

Duty, Honor, Hope

Strategies For Understanding & Unpacking First Responder Grief

Beth L. Hewett, PhD, CT, CCISM, CEOLS

First Edition

© 2023 by Beth L. Hewett, PhD, CT, CCISM, CEOLS

All rights reserved. Reproduction in any form is strictly prohibited
without prior permission from the publisher.



International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, Inc.
HELPING SAVE THE HEROES

Published by:

International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, Inc.

3290 Pine Orchard Lane, Suite 106

Ellicott City, MD 21042

USA

cismbooks@icisf.org

Print ISBN: 978-1-943001-28-6

eBook ISBN: 978-1-943001-29-3

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>ABOUT THE AUTHOR</i>	1
<i>ABOUT THE ARTIST</i>	3
<i>FOREWORD</i>	9
<i>INTRODUCTION</i>	13
<i>SECTION 1: Hope, Grief, and Mourning</i>	31
CHAPTER 1: Hope in First Response.....	33
CHAPTER 2: Grief, Grieving, and Mourning	43
CHAPTER 3: Grief, Trauma, and First Response	79
<i>SECTION 2: Strategies for Unpacking First Responder Grief</i>	105
CHAPTER 4: Unpack Grief through Mourning.....	107
CHAPTER 5: Map Your Grief History	115
CHAPTER 6: Take Some Time (Off)	125
CHAPTER 7: Ponder and Self-Reflect.....	129
CHAPTER 8: Use Ceremony to Mourn	135
CHAPTER 9: Shine Your Light.....	145
CHAPTER 10: Express Yourself.....	163
CHAPTER 11: Move and Rest Your Body.....	179
CHAPTER 12: (Re)Create Your World	189
CHAPTER 13: Address Accumulated Grief and Maintenance Mourning.....	199
<i>SECTION 3: Mourn Together</i>	217
CHAPTER 14: Partner with Others.....	219
CHAPTER 15: Let Your Family In.....	235
<i>SECTION 4: Skills for CISM Grief Supporters</i>	261
CHAPTER 16: Self-Care for Grief Supporters	263
CHAPTER 17: Action Models for First Response Grief Support.....	277
CHAPTER 18: A Case Study of First Response Grief	303
<i>CONCLUSION: A Return to Hope</i>	313
<i>AFTERWORD</i>	315
<i>REFERENCE LIST</i>	327
<i>RESOURCES</i>	337

Duty, Honor, Hope

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Beth L. Hewett, PhD, CT, CCISM, CEOLS is a Certified Thanatologist, Compassionate Bereavement Care™ specialist, Certified Critical Incident Stress Management specialist, and Certified End-of-Life Doula. She is a public speaker and the author of *Grief on the Road to Emmaus: A Monastic Approach to Journeying with the Bereaved*, *Good Words: Memorializing through a Eulogy* and *More Good Words: Practical Activities for Mourning*, and coauthor of *Supporting a Grieving Workforce*. Dr. Hewett supports the bereaved as a grief coach and spiritual companion, as well as a bereavement facilitator trainer, workshop and seminar leader, and support group facilitator. Her work includes pre- and post-death bereavement, healing ceremonies and rituals, and mindful mourning activities. Her publications, to include articles and blogs, can be found at www.goodwordsforgrieving.com.

Prior to her work as a bereavement specialist, Dr. Hewett was an active scholar in rhetoric and online writing instruction, as well as the owner of Defend & Publish, LLC, an academic coaching company. She was the founding president of the Global Society for Online Literacy Educators (GSOLE).

Duty, Honor, Hope

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Canadian Peel Regional Police (PRP) Staff Sergeant (Ret.) Shawn McCowell was an active member of the PRP's Peer Support Team for over 20 years. He is an ICISF Approved Instructor since 2009 and the peer support trainer for Boots on the Ground, a 24/7 telephone and in-person peer support line for first responders.

Shawn is a self-taught artist who learned to cope with traumatic incidents by pouring much of his work-place stress into his art. His paintings often portray the complex emotions involved in first responder work.

Duty, Honor, Hope

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'm grateful to Christina Lengyel, MFA and Creative Consultant at M/X Media, for her developmental editing suggestions. Her help on this book has been especially valuable. Christina, who also wrote the Afterword for this book, provided carefully considered opinions and thoughts regarding content that might help first responders, textual organization, and reader-friendly editing. Here's a book-length hug!

Dr. Tara Fallon has helped me in many projects, enabling me to see how my books could be read and understood by outside readers. Her perceptive approach has been invaluable in this book, and I especially appreciate her precious time used on my behalf. Thank you, Tara.

Dr. Paul Hewett, my dear husband, is my go-to guy for emergency management knowledge and emotional support; sometimes *I'm* the emergency that he needs to manage when I'm writing a book. I always appreciate his thoughtful reading of my books; I can count on him to be both honest and kind. I appreciate and love you, Paul.

Ezekiel "Zeke" Weis transcribed all the interviews I conducted for this book. It wasn't an easy task given the scope, topic, and content. I'm especially appreciative for his time and willingness to risk reading about other people's trauma and grief. Thank you, Zeke.

I'm deeply thankful to Police Detective Sergeant (Ret.) Shawn McCowell, who provided amazing material in his interview, teaching me about how a cop might address grief. He also created the astonishing painting of hope, "Returning to Light," that graces this book's cover: I honor you and your life's profession as a cop and decent human being.

Duty, Honor, Hope

To the 21 first responders who served as my interview participants. They generously offered their experiences of trauma and grief, teaching me about first response and how their grief can accumulate and stack up while they diligently continue to serve 24/7 and 365 days a year: Dr. Anne Balboni, Dr. Barb Russo, Catherine Hewett, The Reverend Cathy Gumpert, Collin Rockey, Evonne Boroski, Dr. Glenn R. Schiraldi, J. Robert Ray, Jerry Weaver, Karen Perry, Marc “Junk” Junkerman, Mark Amick, Dr. Mark Maggio, Michael Weil, Paul V. Jockimo, Renee “Gunny” Plumb, Shawn McCowell, The Reverend Tim Brown, Ted Cam, Veronica Derosa, and Vickey Ludwig. Thank you for your generosity of spirit and gifts of sharing your challenges that stem from your vocations in first response.

Please see the biographies at the end of this book to learn more about the many people who graciously offered in-depth interviews for this book.

Of course, any errors in this book are mine alone and not those of my interview participants.

DEDICATION

As I drive, I often notice a police vehicle is positioned to block the onlooker's view of an automobile that's been temporarily seized. In effect, the police vehicle protects the pulled-over automobiles and the people sitting in them. If another vehicle were to hit the police vehicle from behind, the police automobile will take the brunt of the hit, thereby protecting the very citizens who may be embarrassed, disgruntled, or plain angry at having been detained. This is a little detail, one among the many that are easy to overlook when first responders of all sorts do their jobs. The average citizen just doesn't know all the ways we're protected; knowing some of them might encourage us to be more thoughtful and kinder when first responders show up and when they feel their own frustrations with us.

I dedicate this book to first responders everywhere, professionals from all sorts of emergency and critical incident management disciplines, including the military. Thank you for being there. Thank you for doing your best to remain decent, good human beings under the worst of situations. And thank you for working with us to create better, stronger relations among first responders and the citizenry.

I also dedicate this book to CISM peer supporters, mental health providers, chaplains, and instructors—all part of the essential teams that support those people who protect us and our environment. Thank you for your work.

Duty, Honor, Hope

FOREWORD

In my fifteen years of working at the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation, I have had the privilege of providing training to hundreds of first responders in Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM). My own CISM training was from the 500 Pound Gorillas of CISM, Dr. Jeff Mitchell and Dr. George Everly. I have co-facilitated countless defusings, debriefings, crisis management briefings, and individual crisis interventions.

When Beth Hewett asked me to write the Foreword for the book you are about to read, I accepted without hesitation. I thought, “How hard can it be to summarize a few things about a book about grief and first responders?”

Then I read the book.

That’s when I realized I don’t know anything about grief and mourning beyond my own basic “5 Stages of Grief” understanding, which we now know cannot be applied to grief because those stages are really about the dying process. In my graduate studies for an MS in Counseling, I had taken exactly zero classes on the subjects of grief or mourning. There were also zero classes addressing trauma. As a counselor and educator, I was woefully ignorant to meet first responders where they are, oftentimes at the intersection of trauma and grief. Guidance for the grieving and mourning piece of anticipatory, new, and accumulated grief has been beyond my scope until now. This book has opened my eyes to the introspection and work required for people to address their own trauma from critical incidents and commence actively grieving in a productive manner.

Beth is a bereavement specialist, which means she attends to dying folks, death, and grief. We met when she was a student

in a class I co-taught right before the world closed for the pandemic. She asked thoughtful questions during class about where grief fits in with the CISM model. My answer was always “refer to a higher level of care.” That answer felt incomplete when I gave it, and I was disappointed to hear it coming out of my mouth. I am thrilled that ICISF Faculty and Approved Instructors can now recommend this book!

Beth has interviewed 21 first responders, many of whom I consider my friends. She took on the momentous task of writing this book because nothing like it existed and she saw a need. The gentleness and care that Beth has taken with all the interviewees cited in these pages is evident. Their openness about the absolute worst and most horrific moments of their lives wouldn't have happened had Beth not been sincere in her caring and wish to be of service to society's everyday hero first responders.

Grief is swirly, and the timeline for grieving doesn't look the same for every person or even for every critical incident. Grief simply isn't linear, and sometimes it seems easier to just put it away, letting it accumulate and stack up over time. Beth has provided simple, practical exercises that any first responder (or anyone else, for that matter) can use to begin to unpack their grief container, allowing them to acknowledge and work with the griefs stemming from their careers and personal lives. We all know our worlds often collide, and our careers and personal lives blur together. Skeletons we thought that were long buried often pop up out of the box we threw them in, with no regard for what we are currently doing.

In every CISM class, I am awestruck by the selflessness exhibited by our students. The tenacity it takes to walk back into the fire, sometimes literally, is a fact that humbles me daily. And then they come back the next day, and the next. Unfortunately,

Foreword

the most deserving of us are often the least likely to utilize resources available for healing and self-care.

Pick this book up when you feel strong enough to address some contents of that grief and trauma box of yours. Pick it up when you don't feel strong enough to address the contents of the box. Investing in your own healing will pay off exponentially in your personal and professional relationships. We are all we've got; no one else can do the work for us. Begin by beginning, and I will meet you at the intersection of trauma and grief.

Gratefully,

Michelle Warshauer, MS, NCC, CCISM

Duty, Honor, Hope

INTRODUCTION

When we were children, Mr. Rogers told us: “Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping” (Rogers, 2002).

As I write this book, challenging, awful events that snuff out people’s lives and change the lives of everyone they touch are happening all over the world. Here, a shark attack maims a woman, and the well-trained lifeguards who administer first aid shake with shock after their work is over. In Ethiopia, Ukraine, and dozens of other countries, both civilians and military personnel alike are wounded and killed in bombings and battles that batter their homeland. In Turkey and Syria, a recent massive earthquake with well over one hundred aftershocks is estimated to have killed more than 50,000 people—people who didn’t have any idea their lives would end suddenly and violently.

In all these scenarios and the many others I haven’t mentioned, first responders defend the victims and try to save lives. They are the helpers that Mr. Rogers told us about. They are the ones who stick around when things are scary.

First response work is hard, important, rewarding, dangerous, often misunderstood, and sometimes reviled. For all these reasons and more, first response work can be grief inducing. While first responders may not talk a lot about their grief with others, this book has been written to encourage them to do just that. Some first responders have given me their trust in sharing their stories so I can help show readers that their grief is natural, normal, and especially necessary in jobs where they are repeatedly challenged to keep working regardless of their emotions.

Who am I talking about when I refer to first responders?

Duty, Honor, Hope

First responders are the first, or among the first, people with specialized training that arrive on scene in emergency situations. They address life and death events in varied ways. Firefighters; local, state, and federal law enforcement officers; air, land, and underwater search and rescue units; paramedics and emergency medical technicians (EMTs) are among the first of first responders—typically sent forward by emergency services dispatchers. Emergency department physicians, nurses, and their support staff are first responders in hospital settings. Other first responders include correctional and detention officers, border patrol personnel, park police, bridge and tunnel officers, security guards, lifeguards, and pilots and flight attendants. Active-duty military personnel, National Guard soldiers, Civil Air Patrol members, and medics also are first responders to various emergent scenarios. Support personnel who may arrive at the scene or may attend to other first responders include chaplains and other clergy or spiritual supporters and mental health care providers. This list of first responders isn't all inclusive, and I apologize to any professionals not mentioned here.

People in less traditional roles can be considered first responders in certain emergent situations. For example, veterinarians and their staff respond to animal emergencies requiring both life-saving measures and euthanasia. Other less traditional first responders include medical personnel in oncology units who assist parents when they're told that a child will die from cancer, as well as school counselors and teachers responsible for their student charges when emergencies occur. In fact, anyone dealing with children might be called upon to be a first responder since childhood illnesses, injuries, and deaths are among the worst traumas anyone can experience.

I've developed this book for all of these people, as well as for their supervisors and peer support teams, who may have their own grief. Although not first responders themselves, this book can assist spouses and other family members because they also experience their family members' grief and, quite likely, their own grief stemming from the first response work.

Why First Responders Are Important

We know that emergencies occur in many forms. Crime of various types; fire and hazardous materials releases; automobile and other vehicular accidents (including boating, recreational vehicles, and small aircraft crashes) occur fairly frequently; these incidents create dangerous, intense situations. Terrorist attacks and natural disasters like forest fires, hurricanes, tornadoes, and earthquakes may not occur as often, but their results can be disastrous for civilians, first responders, and the natural world. Other emergencies include domestic violence, as well as interpersonal neighborhood and public space violence. Mass shootings, once unheard of, have become horribly familiar and frequent in formerly safe spaces. There are too many other emergent events to list individually here.

First responders have different roles and training, but they are held responsible for many scenarios for which they have and haven't been formally prepared. Some, like police officers and military personnel, have jobs that go beyond response, requiring them to place themselves in often uncertain and sometimes precarious situations. Police and National Guard units may be tasked with crowd control when public gatherings become hazardous to citizens or the government. Other first responders regularly stride into dangerous conditions, such as firefighters whose job includes entering blazing buildings and facing hazardous materials; forest firefighters encounter especially dangerous conditions to save people and the environment. Still

other first responders save badly damaged people in accidents, attempting to get them to emergency medical personnel alive.

First response work certainly involves critical incidents that are traumatic to people experiencing the incidents as victims. Yet, this work also can be traumatic for the first responders themselves, an issue that increasingly is better understood and addressed by Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) peer support teams. Just as important, however, first response work involves grief because of an inevitable, constant awareness of the fragility of life and the vulnerability of people, animals, and the environment. Such awareness leads to emotions that might emerge as anger or depression, masking underlying pain, sadness, regret, and guilt.

Why I Wrote This Book

Although I've been involved in the field of dying, death, and bereavement now since 2004, I've never forgotten what I learned earlier about the wry, sometimes slow, yet often urgent world of first response. To offer first responders what I can regarding bereavement support, I earned my certification in CISM, learning how and why it's important to address the potential trauma of critical incidents with defusing and debriefings. I've conducted such debriefings in my work as a bereavement coach. Then, I researched their bereavement needs to write this book about addressing and managing the grief that is inevitable with a first response job.

I'm a bereavement specialist—called a *thanatologist*, which means someone who specializes in dying, death, and bereavement. I also have some limited experience of first response and first responders that I share here to tune our common understanding.

Introduction

When I was 18 and having just finished my freshman year of college, I was hired by the Maryland Department of Natural Resources Police as a part-time, weekend officer for the Marine Division. My job wasn't as difficult or sexy as it sounds. I was to catch and tie lines, hold boats off from hitting each other in rough seas, occasionally drive and dock the boat, man (or woman) the marine radio, and conduct other sundry tasks. No weapons. No official officer capacities. It was a wonderful summer job, and I held it happily for three years.

As the state's first female Natural Resources officer—part-time or otherwise—I was in the interesting position of breaking ground for other women in that job arena. Although I didn't know it at the time, but as many female first responders have experienced, the department had to hire me simply because I applied and was qualified (Title VII, 1964). There were no uniforms to fit me, not even a hat. I was a bit of a novelty, the scuttlebutt of the radio waves among the all-male local police, Marine police, and some State Troopers. I was referred to alternatively as “the girl” and “a doll baby.” It was 1976, and I was too naive to protest.

Nonetheless, this job was a serious foray into first response. Marine Police officers patrol the waterways, both looking for boaters' problems and responding to critical incidents. Boaters might be stopped for failure to display their registrations, improperly used lights, or boarded for life preserver and other safety checks. Although not always, boaters without current registrations often have more people onboard than life preservers. Drunk boating is particularly common on holidays. Boaters can have any number of challenges from broken engines to boat fires to missing or drowned persons.

On my second day of my first Memorial Day weekend on the job, I learned some facts about drownings. As we raced to our first drowning of the summer season, I had a sense of the world suddenly being unreal. We bounced on Chesapeake Bay waters, running against the waves, running fast but not all out because the body had already been recovered and dragged to a marina. He merely awaited us to pull him out of the water. As a woman and a complete newbie, the men tried to shield me. “Don’t turn around,” they urged. “Don’t look. You can’t unsee it.” Who listens at age 18? Besides, I thought, if I was to do my job this summer and not be the girl everyone comes to gawk at, I needed to participate in the action. So, I turned around and pushed past the officer who was blocking my way. Once retrieved from the water, the man lying on the dock, my first dead person, appeared simultaneously to be chalky white and eerily blue. His eyes stared into mine as I stared into his. Yes, he was dead, and I was shocked although I refused to show it. I imagine the men saw it in me anyway.

As it turned out, there was little for me to do. The professionals took over, talked with what I was to learn as gallows humor, and cleared the way for this man’s removal to the coroner’s office. I think I was quiet the rest of the day. At home that evening, my parents eagerly asked about my day. When I said there had been a drowning, they seemed both interested to learn the details and concerned about my experience and demeanor of quiet introspection. I didn’t know what to think. After all these years, I can say that, indeed, I have not been able to unsee what I saw. It hasn’t traumatized me insofar as I’m not haunted by the experience, but that first drowning has remained with me as a marker of transition in my life—my then-understanding of death from

before and *after* the drowning. A man lost his life. We stood guard over his body. Somebody cried for him that day. Given that women have societal permission to express their feelings that men don't have, I'm still surprised that I wasn't the one crying.

Those years in the late 1970s with the Maryland Marine Police were my most traditional time with first response and first responders. I had another view of first response as a US Army officer's wife throughout my husband's 15-year career. Our experiences included the challenges of two deployments to then-West Germany and my husband's moral injuries leading to post-Gulf War PTSD. Our son and I also experienced emotional traumas from conditions surrounding that conflict. A few years later, first responders located and removed my brother and his friend's bodies from a small plane crash in 2000. In the meantime, although I have little understanding of their work, my maternal family is a three-generation volunteer firefighting family beginning with my maternal grandfather, moving to three uncles, and expanding through some of their sons. I've had a different role in all these dramas, and I've learned to respect what first responders do.

Finally, I want to share that I've experienced traumatic death and losses, too. My brother was killed at age 44 in the small plane crash mentioned previously. His death was so shocking that I still have few words to express my grief. My father died at age 66 in his sleep from what I believe was a broken heart from my brother's death; it didn't help that he had multiple serious health issues. My sister passed away at age 48 from alcohol, the completion of a long, slow suicide. My mother, comatose, died at 79, a year and a half after brain surgery for multiple aneurysms and an ensuing brain bleed; when she stopped breathing, something in me ended, too. All these deaths have

been traumatizing for me for different reasons. While others I love have died, these four touch deep connections in my soul. I share them here because I, too, have grief, experience grieving as an ongoing process, and engage in intentional mourning, the subject of much of this book.

How This Book Was Developed

Given my closeness to family and friends who have spent their lives as first responders and supporting first responders, I wanted to help first responders with the inevitable grief that comes with their professions and often dangerous experiences. I interviewed 18 first responders to learn more about their lived experiences of first response, trauma, and trauma's relationship to grief in both their professional and personal lives. I also interviewed three people whose primary job was not first response but who are called upon to perform first responder work when the need arises. It's an entirely different type of vigilance expected in a job, leading to different perspectives of grief.

While 21 is a small number in the whole of the first response population, this diverse group represents firefighters, police officers, military corpsmen and other veterans, dispatchers, EMS personnel, nurses, doctors, chaplains, mental health care providers, flight attendants, and school counselors/teachers. They are people with varying sexual preferences. They come from different home cultures and races. They are married, divorced, widowed, and unmarried. Some are retired from full-time first response only to spend their retirement years helping other first responders through CISM work with the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (ICISF) and their state and local providers. They're also artists, gardeners, avid tourists, and fans of musicals and goofy TV shows. Some would like to write

books about their experiences while others want to farm or fish and just forget about them.

These interview participants shared how they manage, mitigate, and often fail to address the grief inherent in their professions. They offered their stories for this book, showing true vulnerability and humility so that others may live better.

I asked the interview participants questions about their experiences with critical incidents and whether they had experienced CISM debriefings as first responders or received CISM training to assist others. We explored their experiences of grief and how they think grief and trauma differ in first response work. They shared with me specific critical incidents that led to grief for them and how they do and don't work with that grief. Every single person teared up when responding to that question, a signal both of their humanity and of potentially widespread grief that may need attention. Many of the participants indicated they have a spiritual life, not necessarily in connection with a specific religion but in connection with a sense of Spirit or Higher Power that helps them address the challenges of their chosen professions and home lives. Some expressed that they see life as random and inherently unfair, so they just do their best to be good people and help others.

How to Use This Book

The first responders I interviewed guide this book through their stories and insights into how death and other losses lead to the grief that influences their work. In many cases, reading their stories alone will speak to first responders as readers, allowing you to enter into your colleagues' worlds. Some of the stories are difficult to read, so feel free to put the book down if you need to. On the other hand, these people have generously offered their stories for the benefit of exploring how to heal grief through hopeful, intentional mourning; if you can bear with them, you'll

be honoring their losses as well as personally acknowledging your own.

These first responders shared that this book needs to do a number of things, leading to the following primary goals:

- Teach others to recognize grief and how it differs from trauma
- Highlight the differences between grief and mourning
- Share why grief can be difficult to address in contemporary Western cultures
- Distinguish between myths and facts about grief
- Consider how grief is different for first responders while normalizing their experiences
- Address how grief often is stuffed and carried for years rather than embraced and integrated into first responders' lives
- Offer practical strategies for addressing old and new griefs, as well as for doing grief maintenance work
- Argue for well-built peer support systems, including support groups, for first responder grief

As they wished, these have been my goals for this book.

I've also tried to write this book as a conversation with you as first responders and those who support you, including your family. In a conversation, you get to agree, disagree, or just think on the points made. Please feel free to respond to my guidance for grief, grieving, and mourning in your own unique way. I promise not to be offended if you promise to at least consider how you might use this information for your own and others' hope and healing.

How This Book Is Arranged

This book opens with a **Foreword** written by Michelle Warshauer, MS, NCC, CCISM, the Education and Training Curriculum Specialist of the ICISF, followed by this **Introduction**. Then, the book is arranged in four primary sections, all of which share actual first responder stories to illuminate how to heal from grief, particularly grief overlaid with trauma. These stories appear as direct quotes as well as illustrative material in grey textboxes. Resources for helping yourself and others are provided strategically throughout the book as well as at the end of the book along with references.

Section 1, “Hope, Grief, and Mourning,” explains these concepts as they pertain to first responders, providing the core understanding readers need to work with grief overall.

Chapter 1, “Hope in First Response,” looks at how hope is an active process that involves potential; courage; emotional expression; and healthy partnership with yourself, others, and Spirit.

Chapter 2, “Grief, Grieving, and Mourning,” shares first responder stories that help to define the differences among grief (what people feel passively after a death or other loss), grieving (the process of learning to live with loss), and mourning (the active expression of feelings about loss), as well as the many ambiguous losses first responders might experience.

Chapter 3, “Grief, Trauma, and First Response,” considers how trauma affects first responders as well as how grief and trauma are alike and how they differ. Grief that is overlaid with trauma, which many first responders experience, can be more intense than grief without traumatic features.

Section 2, “Strategies for Unpacking First Responder Grief,” opens 10 brief chapters with actions that first responders might use to address accumulated, stacked up grief from the past as well as newer griefs that emerge from critical incidents, home deaths, and other losses. These chapters include practical exercises that are easily accomplished alone, in pairs, and in groups.

Chapter 4, “Unpack Grief through Mourning,” shares how first responders interviewed for this book have used metaphors for packing and containing older griefs, stowing them away to keep being able to do their jobs. Such packed up grief can accumulate and stack up, needing to be unpacked through active, intentional mourning.

Chapter 5, “Map Your Grief History,” outlines a process of grief mapping that encourages you as first responders to outline and begin to understand the depths of your individual griefs from your lifetime, giving you a sense of what you’ve stored away and what you’ve mourned thoroughly.

Chapter 6, “Take Some Time (Off),” explains the need for taking time directly after a death or other significant loss. Sometimes, as first responders, you’ll need to take time off work to be away from the job for processing a loss. Everyone benefits from regular time off, with particular attention to not over-scheduling when actively grieving.

Chapter 7, “Ponder and Self-Reflect,” suggests that because grieving and intentional mourning can lead to personal transformation, this process is aided by reflecting on your life, your work, who you are, and who you want to be.

Chapter 8, “Use Ceremony to Mourn,” shares the benefits of various kinds of ceremonies first responders may

experience or develop to mourn deaths and other losses. Ceremonies and rituals are important to human beings when there are no words for what you've experienced.

Chapter 9, "Shine Your Light," considers how first responders can engage and lean into their faith traditions when grieving; for those without a specific faith tradition or who don't have a belief in a Higher Power, this chapter illuminates various ways to engage with Spirit to process your losses.

Chapter 10, "Express Yourself," shares strategies for self-expression in grief. As first responders, you can use your own personality to be vocal through crying and other, often loud, utterances, as well as through a variety of expressive actions. You also can express yourself through your choices of reading material and using specific writing exercises for first response grief.

Chapter 11, "Move and Rest Your Body," considers grief, grieving, and purposeful mourning through body work. Using the analogy of effort, or *yang*, and ease, or *yin* from yoga, this chapter provides ways to breathe intentionally, as well as many common and fun activities that can provide both physical effort and a more relaxed state.

Chapter 12, "(Re)Create Your World," explores ways that first responders can imagine and change their relationships with both grief and their current lives. Animals, nature, handwork, and humor can form new ways of being with what hurts and experiencing the grieving process as adaptation and new thinking.

Chapter 13, "Address Accumulated Grief and Maintenance Mourning," offers three specific sets of exercises for addressing accumulated, stacked-up grief.

Examples use SIDS, line-of-duty, and suicide deaths, but they can be adapted to other types of stacked-up grief. The chapter also considers how to do maintenance mourning to keep grief from stacking up again.

Section 3, “Mourn Together,” contains two chapters explaining ways that first responders can develop relationships when grieving. Some of these relationships will be new and others will involve coworkers and family.

Chapter 14, “Partner with Others,” offers a number of ways to use pairs and small groups in grief. It outlines what to look for in grief support groups and other facilitated meetings, as well as what to consider when engaging a grief coach or counselor for one-on-one grieving and mourning work.

Chapter 15, “Let Your Family In,” addresses the vacuum of not including family members for support when first responders try to address grief, particularly grief overlaid with trauma, without them. The chapter also addresses family mourning when a family member or friend has died, as well as the ways that neighbors and friends can be your supporters if you let them into your life.

Section 4, “Skills for CISM Grief Supporters,” provides three chapters useful for professional development training of CISM team and other supporters for first responder grief.

Chapter 16, “Self-Care for Grief Supporters,” opens this section with important strategies for self-care as a grief supporter. Too often, self-care is considered last in training to help others, yet it’s a necessary element of grief support work, particularly when supporting and observing first responders in need after critical incidents.

Chapter 17, “Action Models for First Response Grief Support,” demonstrates how the CISM SAFER-R model does and doesn’t work for first responder grief needs; it provides a grief-focused support model called ATTEND to fill in the gaps for grief specifically. This chapter also considers some of the signs of clinical depression versus the depression common to grief, as well as the importance of suicide awareness.

Chapter 18, “A Case Study of First Response Grief,” provides a full case study of one first responder’s lack of attention to accumulated, stacked-up grief over the course of a career. Ten discussion questions follow this case to engage trainees in issues of hope, grief, grieving, intentional mourning, and potential for healing.

The **Conclusion**, “A Return to Hope,” rounds out the book’s argument that, as first responders, you need to address your grief in an ongoing and intentional manner to maintain an enjoyable life in a challenging career.

The conclusion is followed by an **Afterword** by Christina Lengyel, who offers a testimony to the value of first response in her own and her family’s lives.

Summary

This book is intended to help explain some of the grief experiences that you and your peers as first responders may have experienced in the past and may encounter in the future. It’s also meant to provide strategies for hope-filled, intentional mourning. I use direct quotes from fellow first responders that show how challenging and rewarding working with your grief can be.

Duty, Honor, Hope

Please give yourself permission to open the book, peruse it, read it, and take what you want. Feel free to put the book down as you need and pick it up again when you're ready.

In other words, you don't have to read everything, and you certainly don't have to read it all at once or in the order it's presented. Take sips. Nibble. Find your pace. Give yourself time.

If you're completely uncomfortable with this book, it's possible you're feeling resistant to doing necessary and important personal grief work. In that case, I encourage you to give this book a try anyway, perhaps beginning with the strategies for intentional mourning in chapter 4 and maybe doing this work with a grief coach, mental health counselor, or peer or family supporter.

Thank you for allowing me to serve your grief and mourning needs. Like Mr. Rogers, I look for the helpers. You're always there. Blessings to you!