

Ep #295: Drowning Your Sorrows with Krista St-Germain



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Rachel Hart

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You are listening to the *Take A Break* podcast with Rachel Hart, Episode 295.

Whether you want to drink less or stop drinking, this podcast will help you change the habit from the inside out. We're challenging conventional wisdom about why people drink and why it can be hard to resist temptation. No labels, no judgment, just practical tools to take control of your desire and stop worrying about your drinking. Now, here's your host Rachel Hart.

Rachel Hart: Hello, hello. We have a special guest here today, Krista St-Germain. How are you doing?

Krista St-Germain: I'm amazing.

Rachel: We were just chatting, before I started recording, and I was like, we could just chat all day. But I'm so excited that you're here on the podcast. I'm so excited to bring your work to the listeners of *Take a Break*. Krista is a Master Coach. She is an expert in grief. She is a widow and a mom, and she is just an all-around amazing person who I love talking to. But her work is so, it's so important.

It is so, I think, often overlooked as well. How we kind of, as a community, culturally, individually, process and deal with grief and treat grief. And I actually brought her in to my membership a couple months ago, before I had my baby, because this is a topic that just keeps coming up inside *Take a Break*. People feeling like, I want to change my relationship with alcohol. But I have all of this grief.

And that grief can be, I, you know, lost a loved one. It can be grief about a marriage that ended. But people just feeling like, if I'm not drinking in the evening then I'm sitting with my grief, and like, how can you possibly ask me to do that? And that seems overwhelming and unbearable, and people really feeling stuck.

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And so, she came into the membership. We had an amazing, amazing class that she led and conversation, and I just wanted to bring her to all of you as well. Because I think that this is such an important topic and something really everyone needs. Even if you're listening right now, and you think like, oh, that's not my issue. You know, I'm not, you know, I'm just drinking too much, because I just don't want like the good times to end.

I really encourage you to listen to this episode. Every human experiences grief. Everyone that I know, myself included, struggles because we are not given a roadmap for what to do with it. And so, I really encourage everyone to just listen to this episode today. I know it's going to be amazing because Krista is amazing. So, welcome.

Krista: Thank you. Yeah, I know, people aren't usually as enthusiastic as you are to talk about grief.

Rachel: But here's the thing, it's true. But it really is so transformative. I could see how transformative it was for the people the that you helped inside the membership. And even the very first time I talked with you about it, you really kind of blew my mind in so many ways. And so, one of the things I remember you said initially... That initially I was like, oh, I've got to know more about this. You were saying, kind of, "We suck at grief. Like culturally, we just suck at grief." So, tell us more about that.

Krista: We do suck at it. I wish we didn't. And honestly, it's interviews like this, that will make us suck less, since I'm always so excited to talk about it, right? So, we suck at it for one, because we don't even talk about it. Right? Like we just kind of pretend it doesn't happen. It's the elephant in the room, it's not really something that we proactively have conversations about.

So, it should be no shock that then, when we have our own grief experience, you know, we are like woefully unprepared. And then, when we do talk about it, a lot of what we talk about isn't actually accurate, you know, or it's outdated. So, there are a lot of grief theories.

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Most people only know about the five stages of grief. Right? It's one of many theories, it's very misrepresented. It was never intended to be linear. You know, it was originally a study about hospice patients coming to terms with their own mortality, not what it's like to lose someone you love. And people have taken that and made it something that, you know, has, in their minds, these very finite stages. They measure themselves against these stages.

And, you know, they ask themselves, questions that imply that their experience is wrong or bad, because it's different than what they've heard the five stages of grief should be like.

Rachel: Okay, so let's pull these two things apart. So, the first is like, we just don't talk about grief. So, why don't we talk about grief?

Krista: I think it's largely because we are so bought into this idea that feelings are problems. And so, the natural extension of that is that grief is a problem. So, let's just not talk about it, right. We're supposed to be happy all the time. And when we're experiencing something other than happiness that is undesirable or a problem to be fixed. So, we just kind of avoid talking about it.

Rachel: Yeah. Just to build on that, I think what I hear a lot of people say inside my membership, is people saying like; this is just, it's too big, it's too much, it's going to open the floodgates, I shouldn't feel this way, I should be over it by now. But really, there is this sense of like; if I let myself feel it, if I go near to it, it's going to open something up, and it's like, I'm not going to be able to, I'm not going to be able to put it away.

And so, I think the thing that, that kind of mindset around grief, that often has people tried to drink over it, as a way to cope, I think people on the outside looking in, also have that mindset, sometimes. Like oh, I don't want to go down this path, I don't want to acknowledge it, for someone who I know is grieving because that might open something up, that might be too painful.

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So, it's like, that mindset affects both people who are grieving, and people on the outside who are you know, witnessing that. It's, you know, that I'm going to open the floodgates, is really kind of part of the problem.

Krista: Totally. And it makes complete sense that we end up in that space, when we're not really taught how to feel our feelings growing up, right? If the only way we know is to avoid, right, or to get away from, to react to, and we have never really been taught how to allow, then it's really easy to believe that you would be swallowed up if you let yourself go there.

And it's also again, it feeds into that belief that it's a problem to solve. If you think grief is a problem, or any emotion is a problem, and you see someone you love experiencing that emotion or in grief, then of course you want to fix them, but you can't. Right. And so, then we avoid.

Rachel: And so, it's okay, it's starting from this place of we're not given a roadmap about how to feel our feelings. Just like we're not, you know, we're not given a roadmap for what do we do with urges and cravings and desire and deprivation, right? Or, the roadmap we're given is very outdated. It's like, okay, just use willpower. Just use discipline, just avoid the situation, avoid being around it.

I mean, this is what so many people have tried, when they come inside, *Take a Break*. They've tried all those things. So, we're not given that roadmap, and then I think, you know, the other piece is we have kind of like an outdated understanding.

So, you were talking about the five stages of grief. I want you to just talk about this a little bit more. So many people are familiar with the five stages of grief. And one thing you mentioned is, you know, we misunderstand it as it's supposed to be a linear process, when that's not what it's supposed to be. But just tell us more about that.

Krista: Yeah, I mean, so appreciative to Elisabeth Kubler Ross and David Kessler for that work. Because at the time, it was groundbreaking, right. At the time, it started some really valuable conversations and the grief work

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that followed it, you know, has gotten us to where we are today, which is many, many grief theories.

But when you go back and you look at it, and you realize, oh, it's just like, empirical, like, you know, this is kind of what some people experience. as we watch them when they're coming to terms with their own death. You know, deny, and then they get angry, and then they bargain, and they get depressed, and then eventually, they accept.

And so, then we took that, and Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, if you will read her writing says, you know, I wish people hadn't taken my work and made it into something that was prescriptive, because it was never intended to be that way. And so, if that's what we think it's supposed to be like, you know, it also implies not only are there experiences we're supposed to have, it implies that we aren't supposed to have other experiences, right?

So, what happens when we have joy, as we're experiencing grief? Well, that's not a part of the stages. Does that mean, there's something wrong with me? Does that mean I didn't love them enough? Right? And if it's stages, then doesn't that mean, there's an ending? Right? Am I supposed to get to this place where acceptance is like a blanket thing that I feel, and I never experience pain again, related to this loss?

And if that's not my experience, which P.S. it's not anyone's experience, then am I doing it wrong? I must be, right. And then oh, by the way, I think it's supposed to take about a year. Something's going to happen at the one-year point. It's magical. We don't know what it is, but it's going to happen. But something happens, and we feel better. And if we can just survive the first year, which for most of us means avoid our feelings and distract ourselves. And let enough time pass, because we have bought into the narrative and the myth that time heals. Right?

So, then we get ourselves to a place where time has passed. We don't feel any better, because actually, we probably haven't allowed ourselves to feel much. We still don't have this skill of allowing a feeling. Now it seems, like

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there's probably a huge you know, depth of ick waiting for us, right? And we probably did it wrong. It's just a recipe for disaster.

Rachel: And it's very hard to see your way out of that.

Krista: It's such a... And then, nobody's talking about it. Nobody wants to talk to you about it, because they don't want to upset you, because they don't know how to be okay when you're upset. So yeah, it can be a disaster in the making. Which is why I love to have conversations about it in advance, because, you know, maybe some of your listeners are experiencing it now.

But maybe others will be helped by normalizing what it can be like, so that later when it happens to them, you know, they're a little more kind to themselves, and they don't suffer so much.

Rachel: Yeah. It was so funny, because I was just coaching someone inside *Take a Break*, I was coaching them on sadness. And she said something along the lines of, "Well, I just think I feel kind of sad in the evening." So, we weren't even kind of talking about grief. And I don't know what she was feeling sad about, but she said, "I just feel kind of sad in the evenings, and I don't want to."

And then, as we were kind of unpacking that, she was like, "Well, but nobody wants to feel sad, like sadness doesn't have a purpose." And it was such an interesting place to take her because I said, "Well, what if it does have a purpose? Like, do we want to be happy when someone we love dies?" She's like, "Oh, maybe there is a purpose to it."

But I think that like, so often, we lump this class of emotions together. And I know you would say that grief really encompasses a lot of emotions. But like; there's no purpose. Of course, nobody wants to feel it. Of course, everyone wants to avoid this. When you start to be like, well, but maybe there is a purpose to it. And, not that I would necessarily seek it out if I could choose to feel anything, you know, that I would pick that emotion. But that there is a reason for it.

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Do you think about it that way? Do you think that there's kind of a reason for it?

Krista: Well, yeah, I mean, I do. And what's coming to mind... I don't remember if we've talked about this before or not, but is the movie *Inside Out*. Pixar's® *Inside Out*.

Rachel: Oh my God, I love *Inside Out*. I love that movie.

Krista: Do you love that movie?

Rachel: We haven't talked about this.

Krista: So, Joy is the main character. Well, I mean, all the emotions have roles, but in the beginning kind of Joy is the boss, right? And so, you're watching all of Riley's emotions, and Joy is like the one in charge. And Joy thinks she's the best. And she really wants to control Riley's emotional experience, especially what goes in her long-term memories.

And, she does not understand Sadness at all. She does not think there is a value to Sadness, right? She like, at one point, she keeps trying to distract Sadness so that she doesn't touch anything. And like damage any of Riley's memories. She draws like a circle and tries to get her to stay in the circle. And then, you know, fast forward to the end of the movie. And you realize that Joy now sees the value of Sadness, right?

She realizes that the meaning in Riley's life is made more sweet because of the Sadness. And so, she actually turns over the whole emotional dashboard at one point, to Sadness, right. And she sees; oh, wow, okay, it's not just about joy.

And I think that's the opportunity that we have, right, is to really get curious in our own lives about what is the value of sadness? Do I want to be sad? We think we don't, but then when we dig deeper, I mean, if I don't want to not be sad that my husband died. Because to me to not be sad, would mean that I wouldn't have gotten to experience the richness of the joy that I had with him. Right?

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It would have been like, meh, he's gone. Right? Must not have been that great in the first place. No, it was amazing. And the depth of that amazingness is equally reflected in the depth of the sadness. And. I wouldn't want it to be any other way.

Rachel: So, there's finding a purpose for it. They're seeing that, I think, just acknowledging no one's escaping grief. It's coming. It is a normal experience to have, not putting kind of a timeline on it. But I think that that might sound a little scary to some people. Like Oh, God, well, the idea that, well, I had a year, that was my framework. And now you're telling me there's no timeline. Seeing a purpose for it.

And also, kind of noticing your thoughts around it; it's too big, it's too much, I'm not going to be able to handle it, I'm going to be overwhelmed. It's that kind of like, once I start crying, I'm never going to stop. Which is, we all have the experience of stopping crying.

Krista: Right? But no, I've been crying since I was seven. No. Yeah, we do stop. And I think that's it too, if we really go back and challenge some of those narratives and realize that they aren't actually true. And then, really see how sometimes the opposite is true, that it really is the resistance to the emotion that makes it compound, and makes it so much more intense when we finally do allow ourselves to experience it.

That just kind of being willing to ride the waves, is what makes the wave so much easier. But it's not like you're going to feel... When I say that grief doesn't end, I don't mean to imply that it's always going to be that emotional roller coaster. What I mean is, the reason we have grief in the first place, is because we have thoughts and feelings about a loss, right, a perceived loss.

And because we can't go back in time and change that the loss happened, that means we're always going to have thoughts and feelings about that perceived loss. But over time, we do get to choose what we would like

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those thoughts and feelings to be. We do get to integrate that grief into our life experience, right, and decide what we want to do with it.

So, it doesn't always have to mean that we'll be miserable. But I can tell you, I'm six years out from having lost my husband and I still have, I call them "grief grenades," right. I still have moments where a memory pops in or something happens, and all of a sudden, it's not something I'm consciously choosing, but like, there it is.

And if I had expected that was wrong, or bad, or I should be "past it by now," that's just not the experience that most people have. And it makes sense. You know, you go through and something momentous happens, or that brings back a memory of whatever it was. Of course, like, that's nothing wrong or bad. That's just a part of having meaningful relationships with other humans.

Rachel: I just want to stress how important and what a difference it makes when you have what, you know, what you're describing as a grief grenade, and then you're not judging it. You're not making it mean that you're doing something wrong, or that you're not over it, or that somehow, you're at fault, or somehow, it's a sign that something is wrong.

Because I mean, I talk about this a lot with urges, and desire and cravings. And, you know, I did a podcast.... I remember I did a podcast last year. How I had gone back to Vermont, a place that I spent a lot of time in, and I hadn't been there for a while. And the last time that I had been on like a particular trail, I had ended that hike by getting a six pack of beer with my boyfriend.

And I was on that trail, I was like; oh, I want to drink. I had this desire bubble up inside of me. And there was a time in my life, where I would have made that mean; oh my God, you're never going to be beyond this. You're never going to get past this. What's wrong with you? What's wrong with your brain?

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And instead, I was just like; oh, fascinating, right? And then, I made the connection, oh, right. The last time I was here, this is what my brain was like. This is how we rewarded ourselves for finishing a really tough hike. And just that, the fact that I didn't have any judgment connected to it. And it just allowed me to be curious about what's going on. It just, it moved through me so much faster. And I feel like there's a connection to what you're talking about with the grief grenades, as well.

Krista: 100%. I just coached somebody today on the same thing. Where, you know, her request to me was, how do I make it stop? Right? I, all of the sudden, I see a picture and I am a mess. And I, you know, like, make it stop. How do I make it stop?

Wanting to make it stop is what actually makes it harder. Allowing it to be what it is, is what makes it easier. And so, we don't want to try to make it stop. You didn't cause it. There it is. Now what? Right? And we go from this shouldn't be happening. I don't want this. Something is wrong with me, to no, this is just grief. There's nothing wrong with me, this is a very natural human thing to have happen. This is the part where I have a grief grenade.

Rachel: Mm hmm. Yeah, I think that is what is so counterintuitive. The idea of like, oh, allowing it is going to make it easier. Because we have spent so much time, and frankly, have been taught that resisting and avoiding and just kind of shutting our eyes, is the solution. And so, it does feel like; really, you want me to allow this? And, that's actually going to feel better?

But that is the magic, I think, of but what both of us teach here. Is that yeah, allowance. When you allow something, you can just move through it so much more quickly. So, I do want to talk about one more theory piece. And then, I want to kind of give some more practical kind of what people listening can do.

But so, one piece of your work that I find so fascinating, you talk about a concept called, Post-Traumatic Growth. Tell us more about that.

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Krista: Yeah. So, post-traumatic growth is a phrase that was coined in the mid-90's by a couple of researchers; last names were, Tedeschi and Calhoun. And prior to their work, it was kind of thought that, you know, you'd have this initial wellness baseline that you were experiencing, then something traumatic would happen. And the goal was, just to get back to the baseline that you were experiencing before. Whatever it was.

And what they discovered is that, yeah, some people weren't getting back to that baseline. Some people were getting back to that baseline. But then, there were these other people that were actually going on, and they were reporting greater levels of life satisfaction, than prior to the trauma.

And so, I started studying it. And so, I like to compare it to a tornado. So, I live in Kansas, we have tornadoes here. So, if a tornado comes and knocks down your house, which happens, I can tell you some stories.

Rachel: I don't like that.

Krista: No, I don't either. It's not my favorite. But it does happen, right? You didn't ask for it. You've lived in that house for a while. You've probably learned some things having lived in that house. You could just try to rebuild the house that you had, wouldn't be anything wrong with that. Right, you could take that same piece of property and rebuild a very similar house.

Or, you could pause, and you could ask yourself, what you've learned from living in that house. And you could thoughtfully take those lessons and redesign something that's even more to your liking, right. So, maybe you want more light, maybe you want a different kitchen layout, maybe you want an extra spare bedroom, right; you've learned something.

And so, that is post-traumatic growth. It is not, you know, experiencing deeper life satisfaction, *in spite* of what has happened. It is creating deeper life satisfaction, *because* of what has happened. It is leveraging what has happened, and then living a life that's even more aligned with what you value and what matters to you.

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So, you redesign the house, you rebuild the house, right? And this is where most people get stuck. It doesn't mean anything about the old house if you if you redesign it, right. And so, a lot of us are, we're very hesitant to allow ourselves to experience post-traumatic growth, because we make it mean something.

When it was a death, especially, you know, if someone that we deeply cared about, we make it mean; I didn't love them enough, they must not have been enough for me. Or, what will other people think if I'm happier in the future than I was when they were still here?

But I love the idea that it doesn't matter what happens to us, we still have the agency to decide what we want to do, with what has happened to us. And, we can use it to inform the choices that we want to make.

Rachel: Yeah, the idea of growing and leveraging a trauma, leveraging what has happened as a way for you to expand. Like that, to me, was so exciting to hear you talk about that, because that's really what I think is possible. Was what's happened in my own life, around my relationship with alcohol.

And what I think is possible for people who do this work, is that it wasn't like, okay, so there was a time, you know, where I had never had any alcohol. And then, I started drinking. And then, at some point, that drinking became problematic for me. And now, I have to return to this place where, you know, my brain never knew what alcohol was.

It's like no, now I'm in this place where I have so much more resilience. And I have so much more command and ability to be with all urges. Not just urges around alcohol, but urges around food, and urges to procrastinate, and you know, all sorts of urges.

And I have so much ability to allow my emotions, and be able to sit with them, and not make them be a problem. And so, it really is like I see my brain as not going back to where it was before, but actually leveraging the entire experience, to have more strength and more resilience and more

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ability. Which I couldn't have had, I couldn't have had that experience, without the years of real struggle and trying to figure this out.

And waking up and being like; Rachel, what is wrong with you? Why can't you learn your lesson? Why are you, you know, why do you keep making the same stupid mistake? None of this resilience that I have now, would be possible without that experience.

So, I love what you said, it's not like we are having this growth in spite, but because. That, to me, that's exciting. That is... And that's something that I don't think that either in my world, right, talking about alcohol, in your world talking about grief, I don't think there's enough conversation around that. That this isn't just something that you have to get through. This is something that you can leverage.

Krista: Yeah, I am continually shocked at how people look funny at me when I say post-traumatic growth. I mean, I get the strangest looks, right? Because people just aren't even aware that it's an option. And they aren't talking about it. And so, yeah, like, I mean, yeah, we could bounce back. But why not bounce forward? Why wouldn't we take advantage of what we've learned from our life experiences, and keep using that information to keep creating lives that are even more meaningful? Why would we not?

Rachel: Yeah. It's why I've always struggled with the term "recovery." Because I think, when I was 17, you know, right before I started drinking, in college, I didn't have any tools to deal with the kind of awkwardness or unease that I felt. I didn't have any tools around desire and urges and deprivation. Like, I don't want to go back to that 17-year-old brain. Thank you very much.

And in many ways, when I think of recovery, it's like; oh, okay, so like, you know, I'm returning to this place. I'm returning to this place where, you know, I was all good and well and healthy before. And I think it has people really looking backwards, in a way that's not helpful. As opposed to; oh, what am I learning? What am I practicing? How am I growing?

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And the idea that you can do that, you know, with desire. And, you can also do that with grief. Again, I think that goes back to kind of the purpose of all of this. Having a purpose really does make a tremendous, tremendous difference, when you feel like, there is some sort of reason.

And I don't mean, you know, oh, so-and-so is better off. I just mean, like, there's a purpose for the struggle and the pain. And you can see how it's benefiting you, how it's helping you grow and evolve as a person.

Krista: Yeah, you just get to be the chooser, the one who decides, right? It's not morally superior to grow from it, it's not inferior to not grow from it. It's just an option, and you're the boss of where your life goes. So, which one do you want? Right? That's how I look at it.

Because I do think people, you know, in this culture that kind of pushes grow through your grief, I do think people can kind of be off put by that, or think that it's they turn it into a should, right. Which then, kind of takes the whole opportunity away from them, which was there in the first place. And so, instead of thinking about it as something, you know, that's, we should do, what if it's just an option that we could?

Rachel: Yeah, I love that. All right, so let's talk about really kind of practical things that people can do. And that the first thing that I just want to say here, is I know... We're talking about grief, and a lot of times we think that that means well, it's about you know, the death of someone. But people can experience grief for all sorts of reasons. And I'm curious what you have to say about that? About the kind of spectrum of why people experience grief.

Krista: Yeah, it can be so much more broad than most assume it is. In fact, it's so interesting when I have conversations with people, and I'll point it out to them, like, oh, that's like, that's grief. And even though we're having a conversation about grief, they might not see it, right? Because we do tend to think about grief as death or certain types of events, as opposed to what

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it really is, which again, is the natural human response to a perceived loss. There are many things that we perceive as losses.

So, you know, maybe you were a runner, and now you can't run anymore because you had a hip problem. Or, you know, maybe you expected, like, you expected something to go one way and it went another; that's loss, right.

COVID, we expected, my daughter expected she was going to get to go to you know, the Crossroads volleyball tournament, and then it got cancelled. Grief. She never got to go to that tournament ever again, right? That's not a death loss.

It's so much more than that. It's we expect something, and it goes some other way. And it feels like a loss.

Rachel: So, how do people, like if we were to kind of help people see how to practically apply that. Is that just really asking the question like; is this grief? Like, how do people identify it for themselves?

Krista: Yeah, I mean, you could ask yourself that question if it's grief. Does it feel like a loss? Is it an expectation that you had, that went another way, right? Maybe you wanted to be married, but you got divorced. Maybe you were the one that filed for divorce, and yet, you still got divorced, and it feels like a loss because you perceived that you were always going to be married, and you didn't want to end up like your parents who got divorced, right?

Or, someone dies, and you had a very troubled relationship with them. So, it's not even necessarily that maybe you're as sad about their death as it is, you expected there was going to be time for you to reconcile. And now, you see that there isn't.

Rachel: So, I think just posing that question to yourself; is there a loss? Is probably less daunting for people, than; am I experiencing grief? And I think, people are probably more apt to be able to identify; oh, yes, I can see

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that there's a loss here. Oh, yes, I can see, I was expecting one thing and this other thing happened.

Krista: And the question might even be more useful, if it just assumed there was a loss, and it was what is the loss here?

Rachel: Oh, what is the loss? Yeah, I like that. Okay, so asking yourself, what is the loss? Now, when people identify that, the next thing that I see happen a lot, with people inside *Take a Break*, is they want to kind of decide that their grief is not justified. That they shouldn't be feeling this way. That it's especially, if it is grief connected not to, you know, death, then it's like; this is silly.

So, what then? What then are people to do?

Krista: You know, and I will just point out before we go there, like people even do this to themselves about death. Right? So, they will make themselves wrong, even over death losses. You're in an abusive relationship and you're about to leave and that person dies. And you experience that as a loss.

Also, part of you might feel a little bit relieved, right? And we 'should' on ourselves no matter how we feel. So, we could just typically stop the 'shoulding,' however we feel is how we're supposed to feel. And we know that, because it's how we feel, at that moment in time. And there really is no right or wrong, or good or bad, or should or shouldn't. It just is what it is because it is.

Rachel: Okay, so what is the loss? And, am I 'shoulding' myself? Do I have any shoulds or shouldn'ts around this loss that I'm experiencing?

Krista: I literally just did a podcast episode called; How You're Supposed to Feel. How you feel, is how you're supposed to feel.

Rachel: How you feel, is how you're supposed to feel.

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Krista: Right? I swear, that is the cause of so much suffering; is thinking we're supposed to feel some other kind of way, than how we actually feel.

Rachel: And I just want to add for everyone listening, don't think for a second that... Well, I'll just speak for myself right now, that I don't have to remind myself of this all the time. Right? It's like; oh, Rachel, this is how you're feeling, that's how you're supposed to be feeling, because that's how you're feeling. My brain always wants to... So much practice of like; no, we shouldn't be feeling this way. No, this is ridiculous. No, it's silly. No, we should be over it, with all sorts of emotions.

Krista: I should be past this, by now. My thoughts cause my feelings. Don't I know this already? I'm a coach. Yeah, yeah, I feel that deeply.

Rachel: Okay, so, what is the loss? Am I 'shoulding' myself? So, that's just I think, that kind of first step, is really just helping to bring awareness to what's going on. Because so often, it's like, because we don't want to look at how we're feeling, it's like, we're only kind of half seeing it out of the corner of our eye.

And just that awareness, I just can't state like, how transformative that is. Of like, acknowledging; oh, yes, there is a loss here. And, I'm 'shoulding' myself. Either I'm saying I should, or I shouldn't. But I have some judgment around it.

Krista: Yeah. And sometimes I think, too, it's worth pointing out that sometimes, you might have just experienced something very positive and then see the loss in it. So, sometimes I'll see this, and maybe you see it with clients who are, you know, not wanting to drink anymore, or change their relationship with alcohol, where maybe they create that for themselves, but then they start to see the loss. Which is all of those years where they struggled, you know, all those years, that wasn't what they wanted?

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So, it can come on the heels of something that actually feels like a major accomplishment. And then, you look back and you go; oh, look what I lost there.

Rachel: I mean, this is a huge thing, right? Because what people will say, and what I did for a long time is; look at all this time I wasted. I had a ton of grief around my experience of college. I worked very, very hard in high school to get into my dream school. I got in, and that is when I really started drinking.

And very quickly, was like, oh, this is how you feel confident? This is how you don't, you know, you don't kind of stand in the corner of a party and want to run away because you don't know what to say, and you feel so awkward. And so, my experience of college, a lot of it was very focused on; okay, so yeah, I'm going to get good grades, but like, let's just get to Thursday, or let's just get to Friday, so I can party.

And I spent years, really having grief around that. And telling myself; you wasted that time. Like, so many people would kill to, you know, have had the opportunity that you had, Rachel, and you wasted it. Because your focus was on having fun. Your focus was on, you know, the next like party I could go to, rather than taking advantage of, you know, what I could learn there.

And that was incredibly, incredibly painful for me for so long. And really didn't shift, until I started to see the struggle and my experience as the thing that was kind of the training ground, in a way, for my life now, and my experience now, and my brain now. But yeah, I had so much grief and so many shoulds around that, that took, I will tell you, a lot of coaching.

Krista: Yeah. And I think that's a really important point that you're making, too, which is like, I mean, maybe connecting some dots a little differently, but it is all still thoughts causing feelings. Right? So, all optional thoughts about what it means that we spent our time in the way that we did.

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And also, if we can allow ourselves to feel the effect of those thoughts, it's easier to process, right? So, it's not that we just want to necessarily say that, okay, just because I feel grief means that my thoughts are objectively true. That's not what we're saying. But a part of me does believe it, and therefore I do feel this emotion, and so it's present for me, and so can I allow it?

Rachel: Yes. So, I have to kind of deal with the fact that the emotion's there. I can't just try to think my way out of it.

Krista: Right. And then later if you, you know, open up new ways of thinking about yourself and your past or whatever it is, you might experience different emotions about the same loss, as it sounds like you did. But the process is, feel first; think second.

Rachel: Yeah, feel first; think second.

Krista: Bumper stickers. That's a bumper sticker.

Rachel: A lot of bumper stickers today. Because I think, so many people want to just think first and then, hopefully, not feel.

Krista: Yeah, hopefully not feel. Think first; feel never.

Rachel: Think first; feel never. Yeah, I mean, that's always the thing that I see when I'm coaching someone inside *Take a Break*, and I can see that they just have this, like, just tell me the thought to think. Just tell me what I need to think, so I don't have to feel this way about my past. So, I don't have to feel this urge. So, I don't have to feel whatever I'm feeling.

And that is always a sign that you are resisting that emotion. And as long as you're resisting it, it's always going to have the power. And that's what you have to do. Right? We can't just try to like use thought work against ourselves. We can't try to use thought work so we only, you know, feel amazing all the time. Because that's just not the human experience.

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Krista: No, and I just think, too, energetically that stuff just waits for you. It's not going anywhere. Like, it's going to be there. So, you can give it your attention and let it flow through you, or you can try to wish it away. But it doesn't really go away. That was actually really helpful to me when somebody told me like; the feelings of grief will wait for you. It's like, oh, okay, I can't outrun them. And so, maybe the easier path is I could just let them be what they are.

Rachel: And not judge them, acknowledge that they're there. Not make it mean that I'm doing anything wrong.

Krista: Exactly. Not give them any power, but just let it be the natural process.

Rachel: Yeah, and not try to overdrink, or overeat, or overwork, or all the ways in which we try to overdo things, as a way not to feel.

Krista: Yeah, and I think I did a lot of that. But it got easier, the more aware of that I became.

Rachel: Mm hmm. So good. What else do you want people to take away from this conversation?

Krista: So, you know, one thing I think we talked about in *Take a Break* was, we talked about the dual process theory of grief. And I think that's particularly relevant to your listeners, right? So, because sometimes we think about avoidant behaviors, and we make them bad.

And in grief, I think it's important to understand that sometimes there is a place for distracting yourself from the "work of grace." So, basically, dual process theory of grief says that there are kind of two bodies of activities: There are grief related activities, which are like thinking about your loss and feeling the feelings, and like we could say thought work and any, you know, emotional work.

And then, there's restoration activities, restorative activities. So, that's when you're not thinking about your loss, and you're not trying to process your

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feelings, and you're just like living your life. And maybe you're pursuing hobbies or doing things that take your mind off of the loss. And sometimes people who are into growth and self-help assume that we need to be like 100% in, you know, the work of it.

Rachel: Right. Like, never distract yourself, otherwise, you know, you're not doing thought work right.

Krista: Right. And so, anytime I avoid my negative emotion or emotion around this, you know, particular event, that I'm doing something wrong. And dual process theory of grief says no, no, not at all. Actually, what we want to do is go back and forth on purpose, right?

So, we want to spend some time in the grief related activities, we want to spend some time in the restorative activities, and the healing happens in the oscillation. And so, I think it's important that we prioritize time away from thinking about whatever the loss was.

And we prioritize things that are fun, and we prioritize things that have us, you know, not just focused on, you know, getting through it. But actually, on distracting, and we see that as a useful thing, as opposed to a sign that we're doing it wrong.

Rachel: I love seeing this as a balance and kind of like a flow in between the two. Because, I mean, I think that this comes up a lot, especially in the initial stages, when people are starting to do the work with me, when they're embarking on, you know, a 30-day break. It will be like, okay, so sometimes what they want to know; it's just like, give me all the things to just distract myself, to make it through.

And I always say; listen, it's not that distraction is a problem, or avoidance is a problem, or isolation is a problem. Because sometimes we're all going to do that. It's a problem when it feels like that's the only way through. It's like, can I find that balance? What does that balance look like? And, are the ways that I try to restore or distract, or have like a moment where it's like, okay, we're not just going to be doing like, all the, you know, feeling the

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feelings all the time. Is that like a conscious, considered choice, that feels good for me?

Krista: Yes. Knowing that, that will be so different from person to person.

Rachel: So different, from person to person. But I think sometimes what happens is, the narrative becomes like; okay, well don't have the glass of wine, just like take the bubble bath. Like, the bubble bath is all well and good, but there's only so much that a bubble bath can do.

Krista: It didn't solve your grief. There were bubbles, I don't know.

Rachel: I have managed to feel sad in a bubble bath, I just wanted to share. But it's that idea of like, we're moving between the two. And we're moving between the two, we're not using either against ourselves. And we're moving between the two, in a really kind of conscious way.

For much of my own personal journey, I didn't know that I couldn't move between the two. And in fact, a lot of how I tried to deal with feeling awkward around saying no, or having a lot of cravings, or desire, was like, oh, I just have to isolate. I just have to turn down invitations. I just have to kind of like, keep myself busy and not thinking about it.

And listen, that can get some days, you know, I got days and weeks and months under my belt not drinking doing that. But that didn't actually change the habit because I wasn't actually working with it. I didn't have that kind of other piece of the puzzle there. And I felt very kind of beholden to oh, well, the only way to kind of feel comfortable is to avoid. And so, it's got to be both.

So, I just love how much connection there is here. And partly why I get excited about this, and I think it's really important, is because so often the topic of alcohol and overdrinking, it really, I see it treated as like this other thing over, you know, over here, and it's different. And I think, just normalizing what is happening with your desire for a glass of wine, or your

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desire to finish the bottle, is actually not that different from so many other parts of the human experience.

That we don't need to kind of treat it as like, ooh, it's, you know, we're talking about drinking, like that's serious. So, let's put it in the corner here. The more you start to see those kinds of connections, the more you start to see that your struggle, even though on the surface may look very, very different from someone else's, they are connected. They are related in this really profound way.

Which is really, what we're trying to avoid how we're feeling, and we're 'shoulding' ourselves, and we're judging, and we're resisting, and no one has given us the tools to do otherwise. And so, I love making these connections. I love it.

Krista, thank you so much. Where can people find you?

Krista: Well, they can find, if they are podcast listeners, they can go check out *The Widowed Mom Podcast*. It obviously sounds very niche, but we cover a lot of good, grief and post-traumatic growth topics.

I am working on a certification, for those in our audience who are coaches, who are interested in learning how to get comfortable coaching grief. Because I know it freaks a lot of people out. So, if they're interested in that, they can email us at support@coachingwithkrista.com.

And then, website; coachingwithkrista.com. All the details.

Rachel: Amazing. Thank you so much. I really want all coaches to have this work. I want all people to have this work. And I think the more that we have these kinds of conversations, and we just normalize, and also help people see that there can be a purpose. And that, to me, is so transformative. So, thank you so much.

Krista: Thanks for having me, Rachel.

Rachel: All right, talk to you soon.

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