Bonni Stachowiak [00:00:00]:
Today on episode number 596 of the Teaching in Higher Ed podcast, Teaching, Learning and the Lessons of Grief with Christy Albright and Clarissa Sorenson Unruh. Production Credit: Produced by Innovate Learning, Maximizing Human Potential. Welcome to this episode of Teaching in Higher Ed. I'm Bonni Stachowiak, and this is the space where we explore the art and science of being more effective at facilitating learning. We also share ways to improve our productivity approaches so we can have more peace in our lives and be even more present for our students. Today, I welcome to the show on a topic that's important to all of us at various seasons of our life, the lessons that we take from our experiences with grief. Christy Albright has a PhD in organization, information and Learning Sciences from the University of New Mexico and a Master in Theology Studies and a Master of Arts from Garrett Evangelical Theology Theological Seminary. As a lifelong learner, Christy's worked as a professional musician, worship leader, educator, nonprofit manager, trainer, workshop designer, and facilitator, curriculum writer, teacher, and public school administrator. And she is joining me on the show for the first time.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:01:40]:
And she's joining her sister, Rissa Sorenson Unruh, who's been on the podcast a few times in the past. Since 2002, Rissa Sorensen Unruh has been a full time chemistry faculty member in Albuquerque, New Mexico. And her background in STEM education research blends practitioner research and evaluator roles and focuses on assessment and evaluation, specifically in ungrading and ethics in educational technology and assessment using mixed methods methodologies. And she's been on the podcast before and has talked about intersectionality, power and pedagogy, Critical Pedagogy in STEM and Community, and lessons from MyFest. Christy Albright and Clarissa Sorenson Unruh, welcome to teaching in Higher Ed.

Clarissa Sorensen Unruh [00:02:38]:
Thank you so much for having us.

Christy Albright [00:02:39]:

Thanks. It's great to be here.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:02:41]:
Rissa, I think about you almost 100% of the time these days when I get the honor of getting to give presentations. You help calm me down. And I'm going to invite you to help calm anyone listening to the podcast today by inviting us to take a moment to breathe.

Clarissa Sorensen Unruh [00:03:01]:
So usually what I have is some kind of beautiful picture of New Mexico sunsets. So put a picture in your mind of something beautiful that you just love looking at. And I want you to take two deep breaths with us. Okay, ready?

Clarissa Sorensen Unruh [00:03:21]:
One. Oh, this feels so much better. Now let's do a second one. Now we should be able to talk.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:03:29]:
Oh, thank you so much for that I was looking on social media because, you know, that's where all the good calming things come from, social media. And I haven't fact checked this yet, so I definitely shouldn't pass it on. But it was, you know, take a moment and listen to these birds chirping in a forest. And the claim was that hearing birds chirping calm human beings, because if there are birds chirping, that means there's unlikely to be predators in the area. And there were some other reasons, too. So I will maybe do some fact checking. I actually have someone who's in this stem field, but it's like. It's like someone saying, like, you know this one thing, so you must know all the things about all the things.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:04:11]:
But am I kind of on the right side?

Clarissa Sorensen Unruh [00:04:13]:
I should probably have heard that, too. So we're on the same page with that one.

Christy Albright [00:04:15]:
All right.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:04:16]:
Oh, good, good, good. Well, we're going to be talking about a very cheerful topic today, and that is grief. And you invite us to think about some counterintuitive things about grief. And in many of your presentations and your

writing and your work, you quote Andrea Gibson, an American poet and activist who says, "if you want to be happier, wholeheartedly welcome your grief." Rissa and Christy, we're going to be welcoming our grief today. But, Christy, I'd like you to start with even just the muddy topic of whatever is grief and what are the different parts of the process?

Christy Albright [00:04:58]:
Thank you for that. I. When I first started researching, none of the books that I researched on grief actually defined grief. It's like they just assumed you knew what it was because it's such a universal experience, but it's not universally experienced by everybody in the same way. And so I dug a little deeper and found three words that people seem to use interchangeably about grief. The first is bereavement. And if you go back and look at the etymology of the word, you'll see that that word bereavement has, through history, meant to rob or deprive. Another word is mourn.

Christy Albright [00:05:38]:
You might hear people say they're mourning. And in the etymology of that word, it is remember. So remembering is part of mourning and then grieving. Just that looking at that term, that word also brought us the word. Gravity or oppression are part of that word of grief. So when you think about grief as a whole, you're really thinking about being robbed or deprived, Remembering and feeling the weight, the gravity of an oppressive situation that all together is part of grief.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:06:17]:
When I was in my 20s, I got to volunteer working with these young people who had experienced trauma. And there are two distinct things I remember from that experience, even though it was more than three decades ago. One was that they used to have us use a picture, a piece of paper with lots of different hand drawn faces with associated feelings. And I learned about how difficult it was sometimes for people to identify how they were feeling, especially these young people. But that's a universal thing, certainly. And then also the Kubler Ross stages of grief. I imagine many people listening have heard of these elements, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. But your research and your writing has brought me to another stage which may be unfamiliar to listeners.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:07:11]:
Tell us about what we might learn about stages of grief and perhaps this lesser known aspect of another stage.

Christy Albright [00:07:20]:
Sure. Well, Kubler Ross and Kessler wrote several books together, and they talk about not formally as a stage, but I've adopted it as a stage in the conversations that I have. And that's anticipatory grief, which comes before any of the others. So anticipatory grief is when you know something is coming and you're already grieving that situation. For instance, my husband was sick for two or three years before he died, and I knew that he was going to succumb to his alcoholism and there was nothing I could do about it. And in those years, I experienced anticipatory grief and I experienced those stages as a before experience in anticipation of his death.

Clarissa Sorensen Unruh [00:08:11]:
And that's been true of a lot of folks in higher ed too, when they're knowing that their grants are going to be cut, when we've started to have lots of different lockdowns on what teaching can be and what it should look like, especially with like the, the Texas A and M stuff that came out recently. I think that there's just a lot of anticipatory grief all over the country right now.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:08:39]:
I'm so glad that you tied it to that experience, because it is something that I have been surprised at. You think about someone who doesn't get tenure. I work at a very small institution, but through the podcast I get to talk to people from all different types of institutions. And that is rather whether someone exists their entire time in higher education in a state of precarity, or perhaps if there was that feeling of, oh, I might not be. And then you have the what I'm now learning this anticipatory grief of. And sometimes I think, my gosh, these people know that for a year and a half in advance. Yeah, like how, how would you navigate that? And then, Christy, thank you for sharing that Powerful example of. With.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:09:25]:
With your husband. And. And I was finding my. My brain wanting to sort of, as you are describing that experience, into what aspects of anticipatory grief may have been helpful to you or to a person in general. And my experience of anticipatory grief is like, oh, my gosh, you know, someday my mother's gonna pass away. But, like, I've been worried about that for a very long time, and I think about what I give up when my overactive imagination pictures that. So what have you uncovered through your personal reflections or through your research or both, in terms of where. How do.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:10:06]:

Is that a helpful thing to think about anticipatory grief as sometimes helpful in healing and sometimes not?

Christy Albright [00:10:13]:
Well, grief is different for every person, and each of us experience each of our griefs differently. So Rissa and I, our dad died actually three years ago today, and we both experienced our grief over his death differently. And I experienced my grief for my dad differently than I experienced my grief for my husband.

Clarissa Sorensen Unruh [00:10:38]:
I experienced it differently when I gave up the PhD recently.

Christy Albright [00:10:42]:
Exactly.

Clarissa Sorensen Unruh [00:10:42]:
Totally different.

Christy Albright [00:10:43]:
But still big griefs and grief is different. There are different kinds of grief. So if you were to ask me, what griefs are you experiencing today? I could list several that I'm experiencing, and they might not. None of them have anything to do with actual death. But like the loss of, as I'm getting older, the loss of the ability to do things I used to be able to do, that's a grief. You were just talking about anticipatory grief as you think towards changes in your life that might occur because your mom would die. That's also something Rissa and I deal with. Even something as simple as you wanted to go somewhere for lunch and that fell through, that's also a little grief in your life.

Christy Albright [00:11:28]:
And so the way we deal with griefs are different every time we deal with them, no matter what the grief is. You mentioned finding meaning a little bit ago, and that's another stage of grief. And I just want to be clear when we say the word stage, even Kubler, Ross and Kessler didn't not mean a linear this happens, then this happens, then this happens. They were really talking about an experience that occurred pretty commonly amongst people who were grieving. But they could happen all. You could have several stages at the same time. You could have anger and then jump to depression and then find some meaning and then be angry again. That's all part of what they were talking about.

Christy Albright [00:12:13]:
But they used the word stages because English language is hard sometimes.

Clarissa Sorensen Unruh [00:12:17]:
And my. I Used to think of it, like, as circular or, like, sigmoidal or something. And now I'm like, it must be a fractal. Like, there's no way to, like, put. Everyone's is different. And it all looks very different depending on which grief it is.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:12:33]:
Yeah. I'm getting so distracted by fractals. And I'm gonna put this in the show notes because I like to watch this. Tell this television show. And I'm forgetting Hassan. Oh, I'm forgetting his name. I think it's Hasan Massa Minaj. But he interviewed eighth grader or a sixth grader.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:12:51]:
That's.

Clarissa Sorensen Unruh [00:12:52]:
Yeah, yeah, the mathematician. It was the podcast. Yeah. Recently he had, like, this crazy, super genius mathematician who was really young, and.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:13:00]:
He talked about fractals, and then he talked about coasts and how coasts are impossible to measure because they're constantly changing. And I just have it sitting in my head right now, you saying fractal and thinking of this. The two examples that they had of these fractals. Anyway, I'm gonna put the. I'm just. It's gonna be a bonus show notes for something that only tangentially relates to what we're talking about. But I can't help but be distracted and start thinking about coasts and how they're impossible to measure and how impressive that young man was. So.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:13:28]:
All right.

Christy Albright [00:13:28]:
It tangentially relates, but it's a perfect analogy because grief is so different every time that it's really hard to measure it and say, this is what you can expect. No, that's not how grief works at all.

Clarissa Sorensen Unruh [00:13:41]:
Which is good to figure out that societal constructs have very specific ideas about what grief should be, and that may or may not work for you at all.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:13:51]:

You mean, like, perhaps the two days of bereavement leave wouldn't be sufficient to, like, get over it now you've had your two days. Get back on the. In the saddle.

Christy Albright [00:14:03]:
Right, Whatever. Oh, gosh, yeah. That's exactly what we mean. But there are some things that are helpful. Like, some cultures or some relig might provide rituals that are helpful for you in processing your grief and in navigating your grief. One of the things we talk about is psychological capital and how that's a tool that can help you navigate your grief. But it doesn't work for everybody. Not everybody can use the different tools and rituals and cultural gifts that are part of the grief journey.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:14:36]:
What's an example of a ritual that a culture. Other than the funeral. No, no. I mean, other than the sort of white, white, United States fairly affluent. Get over your bereavement so you can get back to your job as a stockbroker. Sorry, I'm just. I'm like stereotyping left and right.

Christy Albright [00:14:54]:
Well, there's some cultures that require you to wear black or white for months or. Or year to symbolize your grief. I think one of the experiences that Americans might have read about was when the queen who just passed away, when her mother passed away, she wore black for a year. So there's some of those kinds of things. There are some cultures that require you to pay back any debt owed by the person who died. And that process of going through the finances and paying back the debts and settling all those accounts is the ritual that helps some people. But like all rituals, it's a ritual that can be harmful. To wear black every day might be harmful to someone who needs to move on faster than the time suggested by their culture.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:15:41]:
So that's actually a helpful distinction you just made, because I have been being perhaps overly silly about the shortness that we expect people to get over it in some aspects of culture. But then I would imagine now, as you're sharing that, that perhaps the opposite could be true of, oh, you're not allowed to, culturally speaking, move on until that time's past. And perhaps the person really needs that for part of their own unique healing.

Clarissa Sorensen Unruh [00:16:12]:
Yeah.

Christy Albright [00:16:12]:
The gift for me personally was that my work culture and my family culture both supported me grieving however long I needed to, in whatever way I needed to. And if, for instance, I got to work and I was a basket case and it was clear I'd cried my whole way into the office, my boss would say, we really love to see you. Why don't you turn around and go back home today? Or my coworkers would say, why don't you close your door today, and we'll knock if we need you. And family would say, oh, you're angry today. That's quite okay. That's fine. Not to worry. It's okay for you to be angry.

Christy Albright [00:16:49]:
We're kind of angry, too. And let's talk about how we're angry. I mean, it was really a gift, but not everybody has that gift. And so psychological capital is something, is a tool people can use on their own without anybody. They can create their own culture of grief and use psychological capital to help them navigate their own grief journeys.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:17:12]:
I definitely want to hear you share more about psychological capital, but before we do, just one quick question. Does the grief ever end?

Christy Albright [00:17:21]:
No.

Clarissa Sorensen Unruh [00:17:22]:
No. There's a wonderful picture that Christy has that has this moment that it's a cartoon, it's in under Grief on her page, which was just published. But the that grief. People assume that grief gets smaller and actually we grow around it.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:17:42]:
Oh, that's beautiful.

Christy Albright [00:17:43]:
My experience of grief is that the big griefs, as Wester Berg says, the big griefs in my life stay forever. And other big griefs will remind me of past big griefs. So when dad died, I remembered my husband's death, our grandmother's death. All of those things came flooding back and were part of that grief journey. Then smaller griefs, like, I didn't get to go to lunch where I wanted to. Those might actually go away. But maybe the next time you hear someone talk about that restaurant, you think, oh, I was going to go the other day and I didn't. That, you know.

Christy Albright [00:18:19]:
So in some ways they kind of do stay for a long time and we just go around them or we.

Clarissa Sorensen Unruh [00:18:25]:
Can find meaning with them.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:18:27]:
You invite us to consider some hope. And I need to tell you, before we start looking at the various aspects of a framework called Hero, we're gonna go through each of the four aspects of Hero. I just have to say that ever since preparing for today, I've had this song, holding on to a Hero stuck playing on repeat in my mind. So I kind of have to get it out of my system. It's out there now, and now I can be fully present for you. What should we know about hope as it relates to grief?

Christy Albright [00:18:59]:
Well, these terms hope, efficacy, resiliency and optimism are everyday terms for some people. Definitely hope and optimism are. And the way psychological capital defines them really comes from a positive psychology background. So positive psychology looks at what things are going right and how you can continue doing that, as opposed to regular psychology, which tends to look at what needs to be fixed. And so that difference in perspective also affects the definitions of these words. So for hope, it's not just your kind of willy nilly, hey, I hope that's going to happen. It's a much deeper concept in psychological capital. And it includes both the ideas of having willpower and way power.

Christy Albright [00:19:46]:
And by that I mean you have the willpower, you have the drive to try and make something happen, and you see a way for making that happen. So it's both willpower and way power.

Clarissa Sorensen Unruh [00:20:00]:
And the way power also includes searching out alternative options if your first way doesn't work.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:20:08]:
Right, which kind of, I'm seeing now a perfect transition to efficacy. Why would efficacy be important in cultivating that hope?

Christy Albright [00:20:17]:

Well, let me say something about way Power first. So one of the things I'm personally grieving right now is parts of my body not working anymore. And one of the things that isn't working right now is my left foot. And so I have the will to make it work. I really want my left foot to work. I really want to be able to walk without pain. But the first way that I tried was to change shoes. That didn't work.

Christy Albright [00:20:43]:
The second way that I tried was to do some massages. That's not working. So now I'm thinking perhaps a way to be hopeful about the future of my foot is to go see a podiatrist. But that's putting psychological capital, hope into action. It's both the will and the way. So efficacy is a belief that you can do it. It's really a personal, internal belief.

Clarissa Sorensen Unruh [00:21:09]:
It's the cat poster in action.

Christy Albright [00:21:10]:
Yes, some people call it self efficacy, but if we said self efficacy, then it wouldn't be hero. So we just say efficacy.

Clarissa Sorensen Unruh [00:21:19]:
We're not going for bandera here.

Christy Albright [00:21:20]:
But they're basically the same idea in psychological capital that efficacy is believing that you can and doing what you need to do in order to get something done.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:21:31]:
A really big insight that I've had from this podcast for years now actually comes from many STEM faculty that I've heard from. And they've separated in my mind, or at least distinguished in my mind between trying to help others have self efficacy just by what you say to them versus helping people have self efficacy. In their case, they're talking about students have self efficacy because they get evidence that they're capable. So rather than, oh, you can do it, buck up, you got this. That, that is a pretty empty promise for, for cultivating self efficacy versus let me put you in some conditions where you're able to fail, receive feedback, try again. And I'm realizing as I'm saying this distinction, it might take us nicely into resiliency, because I've just seen so many times where resiliency is kind of. That is the same thing of like, oh, you can do it, you got this. Just persevere without kind of acknowledging the way in which resiliency.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:22:41]:
What it takes, I guess, to have resiliency and maybe perhaps word that's healthy and where it's not as healthy. So what. What do we need to learn about resiliency as it relates to these positive psychology principles you're. You're introducing?

Christy Albright [00:22:55]:
Well, I'm going to back up again and talk a little bit about efficacy in that one of the ways you help people be more efficacious is to break bigger things down into small steps and then help them celebrate having accomplished each of those steps. When you do that, you build both efficacy and. And resiliency. And this is actually one of the things I discovered in my research and that I hadn't read anywhere in research prior to mine, which was the interplay of these four components of psychological capital. Hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism. I have used several analogies, but I think my favorite is the string quartet, which my sister pushed me into in a conversation one time. Actually, my dissertation defense. Thank you very much.

Christy Albright [00:23:45]:
Just a small conversation, but if you think about a string quartet, there might be. There are four instruments playing, but one of them might be resting, so you don't hear them. Well, when you're looking on the stage at a string quartet playing and one of the instruments is resting, you don't think, oh, it's a trio now. It's still the string quartet. There's still four active players. Just one of them is actively resting. And that's true for Hero as well. All four of them are so intertwined with one another that they really are all part of what's going on in our lives.

Christy Albright [00:24:21]:
It just sometimes we might not see hope or efficacy as strongly as we see optimism or resiliency.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:24:30]:
Yes. And now we move to optimism. And you encourage us to think differently than perhaps a traditional use of the concept of optimism.

Christy Albright [00:24:42]:
I do. My family will tell you that for the first 50 years of my life, I looked at life with rose colored glasses. Everything was just peachy keen. It was awesome. Life was good.

Clarissa Sorensen Unruh [00:24:55]:

It's a little toxic.

Christy Albright [00:24:56]:
Yeah, that's. This really is a whole other podcast. But that was the face I showed everybody. That wasn't really what was going on inside of me, which I'm just discovering at 57. Some of those internal conversations. But optimism in psychological capital is not dismissing the negative, it's acknowledging the negative stuff is there, but focusing on the positive stuff. So one of the things we're looking at outside of our window right now are cactuses. And when the cactus are in bloom, sure, you see the thorns, but you see the gorgeous flowers as well.

Christy Albright [00:25:36]:
And optimisms in psychological capital focuses more on the flowers than the thorns, but.

Clarissa Sorensen Unruh [00:25:42]:
Acknowledges the thorns are there.

Christy Albright [00:25:44]:
Absolutely. And I don't know that we defined resiliency, but resiliency is probably the easiest of them all. Think of a rubber band. It stretches and then it goes back into its shape or pulling up your boots and moving forward in life. Any of those images Resiliency is probably the most common of all the words.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:26:03]:
Where do you see? I think I so appreciate that you're acknowledging how these flow together. And I can't decide if this goes under optimism or resiliency or perhaps both. But where do you see the. Just the pull yourself up by your bootstraps kind of without acknowledging the reality of the challenges people are facing? Where do you see that as being? Introducing some challenges and how people might experience the grief process?

Christy Albright [00:26:29]:
Well, that goes in some part back to our conversation about grief in general. Some of the places that we live and exist in will just say, well, you've had your time, move on, pull up your boots and bounce back to normal. Or in a bigger concept, Covid. I remember during COVID people kept saying, well, we'll get back to normal at some point. I don't know anybody who got back to the normal that was their normal pre Covid. So one of the things that happens in resiliency is you might bounce back and find yourself a slightly different person than you were, and that's okay.

Clarissa Sorensen Unruh [00:27:07]:
Well, and I think optimism also includes recognizing that systems are fundamentally problematic, especially for certain groups. And so if we can. We can acknowledge the negative, we can acknowledge that there are barriers for all of us to get to. I don't think we're supposed to say that word anymore, are we? But indeed, the truth, this idea that. That for some folks, it will be harder to embrace some of these parts of hero, but that they're there and they're within all of us. And if you can do some little things to help build that out, it might be helpful.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:27:48]:
I had just had this flash of the words that have been said many times on this podcast for 11 and a half years. So we say those words all the time. But I'm. I've been doing some writing this week on curiosity. I've been curious about curiosity for a long while, and so I'm revisiting a wonderful presentation that Peter Felten gave about curiosity. It was one of those where you just come across something from many, many years ago, and it's so serendipitous. But a big takeaway is looking at curiosity as a skill. And so instantly, as I was preparing for this conversation with you, I'm very curious about what it might look like if we viewed grief as a skill.

Christy Albright [00:28:35]:
Rissa was the first one in a conversation that came up with that idea. And I think she's absolutely right, because skill, basically, when you talk about having a skill in something, you're basically talking about something you want to practice and get better at. And if you practice hope, you practice efficacy, you practice resiliency, you practice optimism, they will affect every part of your life, including all the griefs that we experience every day.

Clarissa Sorensen Unruh [00:29:05]:
I think we had a whole conversation about whether we're really skilling grief or skilling our grieving process or skilling our perception of griefs in our life and trying to figure out analytically what's a grief and what's not and when to use these tools and when to not. I think it. I think of it more like universal design now that, like just building the, building the hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism in any way we can is going to overall affect every portion of our lives.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:29:44]:
Before we get to the recommendations segment, I'm thinking about that some people may be having their own memories of grief, either that they're experiencing right now or just vivid times in their lives where they can remember

going, bouncing back between these stages. I would love to have either of you just give us one last nugget of wisdom around being gentle to ourselves. What should we remember about being gentle with ourselves?

Christy Albright [00:30:14]:
I remember very early, after my husband died and I had finished the allotted time given to me by my workplace to be away from the job and I was going back to work. I would go to work and I'd have one earring on, or I'd have two different colored socks on, or I had dark blue pants and a black shirt on. And I just decided at some point that they were lucky that I was actually getting out of bed and out of the house and coming to work. And it was okay for me to not be the polished self that I had pictured who I was before. And in some ways that has continued. I am much more gentle with myself than I had been prior to my husband's death. And that's been a gift of the grieving process that's continued into the years since his death.

Clarissa Sorensen Unruh [00:31:08]:
And for me, with the PhD analysis, from deciding to become permanently ABD, which was a big, big decision that I just went through recently, the grieving process for me was really about what's enough, what's good enough right now for my life and do I really need this thing that is really creating some real issues in my life. And so I think trying to figure out what good enough looks like is really difficult, but really important.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:31:45]:
Rissa. I think that my closest colleagues and I have this good enough conversation every single day of our working relationship. That's a very important question to ask ourselves and a necessary one And I think when you have these trusted relationships, can be so healthy to ask that on a pretty regular basis. You're also both reminding me of a wonderful Anne Lamott quote, which I'll put a link to in the show notes for anyone who's interested. But it's essentially about how she and her friend Rita have decided it goes through all these different things of, like, people not wanting you to show up. You should be ashamed of yourself for having the grief in the first place. Cause it's so uncomfortable for us. And if you are gonna show up, at least fake it.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:32:27]:
Like you. I'm not doing Anne lamotte justice, by the way. But if you are gonna show up, you know, at least could you please fake it like you're okay? And if you're gonna, you know, okay, you know, maybe we'll allow you this. So anyway, it ends with just kind of this idea of, we decided we are going to show up in the fullness of who we are, with all of it. And both of you are just reminding

me of that. The beauty of showing up. And my gosh, it sounds like you've been very fortunate to have people you work with who understand that, who understood you and your unique experience. And obviously, which was constantly changing as you've already described, how thankful to have that experience.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:33:09]:
I'm sure that there would have been many cases where that would not have been. Either people aren't equipped to do it or just aren't willing to go through that. Well, this is the time in the show in which we each get to share our recommendations. And mine may not seem related and they don't necessarily have to, but it really is. And I want to thank you, Christy, for sharing about your foot. I have very bad feet myself and can certainly relate. As you were talking through that, I thought even though all of our grief processes are different, it is interesting when we have these intersections of commonality. Anyway, I recently had a medical diagnosis and need to take medication twice a day.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:33:55]:
And that's really important for my short and long term health. And I had the experience of, after getting the diagnosis, just losing my executive function. And I'm very thankful to Dave, my husband. I can remember sitting on our back patio and I was trying to figure out how. Because also it's involving changing how I eat too. So I was trying to figure out how to calculate things. But when my executive function is gone, so are my math skills, be they what they may. And so he came out there and he finds me, you know, in tears.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:34:30]:
And I'm like, Could you just please sit here and help me add these numbers up and figure out what would be nourishing for this meal, you know, to have in the mornings and all the things. And so what has been extremely helpful to me in this process is an app that is called Capsule. And some of you might be thinking, we don't need another app. Why don't you just set a reminder for yourself? Well, the problem with reminders on most platforms is you get it once. So the nice thing about Capsule is it's designed specifically to be a medication app. It's designed for that. So the developer, by the way, is lovely and she. She has her own medical experiences too.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:35:12]:
So it's like someone who's developing an app like that who really knows that world. She also has loved ones who need to take medication too. So she just so artfully has designed a beautiful and functional app for this. But you can choose exactly what the color is and exactly what the icon's gonna look like, but you're

gonna get these persistent reminders and you can set up those reminders on a per medication basis. So I also take vitamins every day, but the vitamins aren't really that important. If I missed a day, nothing's gonna happen there. Versus I put this medication in the Capsule app and I have it set. You could set it for whatever duration you want, but I have it set every five minutes.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:35:53]:
If I haven't taken it. 7 o'. Clock. Okay, you're 7:05. Oh, you haven't taken it. 7:10. It's just going to keep going until I go get those pills and take them. And so, yeah, really, really recommend this app.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:36:06]:
It's been delightful and I so appreciate also supporting people who are building things to put good into the world and something that they can relate to themselves. She's a lovely woman, the person who developed it. So. All right, Christy, I'm going to pass it over to you for whatever you'd like to recommend.

Christy Albright [00:36:22]:
I want to recommend a couple of kids books, both by Peter Reynolds. One is called Ish and the other is called the Dot. Both of these books are wonderful stories about kids who have an experience that I would call grief and that people rally around them to help them see the hope, the efficacy, the resiliency and optimism. Now, are those words in the books? No, but you can see those things happening in the story. And so these two books have been part of my life for probably 40, 30 or 40 years. And just as we started talking about grief, we realized these books were perfect as A way to help people see how to really put hope, efficacy, resiliency and optimism into play. So I want to recommend these two books by Peter Reynolds and Rissa.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:37:21]:
Before I invite you to share your recommendations. I feel like I haven't really named something that just came out in the conversation. Thank you for your vulnerability and sharing your grief about the PhD. I think about people that I know who have halted at various stages and that is a really big, big thing. So just thank you for sharing that. I know it's going to be relatable to people whether it is specifically around an educational attainment but or other things that seemed like if I check off that box, then I'm going to done it, whatever it means. And so I just, since I hadn't acknowledged, I was sort of kept. Oh, oh.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:37:57]:
I, you know, we haven't, we haven't talked, you know, since this decision that you made.

Clarissa Sorensen Unruh [00:38:01]:
So we totally need to at some point.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:38:03]:
Yeah, yeah.

Clarissa Sorensen Unruh [00:38:04]:
But yes, it's been really, it's been really good to get to the place of saying no more.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:38:11]:
Yeah, you released it.

Christy Albright [00:38:13]:
She really enacted her inner hero in making that decision because she played with different ways through and had the will to finally say, you know what this is the way through is to not continue. And the optimism in the midst of a lot of negativity to say, nope, I'm going to see the positive aspect of making this decision and seeing the other side of was pretty awesome to watch her go through that process and.

Clarissa Sorensen Unruh [00:38:44]:
Painful and shout out to the continuity of care DM that we've had forever, that you've heard about because Kate Bowles asked me some really good questions that I was like, huh? Yeah. So thankful for her and thankful for that whole group and for everyone who has supported me through all of this.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:39:03]:
Wonderful. I didn't mean to take us on that tangent, but since we've been going on some tangents together, I figure we might as well.

Clarissa Sorensen Unruh [00:39:10]:
It's great. Did you want me to do some recommendations?

Bonni Stachowiak [00:39:14]:
I would like to.

Clarissa Sorensen Unruh [00:39:14]:
All right, excellent. I'm going to recommend Karen Costa's book, the new book coming out. So I got to review that book and it was so, so good. It's just going to be amazing. And it's on pre order right now through Johns Hopkins University

Press. And it's just, it was eye opening. It actually was because I was reading it at the time. My son had decided to not go to CSU anymore, to Colorado State University, and I could help him directly with things.

Clarissa Sorensen Unruh [00:39:45]:
As we were talking and as I was reading that I was like, oh wow. Yeah, we really do this. Like making a pros and cons list that's very detailed that you can refer back to easily. We tend to cycle an ADHD on one thing and make the decision based off of that one thing. And so it was just a beautiful timing for that book, but also just eye opening beyond belief. And then the other recommendation I had was to find there are folks, as you were saying, there are folks who are putting good out into the world and find something that brings you joy. For me, it's like good hang with Amy Poehler or Conan o' Brien needs a friend. Some of these podcasts that I only watch as vidcasts that are hilarious and just have joy embedded in them.

Clarissa Sorensen Unruh [00:40:41]:
And so I highly encourage folks to find something that really works in terms of finding joy.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:40:50]:
What a delight, Rissa, to get to reconnect with you and Christy. She spoke so much of you over many years. Just a joy to get to meet you today and talk with you. Thank you for both of your vulnerability and for what I have no doubt will be a healing, restorative conversation for people to listen to.

Clarissa Sorensen Unruh [00:41:11]:
Thank you, Bonni. Thank you for inviting us and holding space for this conversation.

Christy Albright [00:41:18]:
Absolutely.

Bonni Stachowiak [00:41:21]:
Thanks once again to Christy Albright and Rissa Sorenson Unruh for joining me for this conversation about grief. Thanks to each of you for listening. Today's episode was produced by me, Bonni Stachowiak. It was edited by the ever talented Andrew Krogeer. Podcast production support was provided by the amazing Sierra Priest. If you've yet to sign up for the weekly updates from Teaching in Higher Ed, I encourage you to head over to teachinginhired.com/subscribe. You'll receive the most recent episodes shown over, as well as some other

resources that go above and beyond those notes. Thank you so much for listening and I'll see you next time on Teaching in Higher Ed.