfying life transcending grief into peace. Will I always miss Ernest and wish he were here? Clearly, the answer is yes. But what he gave us all in his lifetime are ways for building a better and satisfying future.

### **Milton Erickson’s grief case**

Creative hypnotherapeutic guidance for nourishing or steering an individual through the interval of grief is also expressed in this brief account of a case described by Milton H. Erickson in a teaching tale recorded by Jeffrey Zeig (1980). This description is one of the scarce occasions in which Erickson described working directly with a patient’s grief.

I said, “Now madam, you say that a pregnancy is more important to you than your life. The obstetrician advises against it. The orthopedic surgeon advises against it. Your psychiatrists have also. My advice is “Get pregnant as soon as you can. If your arthritis gets worse, you stay in bed and you can enjoy your pregnancy. Now when it comes time to deliver, you can have a caesarean section. There is no law against it. It’s the sensible thing to do.”

So, she promptly got pregnant, and her arthritis improved. She lost her depression. It was a very happy nine-month pregnancy. She delivered the baby without incident and she really enjoyed Cynthia, the name she gave the baby. Her husband was very happy.

Unfortunately, at the age of six months Cynthia died of crib death. After some months, her husband brought her in and said, “She is worse than ever.” I asked the woman about it she said “I just want to die. I’ve got no reason for living.” Very harshly and meticulously I said, “Woman, how can you be so stupid? For nine long months you had the happiest time of your life. You want to kill yourself and destroy those memories? That’s wrong. For six long delightful months you enjoyed Cynthia. Are you going to destroy those memories? I think it’s criminally wrong.

“So, your husband will take you home and get you a eucalyptus sapling. You tell him where to plant it. Eucalyptus trees grow very rapidly in Arizona. I want you to name that eucalyptus sapling, Cynthia. I want you to watch Cynthia grow. I want you to look forward to the day when you can sit in the shade of Cynthia.”

I went out a year later to see her. The sapling had grown very rapidly. (I had one at least 60 feet tall in my backyard, and it was only six years old.) She welcomed me. She was no longer confined to bed or a chair. She was walking around greatly improved in her arthritis. She had flower beds that occupied more space than this entire building does. She showed me all around her flower beds. She showed me all different kinds of flowers. She gave me an armful of sweet peas to bring home.

Patients often can't think for themselves. You can start them thinking in some good reality way. Every flower she grew reminded her of Cynthia, as did the eucalyptus tree that I named Cynthia. (Zeig, 1980, p. 285-289)

Erickson was often directive in hypnosis. He recognized this woman needed to be shocked out of her current state. He advised her to follow her deepest values as a guide for decisions. He helped her regain a sense of meaning, acceptance, and orientation to the present moment. He utilized time intervals calling attention to the passing of seasons. She did adapt over time with fond memories of her baby while transcending her grief into peace.

### **Be well. Be happy. Celebrate life**

Patients come to us for healing. Depth of understanding and appreciation for individual variability opens possibilities for a healthy transformation beyond painful circumstances. Whether grief and loss are anticipated or unexpected and tragic, suffering a sense of severe loss is a part of a healthy loving response. As health professionals we can use hypnotherapy to tap into each individual's ultradian cycles, and bring a sense of anticipation, hope and expectancy for release from the transient, though extant, turbulence and assure that the individual can move forward to find personal peace.

By way of summary, my personal journey of grieving can be interpreted as a set of attending postures for the therapist, based upon Rossi Principles, and a set of methods for the person who is grieving that align with the headings of this paper as listed in Figure 1. Rossi principles always follow nature. The stage is set for creative growth when therapist and client come with open minds that are responsive in the present moment. They can then welcome comfort, psychological shocks and surprises, and the gift of "not knowing" what comes next as seeds for new experiences and possibilities. Understanding how time heals through the 4-Stage Creative Cycle gives a boost of courage to directly address and overcome pain and

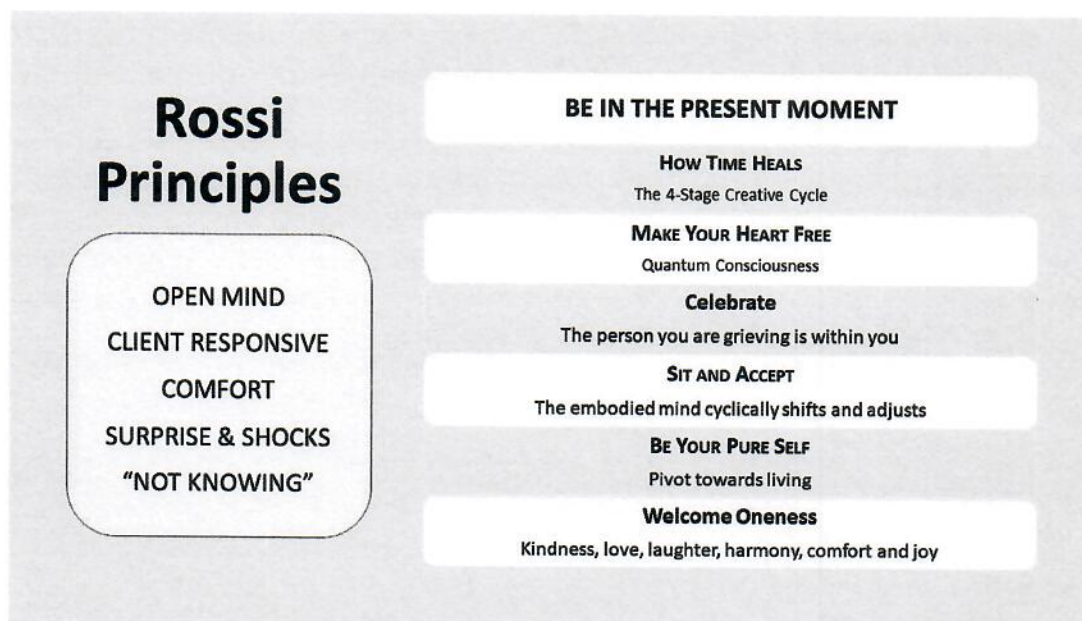



Figure 1. Rossi principles for transforming grief into peace.

confusion simply by understanding that nature has time limits on both joy and sadness. Constructs to “Make your Heart Free, Celebrate, Sit and Accept, Be Your Pure Self, and Come to Oneness” are individual and malleable. The principled postures of the therapist can be practiced as the person in care finds need of each of the methods. The methods are neither ordered “stages” as are Kübler-Ross’s (1969/2014) nor do they necessarily occur in the order I experienced them. But it can be beneficial for the therapist to offer them for consideration and recognition by the person in care as phenomena (e.g., disorienting vertigo, waves of intense emotion) are experienced. That authority can be comforting. If any of my experience can be generalized and formed into help for others, it is in the reassurance that these principles and practices will turn grief into peace and loss into living.

And so, I conclude transforming grief into peace: Be well. Be happy. Celebrate life.

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