

Losing a Loved One to Alzheimer

Sharon Brubaker and Erica Honore

Grief Specialists

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

Erica and Sharon, are sisters who began a grief journey in 2006, when Erica 10 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 broken hearted find recovery in 2015 tragedy struck the family. Once again, when Erica's oldest son Donovan was killed in a motorcycle accident, Eric 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](#)):

Hey, welcome back. I'm so excited to bring back part two of grieving through Alzheimer's with my special guests Gigi. And we're talking about Sharon, her relationship with her dad and what it was like to just be there for someone as they go through the process of Alzheimer's and the dropping to the new normal. So when they have those certain drops, but right now, Giana, we're going to talk about what it was like to actually deal with the grief. So introduce yourself to our friends and just remind them of who you are.

Gigi ([01:15](#)):

I do do nice to meet you all. Well, yeah, anyways I worked with Sharon through my grief recovery process when I lost my dad to Alzheimer's last year. And I'm lucky enough to be on this show to kind of share my experience with you all and you know, give a little insight into my journey and how the, as Sharon would say, the knife has been taken out of my house.

Sharon ([01:40](#)):

Yeah. Oh, awesome. Thank you so much. So there we, we, if you guys haven't caught part one, you've got to go here and it's an amazing story about Alzheimer's and a young girl having to go through all of that. Right? So at some point you start to near the end and you know, that dad is going to pass away and he's going to leave you. And that actually happens. And then you go through, we talk a lot about being strong. So you go through like doing that final process, right? Yes. Yes. So preparing the funeral, preparing all the stuff, give us a little insight, what that was like for you.

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

Yeah. so the, you know, I'd have to say that November of 2019 to February of 2020 was very a chaotic time. My dad was in the psychiatric hospital in November, in December. He was in this like sleep like state wouldn't eat when drink January. He was put on hospice, February, he passed. So it was very rapid. Right. And so on top of the new normals of, of Alzheimer's that you go through and the grieving that you go through of these new normals, that period of time specifically was there was no time to grieve. And to your point where you have to be strong, that's all I thought, you know, I sure I cried. I mean, there that's human that's natural. I had to, there was no way to see your dad in that state to not cry. Maybe I'm just an emotional person, but but there was no room to grieve. I had to, you know, just kind of look at it in a mental, like, factual way, right? Like logic versus emotion and like, what do I need to get done? What, what things do I have to prepare for? And the Volvo blah, you know? And even after my dad passing I spent the month between his passing and his funeral planning his funeral. My stepmom didn't believe in funerals. And so she said, if I wanted to do something for him, that I would have to plan it. So I did obviously. And so even then, you know, so November to March, it was like no time degree. And you know, I, I really have to say that I didn't get a chance to really grieve because of pandemic and things,

you know, just things were happening. It was such a crazy year. It wasn't until I came to you that I was really able to grieve. And that was, you know, eight months after my dad passed. And that's when I finally was able to take a look at it and be like, Holy crap. There's, there's things to unpack here.

Sharon ([04:26](#)):

There's a lot of stuff in there. So I'm going to take you back a little bit cause you, you hit on it already, but do you ever remember? Cause I remember this and I just want to talk about this from November to February, did you ever try to imagine, imagine, okay, this is what it's going to feel like when he's gone. Like, I remember trying to get there with my dad and it would just be nothing and it definitely was not like what it actually felt like we try to put ourself in that spot, but you can't, your heart literally protects you, right?

Gigi ([04:59](#)):

Yeah. And probably maybe a little bit of your mind too, because it's like, well, how can I put myself here when this is a situation that I'm dealing with? You know, I've got to say one of the best advice that I was given during that time, especially the last week of my dad's life was from my boss, believe it or not. And he gifted me a a notebook. And he said to write down all of your experiences, your smells, your tastes, your thoughts, just write it down. Have you allow yourself to be there in that moment? You can never look at it again. But for me I've enjoyed not enjoy. That's a bad word to use, but I've, I've been honored to have that. So I can go back to it and know that that actually happened. And I'm okay to feel the way that I'm feeling today.

Sharon ([05:51](#)):

You know, I can relate to that in one way. Not, not to compare our stories, both in Austin died going that experience. But the second time when we had the loss, when Donovan died, I specifically remember trying to be like an out-of-body experience. I wanted to step out and look at it. And I actually remember taking some pictures of Erica, which I still have and other things that I was doing because I wanted to experience it from the outside, looking in, you have to stay there very long. It kinda, it kinda drags you back in at one point, the feeling of loss and grief became overwhelming. What, what point do you think that, that like just hit you and you're like, I don't know if I can do that.

Gigi ([06:38](#)):

Cool. I think that there were two moments to be honest. The first was the first time I saw my dad in the psychiatric hospital. I mean, that was pretty traumatic. And then the second time was I would say the day before he died and it was interesting because, so I was told and by the hospice nurse that sometimes loved ones will wait until certain family members leave before they pass. Cause they don't want that person to be there, whatever. So I, you know, out of the six days that he was clinging to life, I left two nights and the first night I was like preparing myself. I'm like, okay, like, I'm going to wake up tomorrow with the texts, a call, like it's, it's going to happen. You know, it didn't happen. And then the night that I did leave, the second time I had this weird feeling and I was like, you know, and I was so heavy. I was like, I don't want to go, should I stay? Should I go? Should I say? And finally, you know, it was, again, my boss who was, who told me, you have to give yourself the permission to go home, take a shower, sleep in your bed. You know, you're not like I want to go home and party. No. and so it was that I would say those two moments the night before he passed and the night that I saw him for the first time in a psychiatric hospital where I was like, I don't know if I can do this. What is going to be the future?

Sharon ([08:18](#)):

Like exit stage left.

Gigi ([08:22](#)):

Oh my God, can I just hide under a rock and pretend like this isn't happening?

Sharon ([08:26](#)):

Yeah. I, I distinctly remember at Donovan's funeral, everything was set up, it was getting ready to start and I was contemplating leaving. Yeah. I was contemplating leaving. I'm like, I've done what I needed to do. I'm like, I can't do this. I want it to run. I literally just want it to run and almost feel like if I could run from it, then it wouldn't affect me. Right, right. Right. Were you crying at, at the beginning stages or did you think the crying picked up? Cause a lot of people associate their grief with crying. Did you find that you were letting it in and letting it happen?

Gigi ([09:01](#)):

So I think that I would, during the time, like the five years of my dad you know, decline, I would cry every once in awhile. It wasn't huge for me because again, the be strong idea. I would, I think I isolated myself more than I cried. I think it might come out in different ways that I didn't know was grief in the lead, distracted myself from the grief. And then, you know, in that time period of November to February, especially, you know, February to now I've cried a crap ton. I didn't know that I can produce so many tears. There's some points where I'm so tired of crying, but I can't stop crying. And maybe that was because I didn't allow myself to cry for so long that it's, it's just this abundance of emotion, but it feels good at the same time.

Sharon ([10:04](#)):

It feel does good. It's like the release that, that really happens to me. And I know you guys have all seen the mean, but it says the tears are the outward sign of our inward love for them or inward emotions. Right. Right. But I have so many grieverers that come to me and they're like, but I grieved, I cried. And they associate crying with grieving. And I think in some naive ways I did too in the beginning Gigi, let me ask you a question prior to finding me, what was your plan for how you were going to handle this and what did you think would, what did you think in your mind was going to happen? Like eventually? Cause you know, we talk a lot about the myths of just give it time or keep busy. Did you think any of those things were helping you? Oh yeah.

Gigi ([10:57](#)):

Although yeah. Yeah. All of them, I mean the it'll get better with time, you know, he's in a better place, distract yourself, you know, it's, it's okay to be not okay, but like don't let other people know that you're not okay. You know? I didn't have a plan and again, I didn't even know that grief counseling was a thing. Right. And you know, I just find it to be such a, it's such a necessity when you're going, especially when it's your first big death, you know, because, and not, that's not to say that if you've had, you know, several major deaths that you aren't going to have the same results, but I think that when you're facing your first one, it's most important to find this grief counseling grief recovery program.

Sharon ([11:49](#)):

Because now I feel like I'm better equipped to handle grief the future. And I'm able to identify grief happens. But as far as the plan before this, I hadn't done try it out. I don't know, cry it out. Just keep my goal. Yeah, it did. Okay. And this is the other thing that I hear a lot. And so I'm going to show you that this I'm never going to feel better. I'll never get over this. Yeah. And I agree that trajectory of your life has changed forever and you won't have dad and there'll be moments that are still emotional, but we don't get over it. We go through it. Would you say, I'm going to question you, have you gone through the grief? Do you think, could you honestly say you've gone through.

Gigi ([12:32](#)):

I'll give you this story to answer your question. So my dad's a twin and his name is Tom. And so I hadn't seen my uncle Tom for quite some time. Until my dad's funeral. When I first saw Tom, I was so shocked because it's, he's a spitting image of my father. I mean, there's some differences of course, but I, I, it was at the funeral of my dad looking at a guy that looks like my dad. It was the trippiest experience. I could barely really look at him. So that was February of last year. January, this past January, one of my cousins, his daughters is having a bridal shower. So we have a very small gathering. We go up to Norco and I'm staying for the weekend at his place. And you know, in my head and like, Oh, you know, last time it was kind of weird, you know, how I was going for my cousin. Cause I love her I wanted to celebrate her in the back of my mind. I was really worried about how I would react to this. I know that I have gone through grief. I'm not over it, but I've gone through it. And that this program has worked for me because I was able to enjoy my uncle for who he is and still be able to talk about my dad and laugh about him and share memories. And I even brought up, you know, some of the binders that my dad put together for my uncle to go through. And I even, and I told my family too, I was like, I could not have been here without going through this program. Wow. And it's so true because I mean, I was a mess at the funeral, obviously for many reasons. But for that specific particular reason of seeing my dad through him, that I'm now able almost a year later to spend a weekend with my uncle.

Sharon ([14:25](#)):

That, and that is so trippy. I think the average person doesn't have that, but I like to share with you, like I remember I loved that your stories cause they bring back all these great memories for me looking at my uncles who are not twins, but just the way they say things or the way they hold their mouth, it would be like my dad. And I remember seeing my first uncle and having that, that same, it was heavy. It was very weird. Yeah. It's so, but you had a twin like that. So, so I often say that once we experienced our loss, we become a member of a club that we didn't want to get into. We didn't fill out the application for this club. We didn't want to get there, but Gigi correct me if I'm wrong. It's like everyone that has experienced a loss, especially at this deep level, when they see the other griever, we know them. Now we know them and we know their heart.

Gigi ([15:17](#)):

Right. Absolutely. And you know, if there, if there's any and I hate to use this word, right. Because I had to say, if there's any blessing in my dad's passing, cause it's never going to be a blessing. If you have a choice, right. You can either look at the negatives all your life or you can try to find some positives from it. And some of the positives that I've learned is that I'm now more compassionate towards other people, more sympathetic or empathetic if I've experienced similar circumstances or I haven't, but it's, I know hearing from their stories, it's grief. I can relate on that level. I feel like I have this new desire to like want to share what I know with other people, whether or not they really want to hear it.

Sharon ([16:09](#)):

But then I also, I don't know if you, this is you, but for me after I did the program with Austin, I walked out and for the rest of my life, I feel like, Oh my gosh, she's grieving. He's like, I feel like all of a sudden, all I saw were grievers.

Gigi ([16:23](#)):

Yes. Yes. And it's so funny. So I was even, I was speaking to a couple people that I work with. They're fairly, they're older than I am like a couple of decades. And this one lady was saying because I was talking to her about this program and I mean, it's so much a part of my life now it's ridiculous. I can't not talk about it. I'm so annoying. But she was talking, he was like, how could you gone through this? Especially your age. I can't believe it. Like, can you teach me? And she was almost comparing our grief. And that was one thing that are not one, many of, one of many things that you don't compare grief. Right? I mean, everyone experiences grief in their own right. For their own reasons. And that's what I told her. And I was like, look, there's probably things that you've gone through that I couldn't even imagine. You know, it's not a matter of comparing. It's a matter of understanding. And she's like, Oh my God, mind blown.

Sharon ([17:25](#)):

So one of the things I think we used to do B prior to having this experience right. And then healing our hearts is that we would share about a lot. I don't know about you, but this is me. I would hear about a loss. And I'm like, Oh, I'm so sorry for your loss. Now it's like, almost like, and I can't feel your feelings, but my own experience, I can feel my own experience. And I'm like, I can't imagine what this is like for you. I have not.

Gigi ([17:51](#)):

If you approach them so differently, I feel, you know, you person with more gentleness and more love. Because even, even if it's an, I don't know, an uncle compared to a mom, a grandfather compared to a great-grand, I don't know when you hear someone losing a person that they're close with, like to your point, it goes back to your experience and you kind of re-experience those feelings, not to the same degree, of course, but you know what that person is going through and understand it to a degree. And you know, I, there's been a few people that I know that I haven't really talked to in a long time that have experienced recent passings and their family. And I'm just like, what can I do to help you? And what's funny is that when I went through my dad's passing, I had people who I didn't know, reach out to me and say, what can I do to help you? And now I understand why it's full circle. Oh my God. Like this moment full circle.

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

It happens when we say things out loud. It's so magical. I love that. You just had that alignment, but that's who we are now. That's us being in the club and those are other club members. It's not the person, that's it? Oh, your dad died. Yeah. I know exactly what you're going through. My cat just died. It's not comparing that. It's like, they, they literally know what you're going through from their own experience. And it will be, it forever changes you. Right. If forever changes you Gigi. Thank you so much, Gianna. Okay. You guys, here's the joke. I've been calling her Jianna for a year. She just corrected me. So I got to work on that. Anyway. I love that you shared your dad with us and I'm so excited that you have agreed to come back for father's day and we're going to do it really, really honor him and celebrate him for father's day. And you're going to be our guests for father's day. Okay. Friends, thank you so much for listening and I hope and pray that this podcast gave you guys some alignment of what it's like to be the

fresh new griever. Thank you so much for allowing us in for this moment. We'll see you on the next show.

Gigi ([20:21](#)):

Bye.

Erica ([20:24](#)):

Hi friends, Erica 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 podcast, but all of our podcasts, along with our blogs, the, 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.