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Proem

[My first podcast episode](#) took an interview my dear friend, Bob Doherty, videotaped with my son, Mike Funk, a couple of months before Mike died in 2002. I took the soundtrack of that VHS tape and overlaid a chat I recorded with Bob in 2018. Bob and my unusual, deep relationship began when he was my boss at St. Peter’s Addiction Recovery Center (listen to last week’s episode for a brief description of some of the work we did together). My wife and I became dear friends with Bob. Bob died on August 3rd of complications of stomach cancer. I grieve.

Meeting and working with Bob Doherty 01:39

Bob and I first met when he interviewed me for a job. I asked him for his references. He laughed (great laugh) and gave me a couple of references that I called. *Bob’s a good guy, can be challenging, doesn’t suffer fools gladly.* Bob loved to tell that story whenever he could. Bob said to me as his Director of Quality Management, *you’re in the difficult position in that you’re the conscience of the company and you want to be liked. How do you navigate that?* He also said that *I was an acquired taste.* I told that story as often as I could. Bob was a breath of fresh air.

74 years old, learning from a young man 02:42

Here’s a brief clip of Bob that reveals a lot. Bob was talking about Mike:

He was enthusiastic about life. He was hopeful about the moment, appreciative of all around him. He had a view of the world that was an older man’s view, value. He didn’t mention property or money; he didn’t even mention sadness. He talked about connection, contribution, appreciation of his life as it is exactly. He valued connection with all around him, including his girlfriend. It was rather startling to hear that again from a young person so well-formed philosophically or grasping life and how we would all like to. I think we all struggle with life’s meaning and direction, and he has a meaning down, which was appreciating each other, without any overarching religious, philosophical commitment that was in any way jarring. He just understood and appreciated his own and other people’s lives. So I consider that value, the value of Danny van Leeuwen and what they bring to the world and shared. Mike, by the way,



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was a wayward adolescent that arrived at Danny's house. He said, I just liked the environment, so I never left. Danny was okay with that. Makes sense. So, like a fairy tale, there is a young and vibrant, thinking, and a bright guy having gotten to a point in his life of satisfaction. I'm now 74 years old, and I'm getting closer to it, but I'm not quite where he was, which is greatly appreciate every day. It was wonderful to know him. And that was nice to experience that love is transferable. That's special.

Deconstructing grief 04:54

This week I've pondered grief. That sounds so removed, as if I didn't feel it. My pattern: feel and take a 30,000-foot view when I can. My activism, my podcasting, my empathy, my sanity depends on feeling in partnership with perspective. So, I grieve the loss of Bob today which triggers grief of loss of my son, Mike, and other loved ones who died. Grief is a barely controlled, mostly uncontrollable opening of your heart. When open, emotion flows, in and out. You can't help it. I try to deconstruct the stew of grief when I ponder grief. I can see bits of Mike, my dad, my Uncle Leon, another boss turned friend, Jim Bulger, my mom, my sister-in-law, Peggy, when I grieve for Bob.

During my meditative attempt to deconstruct that grief I saw a bit of stew flow by that looked like grief for myself. We often hear of grief of loss of others and less often grief of loss of self. Loss of self can be functional, emotional, spiritual. I realize that I grieve my MS (Multiple Sclerosis) progression. If you've followed my podcast you'll know of my challenges with deteriorating function, harder to walk, harder to play my sax, some despondency. How can you separate immediate grief, past grief, and self-grief? Recognize grieving loss of self in yourself and you'll see it everywhere - loss of identity, loss of purpose. This week alone I see that loss of self in people with chronic pain and long COVID; with displaced persons throughout the world, families breaking up physically, emotionally, and spiritually, new diagnoses, dashed dreams, dramatic changes in financial standing. Gosh, it's everywhere.

Now a word from our sponsor, Abridge. Use Abridge during your visit with your primary care, specialist, or any clinician. Put the app on the table or desk, push the big pink button, and record the conversation. Read the transcript or listen to clips when you get home. Check out the app at [abridge.com](https://www.abridge.com) or download it on the Apple App Store or Google Play Store. Record your health care conversations.

Grieving loss of self 08:16

When I grieve my loss of self, I realize that I've lost a piece of me. I'm 69, yet the little 8-year-old Danny van Leeuwen still lives in there. I don't feel like I've lost that core little boy. One function, OK, several functions, gone or lessened. I've adapted before, I can adapt again. My team still assists, maybe a bit more than I prefer, but whatever. Adapt again. The hardest loss is spirit – pathological optimism. I get help with that first. Much rest on the foundation of spiritual health. While Mike was dying, my grief counselor said, *manage the stress you can so you can live through the stress you can't manage. Grief is such stress.* Gotta respect its place and let 'er rip.



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Well, Robert, my friend, you made a difference for your family, my family, and your communities. See you around the block!

Let's end with this clip.

Death in your life. Death in my life 09:38

Health Hats: *So your wife Marianne died not that long after Mike died. I'm wondering about -, I know they're very different experiences, but death is death. For not being a member of my immediate family, you were as involved in the experience of him being sick and dying as anybody. I've always wondered about how or if that may have affected how you experienced Marianne's death.*

Bob Doherty: *Wow. I need to think a little more about it, but I think the experiences are identical in that death is death. Death is so stunning and final. My wife died from an aneurysm and it took 18 hours from the beginning of the event to her loss of life. It was quick, bang, tremendous instant change. But they were the same in that the ultimate result of grief and loss is an appreciation of what you experienced and being alive and connected to that person. And, in summary, is gratitude. And I have accomplished that with my wife, and with Mike. I was able to fortunately to never personalize the experience. Her death was her death. I didn't wrap myself in cloth and ashes and feel sorry for myself. I was traumatized. I had to learn to live my life in an entirely different way. But somehow, I never felt resentful. And I watched Danny go through this process. He reached out for counseling help as Mike was sick and sicker. And I did the same within four days of her death. I was asking EAP for a referral to grief counseling, and I went to a group setting grief counseling. But throughout my experience, as heartbreaking as it was, and it was extremely heartbreaking, I never felt Danny shaking his fist at the sky or the gods or the world. And I didn't either. So, there was a commonality there. We both didn't personalize the loss as some injustice; we accepted life as it was going on. And we came very quickly to appreciate the power of the person that we love. So there was that commonality.*

Coping with life, doing our best 12:58

Also, I had an initial feeling on my right side, how can people just say driving around and shopping? Don't they know that the world stops, I felt that with Danny. I remember one day, shortly before Mike died, there he was just trying to do the best he could in all areas. And he told me he was sorry about not being as attentive at work as he had been. I think we were out in the hall, or there was a bench there, and we sat down. It was outside the hospital, and Danny cried. It was appropriate to cry and, we sat there, and he cried a little. I might've joined him with a little quiet tear. There were just two men together coping with life as life was taking us. And I remember Mike's funeral, a particularly sad event because he was so fricking young and vital. But his contribution to life can be seen on that video. It's remarkable that a young man, particularly a guy with some rejection and his family of origin, managed to accomplish at this young age. So that's how it was. We're appropriately sad at the moment. We didn't blame the world for a tragic life. We managed the way we best could. Our best was pretty damn good. I don't think there's much more to be said about it.



No regrets 14:20

Health Hats: *This morning, I talked to Ann, my wife, thinking that now I have this mission of empowering people as they travel together towards best health. And I realized that health is physical, mental, and spiritual and that while Mike was dying, he got stronger and stronger spiritually. And that was fascinating to watch. Really, he got stronger mentally first because he wasn't so strong mentally before he was sick. But then, in his last year, that philosophical, he got centered. That made a difference for all of us.*

Bob Doherty: *I think his accomplishments philosophically or spiritually were stunning. They were stunning. And I think it fulfilled both the true course of life, so what's important. Still, I also believe from your Jewish intellectual tradition, and he was the exemplar, the star, the person who understands and produces within that understanding of communication to the world to those immediate to him, but the whole world. I think he represents your life's direction, Danny. Just as you and I shared the quality of good services and rational management, we tried to manage in a humane way and didn't ask people to do more than they should have or asked them to do the best they could. And that's what Mike did. And that's what you did from the moment you met him. And with my wife, my second wife, we were married about 22 years I never had any regrets. And your relationship with Mike, as far as I know, have no regrets. It was welcoming and on the positive side of human connection and growth.*

Health Hats: *Oh, man. Yeah. What to say?*

Bob Doherty: *You're crying again? We know how to live!*

Health Hats: *Yeah. I wouldn't have given this up for anything. It was wonderful. The whole thing was wonderful. Painful. Wonderful.*

Bob Doherty: *Yes. Life is wonderful. It's got some rough edges that's for sure. Yeah. But for those of us that try to walk the earth and make it a little better. We know how to live.*

Health Hats: *Buddy, thank you so much.*

Bob Doherty: *Oh, you're more than welcome.*

Health Hats: *I love you.*

Bob Doherty: *I love you too, my friend.*





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