

FIVE STAGES OF GRIEF

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00:00

Eliška: Grandad was taken to the hospital in August. We found out later he had pulmonary fibrosis, a permanent scarring of the lungs. At first, I didn't understand how our family behaved. Everyone acted completely differently. At the beginning, I was just terribly scared that I might never see grandad again and that we didn't have any time left. So I started recording.

August

Anna (grandmother): How do you feel now? Is it any better? Or if you...

Jiří (grandfather): It's relatively okay now, it was difficult to breathe in the morning.

Eliška: Naturally, one tries to understand everything, sort it out, and when I didn't know how to go on, I came across the theory of five stages of grief.

Eliška: There is a kind of a study, or something like that, that there are five stages to grieving. It's a kind of a model by Mrs Kübler-Ross.

Do you want me to read out the five stages to you?

Štěpán (brother): I think I know them.

Eliška: So, what are they?

Štěpán (brother): It's denial and things like that.

Eliška: And what are the other things?

Štěpán (brother): Jeez, I don't know all of them, but it's something like that.

Eliška: Denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance.

01:27

Eliška: I asked the five people closest to me about the five stages:

My brother...

Štěpán (brother): I didn't want to believe that...

My grandma...

Anna (grandmother): It infuriated us.

My aunt...

Eva (aunt): And you keep hoping that it might get better.

My mum...

Alena (mother): ... where to look for the strength for this when you...

And grandad.

Jiří (grandfather): What else can I do.

Eliška: To understand the whole process I asked clinical psychologist Hana Neudert for help and we met in a café.

Hana Neudert: Eliška, I want to warn you about one thing. I can be epically broad and when I start talking, I can end up somewhere completely different.

Eliška: I'll try to curb you somehow.

Hana Neudert: Thanks.

Eliška: I told her our story and asked her to introduce the five stages of grief to me.

02:12

Stage one – denial

Eva (aunt): At the beginning when we took grandad to the emergency ward I felt terribly scared for him. And then when I called, after they had taken him to Olomouc, and we still had no idea what was wrong with him and then the doctor said that he might never return home from the hospital, that we should count with this possibility, that was a terrible shock. I called from work. I just cried and I didn't know what to do and how to tell grandma.

September – in grandma's kitchen

Anna (grandmother): Christ, my heart started pounding so much.

Eva (aunt): Come on, you can't be like this, we have to manage somehow, we can't break down.

Alena (mother): And when the doctor in Olomouc saw the CT scan of his lungs, she said why worry so much, it will be okay?

Eva (aunt): Well, when we were taking him away, when she told us to take him to Šternberk, she said it would be okay, that it was just some kind of insufficiency.

Alena (mother): So the CT scan must not have shown anything serious, or something.

03:22

Eliška: What did you feel? For how long?

Štěpán (brother): The feeling lasted the whole morning when I was found out at grandma's. I was trying to find some information on the internet, whether it was possible, whether it could be true. I tried to find out what it entails. And in relation to what grandma knew about grandad, I tried to learn something as well.

Eliška: What do you mean?

Štěpán (brother): Such as what his problems had been and so on, and what grandad went there with, so based on that I searched the internet. And I didn't want to believe that it might be something to do with the lungs. I tried to disprove it using the internet. I know it's silly but...

04:20

Hana Neudert: What is activated is the limbic system that is our emotions. It's an older brain structure and its purpose is to protect us from threats, to save ourselves. Its function is that the brain provides us with only as much information as we can cope with.

Eliška: There are around a thousand medications that can cause lung damage and my grandad was on one of them. According to the doctors, patients with drug-induced pulmonary fibrosis don't react to treatment, and even when they do get better, the changes in the lungs persist and artificial ventilation is needed to support their bodily functions.

Stage two – anger

Eliška: Then comes the next stage, anger, when you are trying to find someone to blame and you're angry about the whole situation or you search for someone you could direct your anger at, whom you could blame the whole situation on – did you have this stage too?

Štěpán (brother): Well, I'm all kind of introverted, so I hold everything back and I didn't blame anyone. I was angry, but who to blame? Like what do you mean by blaming someone?

Eliška: Like for example, whether you were angry with the doctor, because I was for a bit. And then I was angry not with God, I can't say that, but with someone who decides everything and I was angry that they had allowed this to happen, because I thought that grandad is the nicest person on earth and I was really angry that someone could have allowed this, because other people are bad and they are okay...

Štěpán (brother): I did experience it in that the anger came together with envy. That others didn't have to face this problem, they could do whatever they wanted and nothing bad happened to them. And that is just so unfair, that I envied those without problems.

Eliška: Who do you mean?

Štěpán (brother): For example those who smoke or something like that, they have unhealthy lifestyles, and they don't do anything. For example grandad worked for a long time, he's always been honest, he helped everyone and then this happens to him...

Hana Neudert: The first feeling of frustration arrives and you realise that this is a dead end street, but still some people can't believe it. They keep telling themselves that it will be fine, but then the clinical condition sends you the message that it is not okay, but you tried so hard, you hoped so much, you gave so much, you searched so hard and there was always this stop sign, and you realise that your hope has always been a little unfounded.

08:14

October – hospital

Eliška: It will be slow, but you see you're making some progress, what do you think?

Jiří (grandfather): The little things. I used to do the greenhouse...

Eliška: And what about you, grandma?

Anna (grandmother): The anger came when we found out, after they had done the tests, they found out that it was caused by the drug. It just infuriated us. They found out that his serious condition, the lung damage, had been caused by the medicine for his heart.

Eliška: It's horrible, isn't it, when it happens. And the anger is understandable when you know that it wasn't your fault.

Anna (grandmother): It is, it suddenly comes, the helplessness suddenly gets you. You still know that it wouldn't change anything anyway. Even if we tried to defend ourselves, what good would that do?

Eva (aunt): He prescribed him some medication and sent me an email that we should read the leaflet information carefully and consider whether he was to take the medicine or not, that it can cause bleeding and who knows what. He was like washing his hands off it, so I thought, 'What now?' He should have thought about it when he was prescribing the first pills and now he just wrote we should read the leaflet, how can he shift the responsibility, even though we don't have any medical training? We don't know whether it is suitable for him or isn't suitable, so he just put the responsibility on us. You know, at the time I was really angry.

10:29

Stage three – bargaining

Hana Neudert: When you crash your car, you hear the bang, your first reaction is 'it's okay, nothing's happened. It can't be so bad, it wasn't such a bad bang, was it?' And you go and check it and only then you see and you think, 'oh, it did happen', but we always believe, and again this is our nature, that it's not as bad as it might seem. And here it works the same way. We always believe that it's not as bad as it seems that it will work out somehow, it always works out. I always work things out. The doctors will work it out. There must be some cure, 21st century medicine is powerful, there's always a way and that's the bargaining, which I think we always have, before someone tells us, yes, but there are limits. Yes, we'll see what we can do and the hope, because now we fight for hope, we must never take away the hope from the person.

Jiří (grandfather): What else can I do?

Anna (grandmother): You do have some kind of a idea or hope that one day you can get rid of the oxygen and you will live like before, because...

Jiří (grandfather): Hope, there's always hope. But what?

Anna (grandmother): Because sometimes you spend an hour, an hour and a half without the oxygen and you can manage, can't you. So you are hopeful that maybe...

Štěpán (brother): I felt as if nothing made him happy before, so now that he manages things again, it's stupid to say again, but I can now see he's happy.

Eva (aunt): You keep hoping that it might get a little better, don't you? That this diagnosis of his, as all the doctors said that it's a long haul, maybe years, that maybe in a year it might be a little better, but...

Štěpán (brother): I thought to myself that 'whatever happens, make grandad come back home, under any circumstances, whatever the cost, I want nothing bad to happen to him'.

13:07

Eliška: After almost six months in several hospitals, grandad's state stabilised and he was able to come home with a huge box and a breathing tube on his face, but home. I took our dog Roza and went to see him.

November – at grandad's

Eliška: Roza, wait. Roza.

Eliška: Jeez, stop it, Roza.

Jiří (grandfather): Little Roza.

Eliška: Did you see the teeth?

Eliška: God, that was disgusting.

Eliška: She's so happy.

Eliška: What a dog.

Eliška: Roza, it's grandad.

Jiří (grandfather): She's laughing, hello.

Eliška: You finally get to see him, Roza.

Jiří (grandfather): She's recognised me.

Eliška: She has.

Jiří (grandfather): Yes.

14:19

Depression

Eliška: And when the next stage comes, the depression or sadness, when you are tired of it, helpless...

Alena (mother): That's me at the moment.

Eliška: Now?

Alena (mother): In this situation.

Alena (mother): I'm exhausted, tired and it keeps going on, it's actually getting worse due to other circumstances, for example that grandma can't walk and that we should expect that it is something that will need to be taken care of, another complication on top of all this. I don't know where to find the strength for this, when I still need to do my job, take care of my family, now the ill grandpa, plus grandma, who can't fully take care of him. And now you don't know what and how things will be, it's just so...

Hana Neudert: And then comes the depression and it is typical for depression to feel a lack of energy. There's also a clash with the reality and this happens when you realise how things are. 'Oh, it probably is like that, there aren't many options left. What now? But I don't want to die, I don't want to leave, I need to stay here.' Everyone has lots of reasons at any age why we need to stay.

16:03

Eva (aunt): And the strongest was the fourth one.

Eliška: The depression? Mum said the same.

Eva (aunt): I think that with me it also led to the health issues. You remember the rash I had? I was swollen, I had blotches on my body and even the doctor said it could have been a result of stress, that it was because of how long it all was. You know, and that it was such a really difficult time.

Štěpán (brother): It was, I'm not sure when exactly it came, but it was taking so long and we were told that it's not clear whether grandad will be ever able to return home from the hospital. It was almost near the end, not really near the end, in about two thirds of the time that he was there, and I felt there were other issues as well. I was tired, I even spoke to my friends about it. I don't know, I was, as you said, tired of it, I had no energy left to deal with it, I felt I couldn't cope.

Eliška: So you think you haven't reached the acceptance stage yet?

17:45

Stage five - acceptance

Alena (mother): Probably not, I think it will come, you count on it, but I don't think I have come to accept the situation as it is. Not at all.

Hana Neudert: Sharing time with the person, a hug, attention, these are big motives to keep on living, reasons not to give up and try, because we suddenly realise the relativity. We realise 'okay, I feel pain, I can't eat properly, I can't walk. But I can still be here with my loved ones, I can still see the sun, smell the flowers and I can still have my favourite cup of coffee that I've loved all my life. And I want to have it again tomorrow with my beloved wife or with my children or grandchildren.'

December

Who wants a cup of coffee?

Eliška: I'll have a small one.

Eva (aunt): You're drinking beer, Eli?

Jiří (grandfather): A drink for dad.

Eliška: No, this is for granddad.

Jiří (grandfather): Eliška will have some beer.

19:13

Hana Neudert: You always need some time to accept things as they you're your grandfather also realises that it's hard to live in his body. That he's not the strong healthy guy who was able to do anything. And that he might be a burden for you and he knows what his aches and pains are, his limitations, how difficult each day is, even though he's grateful for it. He might also perceive that there is no way back, he knows this, but the idea that you live like this for many years ahead might be frustrating and difficult for some people. And that's the moment when you think, I'll let go, I'll let things happen as they come.

Alena (mother): I know it will be difficult, I'm reconciled with fate, I might have felt like this from the beginning, I am aware that we need to count with this that we have to come to terms with it. But being okay with it? I don't think so. The rational acceptance, I've come to that, but I've certainly not arrived at the psychological acceptance. I think no one can, that it can't come. You can't accept it. Every time I see granddad with the tube on his face... it always comes back to me.

21:09

Eva (aunt): I think that now after the New Year it's been a little better. But it's still not... Every time I see grandad I feel like crying. I think you can never accept it completely. You have to come to terms with it, you must come to terms with the fact that that's the way it is.

Štěpán (brother): I'm trying to come to terms with it. I don't know, I've accepted that grandad will never have the strength to do things he was able to do before, that I will have to keep helping him till the end.

Eliška: You've accepted that?

Štěpán (brother): I've accepted that.

Eliška: And what have you not accepted?

Štěpán (brother): I haven't accepted that grandad is not okay and that his condition will not make his life longer, it will make it shorter. I'm worried he will not last long.

22:41

Jiří (grandfather): One woman in Olomouc told me she'd had the device for ten years, so that gave me a shudder. Can you imagine ten years?

That's... that's incredible. I say if you haven't had it on your neck.... I've had it for more than what?

Eliška: Six months.

Jiří (grandfather): Six months.

Eliška: You keep carting it around, don't you?

Jiří (grandfather): I keep carting it around like deadweight.

Eliška: But as grandma said, there's always hope you can get rid of it.

Jiří (grandfather): There's always hope.

23:39

Eliška: Everything needs time. I've been recording for nine months and I don't want to continue. It's great that things are stable, but it's not good that nothing is changing. During the nine months I've realised that just like grandad needs to go through the five stages, we need go through them with him.