

Living in the Shadow of a Loved One

Sharon Brubaker & Erica Honore
Grief Specialists

Tony ([00:02](#)):

Erica and Sharon, are sisters who began a grief journey in 2006, when Erica's ten-year-old son, Austin drown together, they participated in a grief education program were so moved by this experience. They studied and became specialists so they could help the brokenhearted find recovery. In 2015 tragedy struck the family once again, when Erica's oldest son, Donovan was killed in a motorcycle accident, Erica and Sharon are committed to sharing their experiences of love, loss, and healing through this podcast. Now, your Grief specialists, Sharon and Erica,

Sharon ([00:41](#)):

What happens when you have someone in your family and they become, they have died and they become greater than anything else where we literally put them up on a pedestal and we absolutely refuse to allow them off of that pedestal. We make them so perfect. Their life was so perfect and my life was so perfect when they were here. And everyone was now continued to bow down to them as I do. And I'm, I'm exaggerating this, but we meet so many people that tend to enshrine their loved ones once they are gone and are forcing everyone in the family to do the same thing.

Erica ([01:31](#)):

Well, it's like they achieve sainthood. We, we, we made them the Saint. Like it would have been so easy for me to do that with Austin. He was 10 years old to make him this Saint, you know, because he was this child. He was, how much could he have done wrong? He was this little boy and I could have put him up on this pedestal. And we all would have Donovan would have had to, you know, live in this shadow of St. Austin. Cause he was so great. It's easy to do. It's easy to do.

Sharon ([02:10](#)):

It's very easy to do. But in total honesty, Erica, I feel like a part of us at the beginning, we did do that because we didn't know, we didn't know any better. So part of us, we did start to do that. Right? And, and it, it happens a little bit naturally. And I think it happens naturally with everyone. There's a part of this where the person in your family dies or the child dies. And then you start the Memorial of you do the celebration of life. But then you start gathering all their little things in one area that happens naturally, right? That's not what we're talking about. And it was very easy for us to do. I agree with you because he was only a 10 year old child. Right? And this thing happened to him. He drowned at on a trip that we were on. Right? So it all, it kind of happened naturally. That's not what I'm taught. We're talking about here. We're talking about when you go past the first year and you go past the second year and he becomes so holier than now and everyone lives in the shadow of that person.

Erica ([03:13](#)):

Right. Exactly. That's exactly what it is. It's living in the shadow. It's that the surviving children will never measure up how amazing everything negative in the relationship is forgotten. Yes. The only thing remembered are all the positives. Remember the way he used to smile in pictures and you're going through the pictures and you're just in those moments, there was nothing. There's nothing negative about them. There's not a hair out of place. There's nothing bad you could say. And you make him that, like I said, this Saint that no one else can measure up to.

Sharon ([03:54](#)):

I had a client recently and her husband died and she said her husband refused to have anyone speak at his funeral except for her. And the reason being is because he said, every time he went to a funeral, everyone was lying about the person. They would stand up there until all the great stories and they never told the truth. And so, because of that, he refused to allow anyone to speak at his funeral for fear that other people would say, Oh, well, he's just a lie. He couldn't have been that great. He wasn't this, he wasn't that. I, I think that it's okay for us to see the greatness in a person or the good stuff in the person, especially when they die. But we also have to tell the truth. Yeah. We have to tell the truth. And the truth was that sometimes us, it could be a little.

Erica ([04:43](#)):

Well, in that, that is, I think what helped the most about us not completely making him on the St level is because we all knew him. I spot with that sucker angle day, every day, even though was 10 years old, I felt like I was fighting with a grown adult. He would, he was so witty. He was so witty. There were times he would literally stump me and I didn't have a comeback or know what to say as a parent. And I would, I would just have to turn around and walk away because he would, he would stop me and I couldn't let him see that he got me. And that's the thing. I mean, I, I think, like you said, for a while, we kind of went on that track of Oh, St. Austin, but then reality. So I'm just in and we were like, he was a turd. Yeah. It was key would say some, you know, off the wall stuff. He definitely didn't have a filter. If you looked fat in something don't ask Austin, could, he would tell you the truth. Yeah. So, I mean, thank goodness we came to our senses, but you have to tell the truth because you can't, there's no way you can heal from a relationship that you had with someone. It was perfect.

Sharon ([06:04](#)):

Right. And I never met anyone that is perfect. I have never met anyone that is perfect. Even a 10 year old nephew named Austin was not perfect. And the reason I said, we did that a little bit, because I think I did it more. You had the daily encounters with him. It was so easy for me to go into, but he was only 10 and he was a child and he was this. And he was at recently a couple years ago we had a client that a past client that called us and she was doing a funeral for her cousin. And she said my cousin was homeless and she died as a drug addict. And she said, they asked me to speak at the funeral. And I, I don't know what to do. How do I get up there and say, she said she was one of my best friends and I loved her, but she had this problem and she struggled. And I said, that's what you say. We all knew that Mary lived a less than perfect life. That's it that's sums up the truth of what Mary's life was. You don't have to go down that rabbit hole. Then you say that, that lets everyone know, we know this. This is so Mary was then you'd share your parts that were great. And where she was your best friend. We know we have to tell the truth about everyone. We have to say that Austin was a little terror. Sometimes I have a picture of him and I'm kissing him and he has his fist balled up. Like he's gonna punch me in the face. We know that he was a little terror at times, but that doesn't negate the fact that we loved him. Right, right. You had a picture and I share this quite often when we're teaching, we had a picture of Austin from, I don't know, what is he? Eight months where they had an angel picture taken of him.

Erica ([07:54](#)):

I think he was about six months. Yeah. He was about

Sharon ([07:56](#)):

He was six months. He was huge. I think so. Well, and so back then they had, they had at the mall, they had these these Photoshops where you could go in and they would make your little baby into an angel. So he had these like angel wings on and he was sitting on top of a column.

Erica ([08:13](#)):

Yeah. Been in six months. Cause he was walking. That's why his face is scraped up. Cause he had fallen off.

Sharon ([08:19](#)):

So here we had this picture. Not only are we in shining him, we have this picture of him to enshrine him with. And we actually put that on the pamphlet. It was on the back of the pamphlet. Yeah. It's a picture of him dress like an angel. Right. So I feel like that even though I love that picture, it kind of helped us to go to that place at times. Right. So literally we did in shrine and we enshrined them in our minds. We can him in our heart and we just are so blessed that we didn't stay there and that you didn't make the rest of your children bow down to St. Austin.

Erica ([08:52](#)):

Right. Yeah. Cause what I was thinking, I think when I saw this topic, that's what resonated with me is what if I had done that and then created this image that Donovan and Jordan would never have been able to live up to have this perfect St. Austin. And, and there are people who do that. And so then the children feel this, this sense of inadequacy that they'll never measure up to this perfect human that that was once here and is gone.

Sharon ([09:24](#)):

So, and, and we're you and I have just been talking about when you do it to your children, what happens when one spouse does it to the other? Yeah. That can happen. It happens all the time. One spouse puts the child in shrines, the child or the mother or their ex-husband or their their, their first marriage that their wife died. Right. They in trine, her or him and they bring that into the marriage and the other spouse can never live up to that.

Erica ([09:55](#)):

Right. It looks like you're you're the ghost is part of the marriage. You know, it's like now a, a threat because now you have this other person who's in the marriage and no matter what you do, you're never going to do it as good as she did it or as good as you're not going to say you know, the things as, as well as he did. So yeah. It's like you have this ghost that that's there. That's holding you back from achieving a level that you've, you're looking for in your relationship.

Sharon ([10:26](#)):

The other thing is enshrining keeps us from healing. When we enshrine someone, it keeps us from healing because they become so perfect in our eyes because, and you, and I say this a hundred times a day, we have to tell the truth about everyone. We have to tell the truth first about ourselves. I thought that he was perfect. We have to tell the truth about what's in our heart. And we have to tell the truth about the other person and telling the truth about the other person says that one time I went to the bank in Austin, wouldn't get out of the car. And so I ended up leaving him in there and it became this big thing outside of the bank that I left a child in the car and I called you. And I was like, your kid almost got me arrested because that was the truth. He was so stubborn at times, there was no getting around that,

but I completely forgot that story. I went into how perfect he was and he was my little angel and he was this. And he was that when actuality, when you break it all down and you're willing to tell both sides of the story, sometimes there's ugly in that story.

Erica ([11:32](#)):

Yeah. It's not, you know, it's not that you love them any less because there's ugly. You still love them. The same. Your grief is still heavy. And it's a lot because grief is the price we pay for love. Right? So your grief is, is the equivalent of your love, does it mean that you're going to grieve for them any less because you admit that they had fault. Awesome. Was stubborn. Donovan was selfish Donovan as much as I love that boy, he was selfish. And I have to tell the truth about that. I have to acknowledge that I'm not Mother Teresa and I didn't raise these two perfect beings. It's not possible.

Sharon ([12:16](#)):

I'm so glad you finally said that. I'm just kidding. I don't think that Donovan was selfish. I think you're wrong. He was pretty boy. Well, he was, he knew it. Oh my God.

Erica ([12:27](#)):

Yeah. Selfish and conceited completely. No one love Donovan more than Donovan.

Sharon ([12:38](#)):

Oh my gosh. That's too funny. Okay. And I'm only going to touch on this cause I don't want to go into it, but the opposite of enshrining, someone is also be deviling in them and making them out to be the worst person. And I, I think they're equally as hard to to deal with and they need to be brought out and told and be definitely in is when that person becomes the worst person ever. And we see this a lot, a lot, a lot, a lot in divorce. The marriage ends and all of a sudden he was the worst person ever, or she was the worst person. So it's the opposite. The reason I don't want to touch on it is, cause I know we're going to do our own show on it, but coming up soon, but that is definitely the opposite of enshrining someone.

Erica ([13:28](#)):

Yeah. And that all that is also easy to do when you, especially when you have a parent that had like a, an addiction or anyone, anyone in your life, a sibling, a spouse, anyone who had an addiction, it's very easy to bedevil them and make them like, they were the worst thing, but they weren't always that way. There were good parts to them as well. And when they're, they're sober, they're different. So we definitely going to do another show on that. But definitely good to be aware of that. You can do that without knowing it just like you can enshrine.

Sharon ([14:01](#)):

Exactly. Now we don't always enshrine and make everyone in the room and shine. Sometimes we try it on our own and we enshrine them in our heart. Right. And when we enshrine them in our heart and we don't say the words out loud, it keeps us stuck exactly where we are and we don't move towards healing. And we just stay in that spot of grief and misery. Right.

Erica ([14:35](#)):

I think I did that with our dad. We're all daddy's girls, me being the youngest. I was, it was easy for me to do that automatically because he just was always such a big presence in my life, you know? Cause I didn't have to share him with anyone by the time I was coming up. You guys were all gone living your adult lives. I was the only one at home. So I had pretty much my whole childhood just with our parents. So I got all the, his attention, all of the conversation. So that was easy for me to do with him when he first died. I didn't want to move through the process because he was, he, I just made him my world in my heart. I don't even think we ever talked about it, but that's what I did. It was like, I can't do this grief because this is my dad. He's my hero. He's my hero. And I did that for a little while until I was like, okay, snap, snap, back to reality, sister, Get yourself in gear also because I had to leave, you know, after the funeral was done, we already lived in Texas. So I had to say goodbye, Louis and I got in the truck and we drove back here to Texas. So I kind of went through this whole thing, you know, by myself. I didn't have all you guys to just tell the stories like we did after Austin. We told all the stories, remember when he wouldn't get out of the car, remember when he did that. And so we kind of kept him a little bit more human. I just enshrined dad when I got home.

Sharon ([16:15](#)):

I think there's healthy and Tremont, Erica. I think there's a healthy amount of enshrining that should take place. And it does often, most often take place in enshrining and be deviling I think there's a healthy part of it that takes place right immediately after, because that's what helps get us catapult us to the next level. I think also when we, while we are enshrining we're also in our zombie state. So our brain and our heart are not thinking correctly. We're completely walking around like a zombie. And we are thinking of all of the happy moments and all of the perfect time and everything. That was great. But then what starts to seep in is some of the truth that, you know daddy was a big yeller screamer and he did cuss a lot and he did drink at times and he did do all of these things, you know? So those stories start to seep in, but what happens when we absolutely go through our grief work and we absolutely work on our broken heart, we complete all those aspects to the relationship that are left unsaid, undone, all the regret, all the pain, all the things that we want to complete. And we're left with those great stories. We're left with those great stories in our heart. And we can literally look at the, the ugly times and we can be okay with them. We know that they happen, but we unplugged that energy.

Erica ([17:48](#)):

Absolutely. And that's the greatest thing about this process. That's one of the biggest things that we want to convey to people why it's so important to find something like this, because what we do is we take the, we, we acknowledge the ugly. We see the ugly for what it is. We call it, we speak the truth about the ugly, but we unplug the pain that's caused by the ugly. And we leave them with the, the shrine heart, the good, the smile, the joy, because that's, that's really how you do want to remember your loved one. We're not denying that there's, there's ugly stuff. We're just, we're dealing with it. We're letting it go. And we're leaving all the good.

Sharon ([18:29](#)):

Let's discuss a couple of things of the problems that in training can absolutely. Cause so number one, it stops you from moving on and move in, moving forward and getting healed, right?

Erica ([18:42](#)):

Yeah. Also, Oh, I was going to say,

Sharon ([18:46](#)):

go ahead, go ahead.

Erica ([18:48](#)):

I have a feeling our number two is the same. Go ahead, go ahead. It creates this unrealistic expectation for the survivors to live up to. They can't, they'll never obtain superhuman status. Like the person who's died.

Sharon ([19:03](#)):

It gets you living in an alternative reality. It gets you living in an alternative reality. And because of that alternative reality, you can lose family and friends behind it. You refuse to even be around them. Right.

Erica ([19:21](#)):

I'm not going to go around Sharon. She talks bad about my dad.

Speaker 2 ([19:31](#)):

It also can cause you to do a physical and Memorial that stays up forever. it causes you sometimes to become a, what we call a grief queen. You're in your perpetual grief state, you get stuck in your grief state, five, 10 years later. You're still making posts about them as if they were sitting next to you. Yeah. Yeah. And basically I think the biggest thing is it just keeps you from moving on.

Erica ([20:06](#)):

Yeah. You definitely get stuck. It's so easy to get stuck there because you, you feel all, it's almost like the, you, what we want for you is to feel all the positives and to love them with all of your heart. But you have to go through the process and feel the ugly, speak the truth, and then circle back to the good. So it's like our program takes you through everything and ends you with an instructor and heart, but we've walked through all the ugly when you just stay there without admitting all the ugly. Yes. It's impossible to move on from there. And then, like you said, you start avoiding people who wants to talk about, remember that time. Yeah. When Austin did this and, and you just, it, that will enrage you if that's happening. You you're in a problem.

Sharon ([21:02](#)):

Yeah. Yeah. The number one thing I think I want to leave you with is even just in your own prayer yourself, it's not something you have to share with anybody, but write a list of all of the good and write a list of some of your memories of the things that weren't so perfect that were less than perfect. So that, you know, you're in that state. That doesn't mean if I have a two-year-old child that drowns, right. They're saying I have to find bad things about them. That's not what we're saying. We're saying, tell the truth, tell the truth about how you feel, tell the truth about whether you're enshrining that child or not tell the truth about whether you're having the family members, because it's not about looking at just the person it's also about looking at yourself where your own hardest.

Erica ([21:51](#)):

Right. Right. And in like, if Austin would have died at two, at two, he had some, you know, little stinky traits, you know what too? Yeah. Yeah. It's acknowledging that even two year olds can have, you know,

the terrible twos. They don't call it that because it's Nick. Yeah. Yeah. It's just about, it's about speaking the truth and being honest, that's, that's the most important thing.

Sharon ([22:20](#)):

I think that is. That's the best advice we can lift, right. That we can give speaking honest, always about ourselves and about them. Thank you ladies.

Erica ([22:31](#)):

Bye friends.

Erica ([22:34](#)):

Hi friends, Eric Honore here with Healing Starts with the Heart. Sharon and I are so glad you joined us for another great episode of our podcasts. We hope you enjoyed this episode. We want to let you know for more information you can go to our website@healingstartswiththeheart.com. There you will find not only today's podcasts, but all of our podcasts, along with our blogs, the information on the programs that we offer and the griever's guide, which is something Sharon and I put together to document how we came to be your grief specialists. We also have a quiz to take, to identify if you are truly grieving. And if you want to talk specifically with either Sharon or myself, you can schedule an appointment there. You will also find a place to join our private face book group at hope, heal and recover. Thank you so much for being with us. Have a great day friends.