Abstract

Experiencing the death of loved ones is traumatic, leaving individuals with a profound sense of loss. Researchers often focus on the negative aspects of grief and loss, such as pain and psychological or physical symptoms experienced by the bereaved (Gerrish, Dyck, & Marsch, 2009; Michael & Cooper, 2013). However, a growing body of evidence indicates that after the loss of loved ones, many people grow in positive ways, a term called post-traumatic growth. Post-traumatic growth is an experience in which persons transcend grief and develop beyond their pre-loss functioning. Although there are many aspects to consider in post-traumatic growth, one important aspect is social support. Being supported by others is consistently mentioned in the literature as a critical aspect, in not only recovering from the loss, but growing and adapting positively after the loss (Bray, 2013; Gerrish, Dyck, & Marsh, 2009).

The purpose of this project was to make a quilt that visually represented the process that occurs when someone experiences loss and all its negative aspects, but beyond that, how one recovers and moves forward beyond grief and finds a life still worth living and enjoying. The quilt was inspired by a book, The Heart’s Journey (Pelikan, 2005). The creator of this quilt is a nurse who used planning and producing the quilt as a way to process her losses. Acknowledging the importance of social support, the quilt designer’s friend, also a nurse, highlighted the quilt with embroidery that demonstrates metaphorically, post-traumatic growth. The quilt has twelve panels that depict the hearts journey from being whole before the loss, slowly breaking apart, and being totally fractured, after the loss. Eventually, flower seeds fill the broken-mending heart, bud, and finally bloom as a demonstration of post-traumatic growth as the heart heals.

The powerful visual image of the quilt reminds viewers of the devastation of loss and need to acknowledge the struggle of the bereaved. But, the hope of recovery is also clearly depicted, with the possibility that loss can be transcended, especially with the support of others.

**This quilt is in the process of being completed.**