

# BY YOUR SIDE

SUPPORT IN BEREAVEMENT

## SUMMARY

**Jean Monbourquette**

The stages of healing

**Bereavements that become complicated**

**Suggested books and Web sites**



## TOWARD HEALING AND TRANSFORMATION

Over a year has passed since Simon died. While her husband's death has shaken her terribly, Laurence's life is becoming more tranquil.

Day by day, she has had to accept a lot of things to reach this point. First, Simon's sudden departure, in a horrible car accident. Next, she has had to forgive him for not always being there for her, and for having "abandoned" her so soon. Finally, she has forgiven herself for her lack of understanding toward him when their relationship became stormy. In this way she has made peace with her past,

knowing that Simon's love would remain in her heart forever.

Now she feels more tolerant and patient toward others and toward life in general. All the suffering she has experienced has led her to appreciate the simplicity of the little pleasures of life. Now she takes advantage of every moment, knowing that nothing lasts forever.

What is more, she has a lot of plans on the bubble. She might like to launch a second career, for she has been dreaming about laying out textbooks and teacher's

chalk! Also she sometimes thinks about sharing her life again with someone.

With hindsight, she realizes that this experience has taught her a lot about herself, but also about the meaning of life and the many losses it sets in our path.

This final instalment in a series of four is intended to help persons in mourning better understand the stages of the grieving process that lead to healing.

Produced by the funeral cooperatives movement, this publication is designed to offer support to persons in mourning. The participating funeral cooperatives provide this publication free of charge to persons in mourning who have ordered funeral services from them for a family member.

Presented in four instalments, the By Your Side series gives you a better understanding of the emotions associated with bereavement. Offering clear, accessible information, the instalments present some thoughts, personal accounts, concrete methods and resources that can help people through their mourning process.

Part 1: Shock, denial and disorganization

Part 2: Reorganization

Part 3: Reclaiming your life

Part 4: Transformation and healing

Attentive to the suffering of persons in mourning, your funeral cooperative understands how important it is to face this trial in an atmosphere of respect. May you find the strength and comfort to move forward on your path to peace and serenity.

## SUMMARY

### INTERVIEW

#### Jean Monbourquette

The great communicator Jean Monbourquette presents the final phases of mourning which lead to transformation and healing.

2

### TIPS AND ADVICE

#### Follow your dreams!

4

### PERSONAL ACCOUNT

#### The death of a former life partner

##### The ultimate separation

Andrée Perron speaks of his emotions upon the death of his ex-wife and the events that enabled the family to traverse this bereavement.

5

### YOUR QUESTIONS

#### When should we part with the personal effects of the deceased?

6

### COOPERATION

#### Becoming a member

of my funeral cooperative: my right to choose

6

### LOOKING AT BEREAVEMENT

#### Bereavements that become complicated

A wound that is slow to heal

7

### SUPPORT

#### How about a little reading?

There is no doubt that learning about bereavement better equips us to face the ordeal, and also helps us find meaning in this tragedy, which will come to every one of us, sooner or later.

8

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

We would like to thank Ms. Johanne de Montigny, Ms. Josée Jacques, Ms. Andrée Perron and Mr. Jean Monbourquette for their contributions to this instalment.

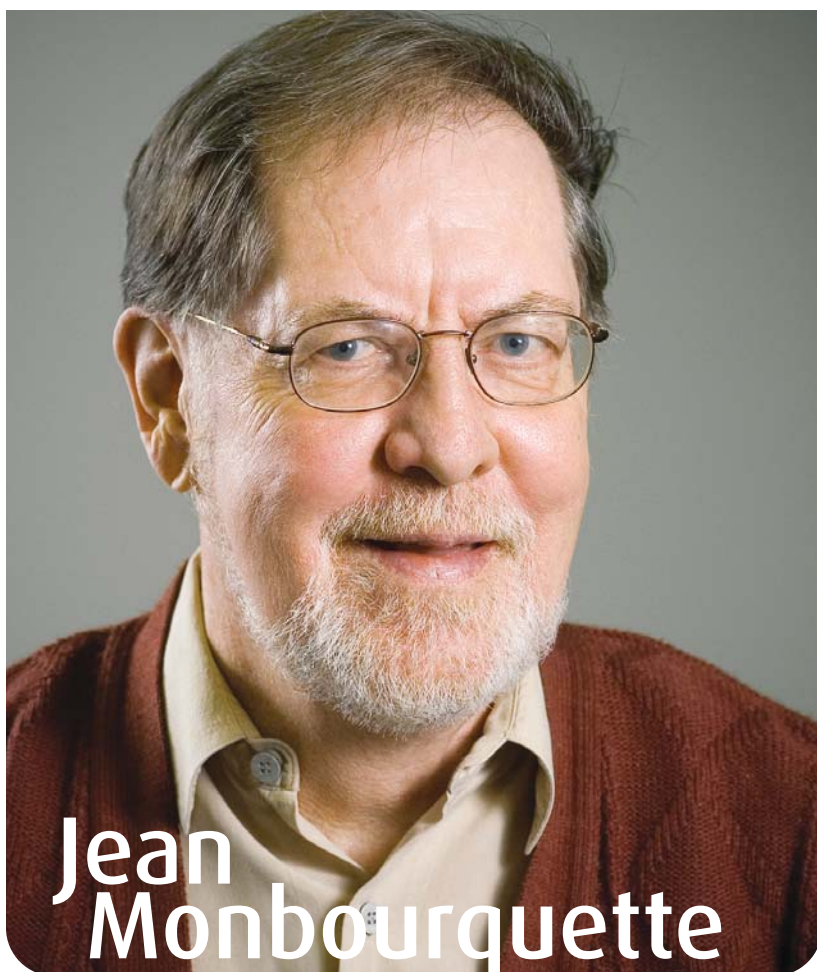


PHOTO: FRANÇOIS LAFRANCE

# Jean Monbourquette

# A promise of

After denying himself for over 20 years, Jean Monbourquette finally plunged into bereavement and made it his life project. Every year, thousands of new readers discover his first book on the subject, *Aimer, perdre et grandir*. In his books, lectures and this interview, this man, an Oblate priest and psychologist, explains that the process of saying your goodbyes is a promise of rebirth. He was one of the first to form self-help groups for persons in mourning (in 1975), to ease this transition which is feared by so many. Today, the teacher has given way to the writer. Educated by his own bereavements, this doctor of souls still has many things to pass on.

### *What is it that tells a person that his mourning is over?*

When you can talk about the deceased with no pang of suffering. That means the wound has healed over. In our self-help groups, mourning ends with finding the meaning of the loss, mutual forgiveness, claiming your inheritance,

This four-part publication is published by the:

#### Fédération des coopératives funéraires du Québec

31 King Street West, Suite 410  
Sherbrooke, Quebec J1H 1N5

Telephone: 819 566-6303

Fax: 819 829-1593

E-mail: [fcfq@reseaucoop.com](mailto:fcfq@reseaucoop.com)

Web site: [www.fcfq.qc.ca](http://www.fcfq.qc.ca)

Editor: Alain Leclerc  
Coordination: France Denis  
Writing: Christine Tremblay  
Advisory committee: Louise Bonin, Luc Langlois, Louise Talbot, Andrée Perron  
Graphic design: Gilles Blais, Infografik design communication

*Reproduction prohibited without the authorization of the Fédération des coopératives funéraires du Québec.*

and the community's confirmation that the mourning period is over. When we thus leave behind the rituals that accompany bereavement, we have to devise others to fill the gap.

**Why do you mean by finding meaning in the loss?**

It's a matter of finding out how I am going to continue on, what is the meaning that this has in my life. I knew a woman who couldn't manage to move ahead in mourning her child. One day I suggested that she find a meaning in this loss. At first, she was very mistrustful, she was afraid I was forcing God on her. The next week, she told me: "I've thought about my very dear girlfriend who died at the age of 28, without having lived her dream of having children. I thought I would entrust her with my child so that she could

take care of him on the other side." And the week after that, she came back and told me: "I went to bury my child's ashes in the region where I was born." She had kept these ashes at her bedside for six years. She was able to move ahead in her grieving by finding a meaning for this loss. We need a mythology, even if we don't believe in God.

**You deal with the phase of forgiveness in your stages of mourning. Who do we have to forgive?**

For some of us, God. A good God who permits such a thing, that poses a problem of faith. Others have to forgive the deceased. Losing a loved one causes a wound. There is a little boy or little girl inside us who is suffering. To achieve closure on our grieving, we have to forgive the other for leaving us, for causing us a problem, for no longer looking after his responsibilities. Losing someone creates trouble for us. In my sessions, I met one woman who was inconsolable for the death of her mother. One day I asked her to tell us just what she had lost. She said: "I've lost my baby-sitter. She was my mother, but also my

# rebirth



PHOTO: FRANÇOIS LAFRANCE

**When we lose someone, we lose her in different ways.**

baby-sitter." And she burst into tears. When we lose someone, we lose her in different ways. We have to forgive the person who has left us, and we also ask her forgiveness: for not loving her enough, for not telling her we loved her enough, for not visiting her enough.

**Claiming your inheritance means asking yourself: "What do I want from this person, what have I loved about this person?"**

**In your support groups, you bring bereaved persons to discover the legacy left by the deceased. What is the importance of this ritual?**

In psychology, they say we project our qualities onto the person we love. Parents in particular project their dreams and qualities onto their children. When the loved one dies, an enormous void is created. We have to recover these projections. This is what causes people to take over from a spouse or a parent in a business. It is also what causes them to pick up a project or a talent, and sometimes be more of a success than the other was. Claiming your inheritance means asking yourself: "What do I want from this person, what have I loved about this person?"

**When a parent dies, is it possible that the children may each seek part of the inheritance?**

Yes, focussing on the aspect of the parent that they loved. But in a family, it is very difficult to choose your legacy for yourself. Sometimes it is sort of imposed on you. The family system stands up for itself. Roles are redistributed to the different people. Someone is designated to fill the gap. The same thing happens when a couple loses a child: another child feels obliged to take his place. I have seen a teenage girl tell her parents: "Don't cry, I will replace my brother". That puts a lot of pressure on the children. The parents should be wise enough to say: Your brother is dead, come mourn with us. No one is going to replace him."



**How do you explain that some people discover their mission in life when they experience a major bereavement?**

Letting go of a family member is very difficult. But when it happens, we enter upon a meditative period which brings us to ask the question: 'Who am I? What can I do with my life?' We have to take the time to think about this. When a mother loses her child, she asks herself: "Who am I now? I used to have a function which demanded all of my energy." She is faced with a void, she doesn't know what to do with herself. This questioning can last two or three months, and the response comes from inside us. Each of us has a mission, I am sure of that.

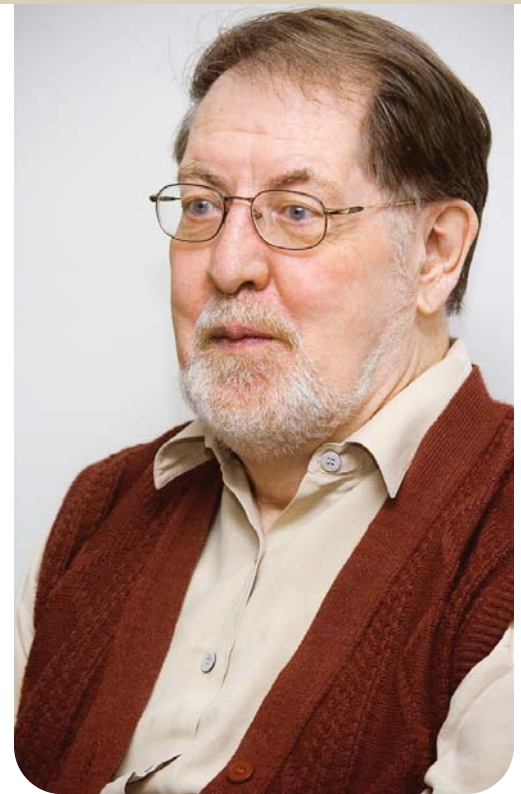
---

**Each of us has a mission, I am sure of that.**

---

**Do you suggest that people celebrate the end of mourning?**

Yes. When we claim our inheritance and sense that we are growing, we enter a phase of great power. It is good to celebrate it: we can open a bottle of champagne, have a party, engage in some activity we really enjoy. We are not celebrating the person's death, but the growth that comes from mourning. It is very beautiful.



## Tips and advice



### EXERCISE: FOLLOW YOUR DREAMS!

It is not uncommon to hear people complaining that they don't spend enough time on what really gives them pleasure. Compiling a list of what you would like to do encourages you to define your priorities and take action. It is always possible to act on your desires and change your daily life.

1. What are the things (dreams, projects, promises, etc.) that you would like to do before your die? Try to identify 50 of them!
2. Pick five priorities from among these.
3. On your list, indicate whether your wishes are feasible in the short, medium or long terms.

4. Choose one thing that you will do or begin doing in the next three months. What is this particular wish?
5. How did you go about doing it, or starting to do it?
6. What are the benefits of this achievement, or of these few steps toward making it a reality?

When life is getting you down, simply look at your list and take action on it. Every project can become an objective. One simple step toward that objective brings you closer to its realization. Life is a dream: make it a reality...

SOURCE : JACQUES, Josée. *Les saisons du deuil: la mort tisserande de la vie*, Outremont: Les Éditions Quebecor, 2002. 223 p.

Exercise published with the author's permission.

PHOTO : FRANÇOIS LAFRANCE

## The death of a former life partner

# The ultimate separation

Gilles, my ex-husband, died in December 2003. Diabetes finally got the better of him, after about 20 years of fighting the disease.

Although divorced in 1988, Gilles and I had kept up a very special friendship. To preserve the family unit, we had decided to ensure that our children grew up in a balanced environment, and were never caught between the two parents. We were both of a peaceful nature, and always saw to it that an atmosphere of understanding was maintained.

When we learned of Gilles' death, we were together in his room, the children and I, to spend his last moments with him. Similarly, we were there at his cremation, and the funeral services that followed a few days later.

My daughter attended to the estate, and I looked after everything to do with the funeral services. Since I was already in the business, I knew that it was important to make the right choices for the people left behind.

***"The devil's reel" became "the angel's reel"***

My ex-husband was truly what you might call a "bon vivant". To mark this aspect of his personality, but also the

fact that he was a great fan of folk music, we retained the services of a fiddler at the funeral. So "The Angel's Reel" was heard

---

***"Do you realize you are a widow now?", one of my children asked me one day. I was surprised by this remark.***

---

throughout the church, to the great pleasure of those attending. This was December 23. It was important for me to take account that day of the holiday context in which we found ourselves, but also to give the people the impression that Gilles was saluting them and wishing them happy holidays in spite of everything.

That Christmas, the children and I preferred to leave the presents unopened under the tree. Our hearts weren't in it. So we gave ourselves some time to feel the emptiness of the absence. I thought it was important for us to go at our own pace, according to the intensity of our emotions. I believe that one must never celebrate half-heartedly.



***Andrée Perron is the general manager of the Coopérative funéraire de la Mauricie***

### ***The departure of an "ex"***

"Do you realize you are a widow now?", one of my children asked me one day. I was surprised by this remark. Personally, I didn't consider myself a widow. In my heart and mind, it was my ex-husband who had gone, but above all, the father of my children. I had already mourned my relationship with him. The emotional break had taken place long ago, even if I do admit that I lost a great friend. In fact I think that is something that helped me through the bereavement. There was no ambiguity about our relationship. In that sense, everything was clear.

What matters in a difficult time, such as when you lose a person who means something to you, is to be surrounded by a support network that will accept your tears, your showing less enthusiasm and being in less of a good mood. For if a person's death makes it possible to tighten the bonds with those around you, at least it will have served some purpose.

***Andrée Perron***

## When should we part with the personal effects of the deceased?

There is no ideal time to do this. Hastily getting rid of the personal effects as a way of avoiding all reminders of the person's existence and death can be as harmful as desperately hanging on to these witnesses of the past, especially when they call painful moments to mind or are detrimental to detachment.

The right attitude is to take the time to go through a transition period so as to assimilate the absence of the deceased, keeping in sight only those objects that prompt happy memories. After a while, sorting through these objects should become easier.

This stage is also an opportunity bring some order to your own thoughts and memories. So it should be done in an atmosphere of calm and clear-headedness. Before deciding to keep, give away or throw out some object, it is a good idea to think about your reasons for doing so.

*Response taken from: RÉGNIER, Roger and Line SAINT-PIERRE. Quand le deuil survient, 80 questions et réponses. Montreal: Éditions Sciences et Culture, 2000. 185 p.*



## Becoming a member of a funeral cooperative

# My right to choose

Over 130,000 people in Quebec have made the decision to change things by supporting the development of a funeral cooperative. That way, in addition to helping support a collective enterprise owned by its members, they can take advantage of the benefits that come with membership.

### *I am becoming a member of my funeral cooperative because:*

1. I am supporting a company that reinvests its profits in the publication of tools for its members.
2. I am choosing a company that stands apart by virtue of its humane and professional approach.
3. I am demonstrating my solidarity by joining the cooperative movement.
4. I am affirming my values of mutual assistance, democracy, fairness and commitment to the community.
5. I am encouraging a fully Quebec-based organization.

6. I am supporting the local and regional economy.
7. I am obtaining quality products and services that truly meet my needs.
8. I can participate in my cooperative's decision-making process and activities.
9. I am becoming the co-owner of a cooperative enterprise.
10. I have access free of charge to objective information and practical documentation.
11. I am able to transfer my prearrangement contract to 100 points of service in Quebec.
12. I am joining a network of over 130,000 members all across Quebec.

The cooperative is a guarantee of the region's structure and economic robustness: it belongs to the people and is part of the collective heritage.

### *I would like to know more*

- I would like to become a member of my funeral cooperative. Please send me a form.
- With no obligation on my part, I would like someone to contact me to provide information about funeral planning.

Last name: \_\_\_\_\_

First name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_

Postal code: \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please return to the funeral cooperative in your region, or to the:**

**Fédération des coopératives funéraires du Québec**

31 King Street West, Suite 410  
Sherbrooke, Quebec J1H 1N5



## BEREAVEMENTS that become complicated

# A wound that is slow to heal

The death of a family member generally prompts a whole range of acute and contradictory reactions, which are often a surprise to the bereaved themselves. Should questions be asked when symptoms such as a desire to die, a feeling of profound guilt or simply loss of appetite persist over time, without diminishing in intensity?

With the help of Johanne de Montigny, a psychologist in the palliative care department of the McGill University Health Centre, we will try to get a better understanding of how and why a bereavement can develop complications.

### **Complicated bereavement vs pathological bereavement**

“First of all, it is important to distinguish pathological bereavement from complicated bereavement,” explains Ms. de Montigny. “We refer to complicated bereavement when the circumstances of the loss make the normal grieving process more complex.” Johanne de Montigny names four factors that can impede the healing process. First, isolation, which

---

***The intensity of the reactions is the main factor to consider in differentiating the normal process of bereavement from the bereavement that becomes complicated.***

---

makes the bereavement much more difficult to bear.”

“Next, excessive attachment (for example, fusional couples), in which a person has staked everything on one particular relationship. Third, we have unresolved conflicts, and lastly, removal of the sacred aura of the rites. In fact, the great freedom of action permitted under the new rites is often a cause of divisions among the members of a family, as not all the members have the same needs with respect to funeral rites. So these four factors can cause the mourning process to be ‘blocked’ at one of its stages.”

For example, unresolved complicated bereavement risks dragging the person into more major depression, namely pathological mourning, which will then require professional help.

Pathological bereavement is more serious because it involves self-destructive behaviour or repeated self-criticism which can ultimately lead the person to formulate a specific plan of suicide. Pathological mourning can also bring about other forms of self-destruction such as serious and prolonged eating disorders, persisting sleep disorders, or the adoption of risk behaviours such as excessive speeding.

### ***How do we recognize a bereavement that is becoming complicated?***

“The intensity of the reactions is the main factor to be considered in differentiating the normal process of bereavement (with its own characteristic reactions) from the bereavement that becomes complicated.” Johanne de Montigny claims that there is a clear distinction between, for example, a normal feeling of guilt, which simply connotes how much we loved the deceased – and which we try to evaluate against the frustrations we have experienced – and the same feeling expressed with intensity and conviction in such statements as: “I will never forgive myself” or “I don’t deserve to love or to be loved”.

### ***Who discovers the problem?***

“Someone who is not in the habit of asking for help or who is staggered by his loss will not automatically make the effort to verify whether he or she is grieving in the normal way or not,” says Johanne de Montigny. Sometimes outside intervention is the only way to detect the trauma in the mourning.

If you know someone in this situation or if you feel that you yourself are not making progress toward resolving your grief, do not hesitate to consult a bereavement professional.

# How about a little reading?

There is no doubt that learning about bereavement and its repercussions better equips us to face the ordeal, and also helps us find meaning in this tragedy, which will come to every one of us, sooner or later. So here are a few suggestions of books and Web sites that might teach you a little more about your own reactions and give you some different things to think about.

## Suggested reading

Deits, Bob. *Life after Loss*. Lifelong Books, 2004. 256 p.

Delcourt, Annick. *Apprivoiser l'absence Adieu mon enfant*. Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1992. 393 p.

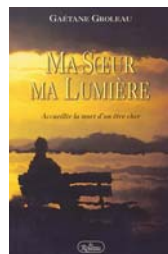
Delisle, Isabelle. *Survivre au deuil*. Montreal: Éditions Paulines, 1987. 253 p.

Fauré, Christophe. *Vivre le deuil au jour le jour: Réapprendre à vivre après la mort d'un proche*. Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1995. 251 p.

Groleau, Gaétane. *Ma sœur. Ma lumière. Accueillir la mort d'un être cher*. Montreal: Éditions du Roseau, 2002. 187 p.

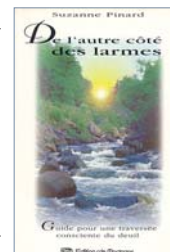
Jacques, Josée. *Les saisons du deuil*. Montreal: Éditions Quebecor, 2002. 223 p.

Monbourquette, Jean. *Comment pardonner?* Ottawa: Édition Novalis, 1992. 249 p.



Monbourquette, Jean. *Grandir: Aimer, perdre et grandir*. Ottawa: Éditions Novalis, 1994. 175 p.

Pinard, Suzanne. *De l'autre côté des larmes. Guide pour la traversée consciente du deuil*. Montreal: Éditions de Mortagne, 198 p.



Rosette and Dobbs, Barbara. *Vivre son deuil et croître*. Geneva: Éditions Jouvence, 155 p.

## Web Sites

**La Gentiane – Deuil-entraide:** [www.lagentiane.org](http://www.lagentiane.org)

**Entraide-Deuil de l'Outaouais:** <http://entraide-deuil.qc.ca/index.html>

**L'épreuve du deuil:** [www.prevention.ch/lepreuvedudeuil.htm](http://www.prevention.ch/lepreuvedudeuil.htm)

**Entre le deuil et l'espoir:** [www.er.uqam.ca/pasteur/e150640/deuil.html](http://www.er.uqam.ca/pasteur/e150640/deuil.html)

This instalment is the last in the *By Your Side* series. We hope that it has been of help to you in your mourning process. May you find the strength and comfort to move forward on your path to peace and serenity.