



Am I  
supposed to  
feel like this?

*Understanding grief and  
the grieving process.*

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## Understanding Grief

Grief is an emotional response to a significant loss. It is the combination of sadness, strongly felt emotions, and confusion that comes after we have lost someone important to us. While grief is normal and natural, it is also one of the most neglected and misunderstood experiences that a person can go through. It is important to realize that everyone grieves, each in their own way. It is a natural response to a traumatic event, and it is nothing to be ashamed of. The aim of this booklet is to provide information about the grieving process so that people are not afraid of it and so that through grieving their wounds may be healed.

### What will grief make me feel like?

Grief is different for everyone, but there are certain common feelings that many people share. Grief can manifest itself in physical as well as emotional ways. Just after a death has occurred, it is common for people to feel numb, as if in shock. This is the body's natural response to dealing with intense pain. You may also experience the following symptoms:

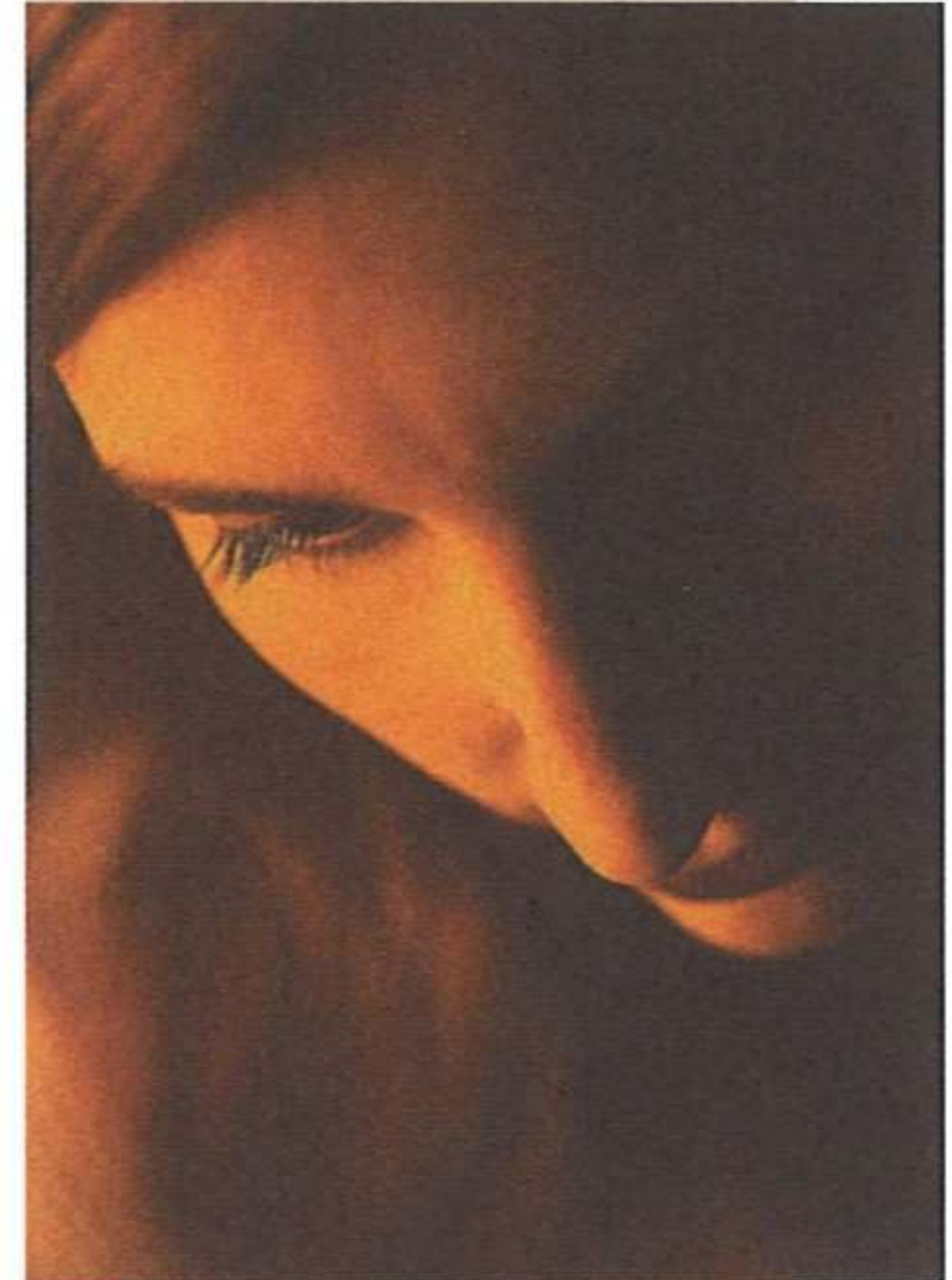
- Loss of appetite
- Trouble sleeping

- Tightness in the chest and throat
- Weakness/Lack of energy
- Difficulty breathing
- Crying

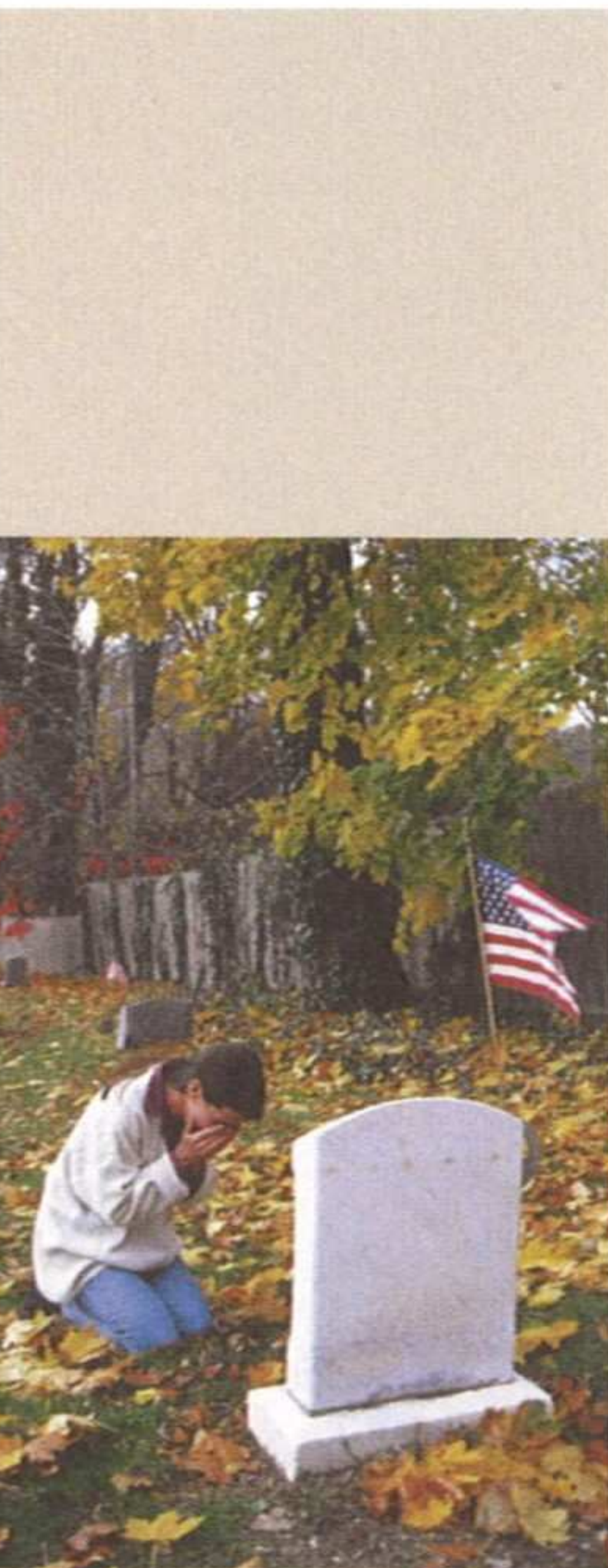
These are some natural ways that grief manifests itself physically. Crying is an especially useful outlet for the wide range of emotions that are brought to the surface during grief. It is nothing to be ashamed of and should be used as much as it is needed. If, however, any of these symptoms persist or seem utterly overwhelming, it is important that you see your physician. During this time it is important that you eat a balanced diet and get plenty of rest. Alcohol and other drugs should be avoided. These tend to work against the natural grieving process and people are especially susceptible to addictive behaviors after they have experienced the loss of a loved one.

### What is the grieving process?

Another term that you may encounter for the grieving process is bereavement. The grieving process is different for everyone, although there are certain stages that most people have in common. As with most things, the length of the grieving process varies greatly from person to person. For some people it may run its course in a few months, while in others it may take up to two years. Remember, grief is one of the most



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*It is important to realize that everyone grieves, each in their own way.*



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misunderstood aspects of life, and it lasts longer than most people realize. Be patient and let yourself experience the thoughts and feelings that come naturally. Given time your wounds will heal and you will be stronger because of your suffering.

Here are some of the stages of the grieving process you may experience.

### *Searching*

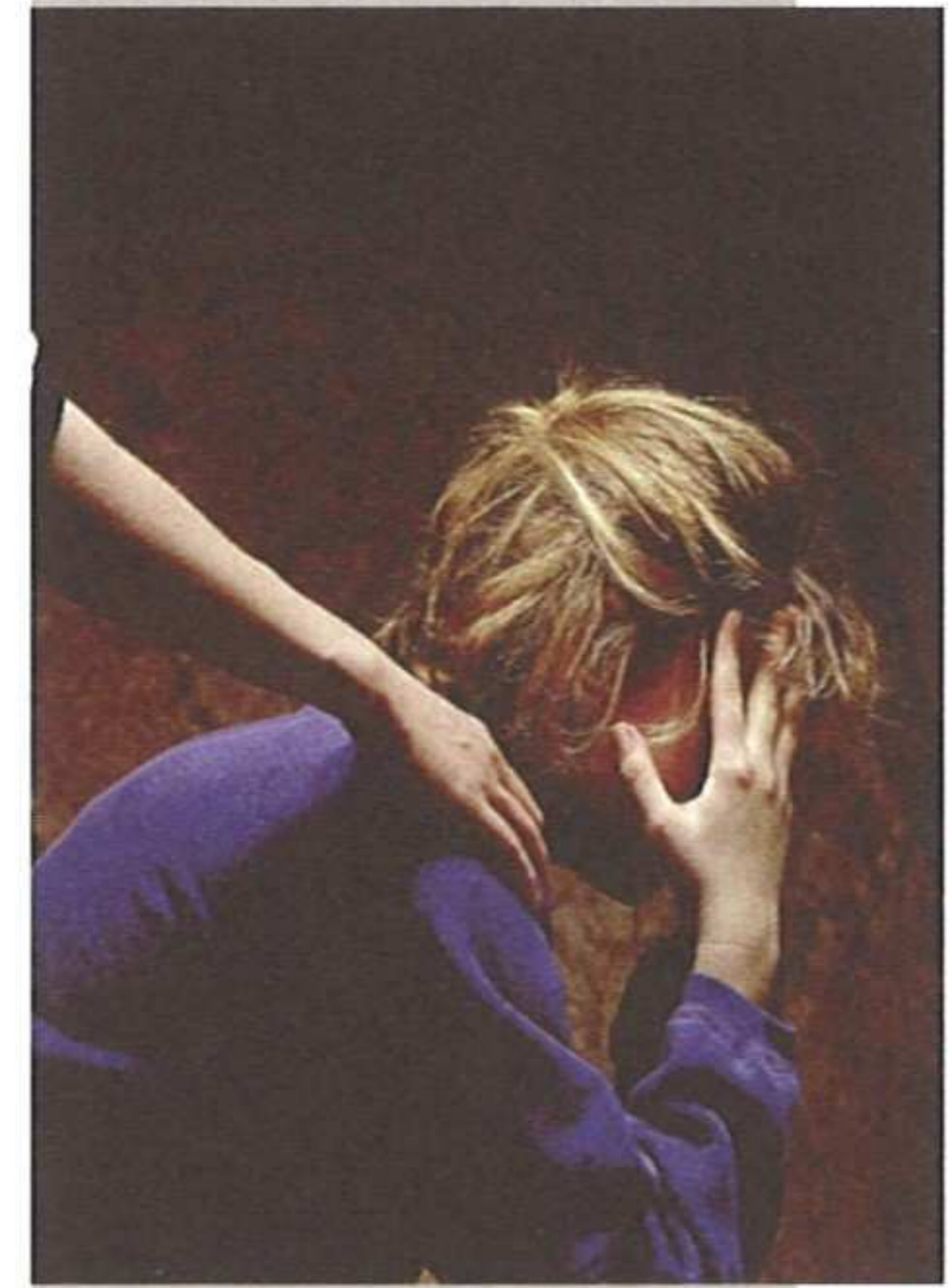
Soon after a death, many people feel a strong emotional need to search for their departed loved one. Very realistic dreams and even hallucinations about the deceased are natural aspects of this stage of bereavement. These hallucinations are often caused by familiar sensations that remind you of your loved one. It is important to realize that in times of great grief our bodies become super sensitive to outside stimuli. Dreams and hallucinations are the result of this sensitivity and should be interpreted as the body's instinctive response to a traumatic situation. In this stage it is important that you use your friends and family to talk about your feelings and in order to help you get through your process of mourning. We all need help in getting through our grief, and we should not be ashamed of asking for help if we need it.

### *Anger*

Anger is a very common reaction to the loss of a loved one. You may be angry with a particular person, a situation, or just angry at the world in general. For lack of a better target, this anger is often focused on the people that we love and are closest to. It is important that this anger is expressed in healthy ways. One of the best ways to diffuse this anger is through exercise and physical activity. Tend your garden or take a walk or play tennis. Try to use your anger as a motivation tool to get out and do something you enjoy. Don't sit at home and swallow your anger, but confront it and grow from the experience.

### *Guilt*

One of the most insidious aspects of the grief process is guilt. Whether it is rational or not, it is a very real feeling to the person experiencing it and should be treated as such. Guilt is most often experienced when you feel that you could have or should have done something differently. Try to acknowledge your guilt. It may help to write down your feelings and even to write an apology, even if no one sees it but you. The mistakes that you may have made in the past don't have to be made again if you allow yourself to learn from them. This is an important aspect of your renewal and will help you



*The mistakes that you may have made in the past don't have to be made again...*

come to terms with your underlying grief.

### *Depression*

It is possible that you will not be able to move beyond your initial feelings of lethargy and numbness. If these constant feelings of emptiness and hopelessness last longer than the first few weeks and you just can't seem to shake them, you may be suffering from a form of depression.

At this time it is very important that you have someone that you can talk to and share your feelings with. This may be a close friend, a clergy person, or another person you feel comfortable with. Since depression is caused by a physiological imbalance and is very treatable, you may want to speak with your physician to discuss your options. A professional counselor is also a good option if you feel you need further treatment. Thoughts of suicide should be treated very seriously, and it is very important that you seek immediate help if you experience these destructive thoughts.

### *Feeling Whole Again*

The final stage of the grieving process involves the reorganization of your life. During this time you should begin to feel a renewed sense of hope and optimism. Along with this comes a stabilization of sleeping and eating habits,

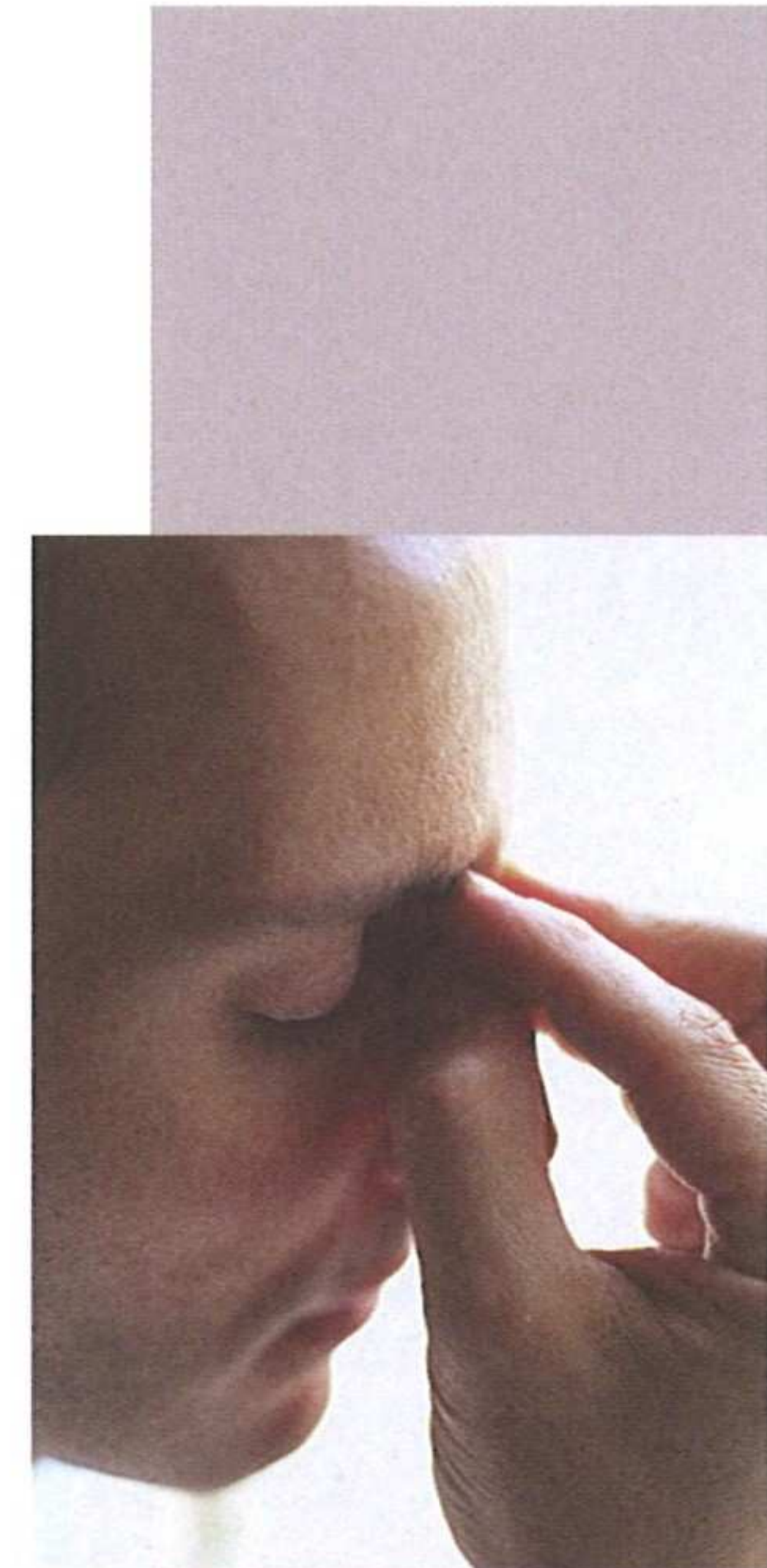
renewed energy, and relief from the physical symptoms of grief. You may feel that you have more control over your life, as your thoughts no longer revolve around your loss. It is important to remember that it will take time for you to reach this stage in the grieving process. You must fully experience all of the pain and strong emotions of grief in order to renew yourself as a person and to see your loss from a new perspective. You will only come to terms with your loss if you allow yourself to sufficiently grieve.

### *Putting Your Life Back Together*

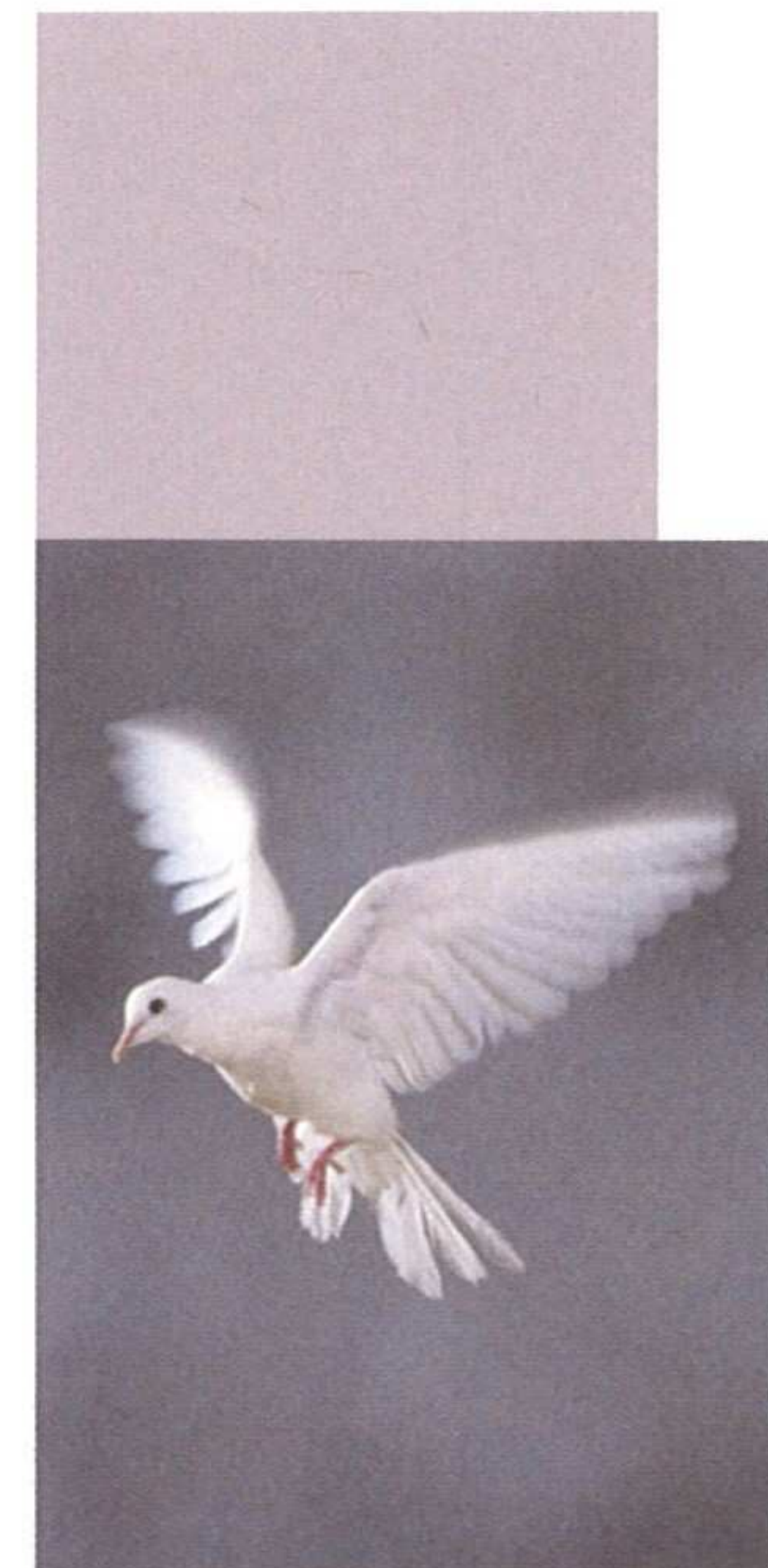
After you have sufficiently grieved, you will begin to reorganize your life and map out new goals and everyday patterns. Given time you will be able to recall fondly the memories of your departed loved one. If you are reading this shortly after your loss, you may not be able to see the light at the end of the tunnel. But be patient, and allow yourself to experience the wide range of feelings that are associated with grief. Grief is nature's way of emotionally separating us from our past so that we can move on to experience the future. It is only in this way that you can put your loss behind you, pick up the pieces, and move on.

#### *About the author:*

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