# Case Study: Unexpected Loss

**Expository Text:** Grief is normal and natural, but to those who have experienced a significant loss , grief can upend their life, personality, beliefs about the world, and even their sense of reality. There is no standard time limit to the bereavement process and there is no right or wrong way to go through it. Some people get angry, some people become completely numb, and some people find their grief becoming complicated and seemingly intractable.

When a loved one dies suddenly, the bereaved may experience feelings such as uncertainty and disbelief. Click on each character for a brief description then click Let's Begin to hear the counseling session.

## Characters

**Christy Feltch:** Christy Feltch is a budget analyst for the city. Twelve weeks ago, her husband of thirty-three years died unexpectedly while on a routine overnight business trip. Since his death and funeral, Christy has continued to struggle and has finally decided to seek help.

**Martin Lewis:** Martin Lewis is a counselor at a private mental health practice in Riverbend City. Martin is a licensed psychiatric social worker who has worked with adolescents and adults providing individual, couples, and family counseling. Treatment specialization includes at-risk youth, parenting support, grief counseling, stress and anger management.

**Instructions:**

Listen to the scenario, which represents a glimpse into an initial counseling session. As you listen, consider what advice or thoughts you could offer the counselor on how to help this client. You may replay the scenario if you wish.

### Scenario

Christy:

It's crazy … the whole thing has been crazy. John is … was … a sales representative for a college textbook publisher. Part of his job is to check in with faculty and talk about upcoming courses they are going to be teaching, new products, that sort of thing. So, he goes up to Brown Trout Bay because he has several instructors he works with at the community college there. He made that trip all the time … several times a year. But … this time he didn't come back.

The worst … well, it's all the worst. The worst thing is that I missed his call. I was out with some of the girls from work. One of the admins is getting married and so we took her for a girls' night out. I was gone longer than I intended to be, so, when John called, I wasn't there. I missed his call, so he left me a voice mail and said "I'll see you soon, hon" … but he won't. See me soon. Because he's gone, I guess.

Martin:

Can you tell me what happened?

Christy:

He had a heart attack. I'm the one with the high blood pressure and cholesterol, but no, John leaves the hotel first thing in the morning and …. That's all we know. I guess he felt sick or something because he pulled off the highway into a rest stop … one of those little "scenic view" cut-offs and you couldn't really see his car from the road.

So, he didn't come home and I started to worry and I called his cell, but there was no answer. Of course there was no answer. Eventually, I called 911 and talked to the police but it was three days before they found his car.

And this is weird. Or at least, I think it's weird; the funeral director insisted that John's body was unviewable because he'd been in the car for so long. But … that doesn't make sense to me. It wasn't that warm when this happened. Not like the height of summer or anything.

Martin:

You weren't able to view your husband's body at all?

Christy:

No, they told me not to. The police and the social worker at the hospital told me I shouldn't and later, when I decided I wanted to see him anyway, the funeral director said it was too late. I couldn't argue with them – we were doing everything so fast and there were so many decisions to make. I had to take him to Deerfield, he grew up there … right outside Chicago.

Martin:

Chicago is quite a distance from here.

Christy:

Yes … it certainly is. I was always amazed that someone so gentle could have grown up in such a big city, but that's where his family is. There are family plots. I have one, too, I guess. His parents bought plots for themselves and their children and their children's spouses, but we never thought about that when we settled here. Who thinks about where you are going to be buried or that you won't be together? But, now I'm back here and he isn't and it's all so strange and terrible.

Martin:

I'm sure it is.

Christy:

I'm going to tell you something I haven't told anyone else. That message he left me the night I was out with my girlfriends? I play it all the time.

*"You must still be out with your friends. Sorry I missed you, but I'll be home tomorrow night. Let's do something fun this weekend… maybe get together with Dennis and Gail? Think about it and we'll talk when I get home. I'll see you soon, hon."*

When I hear his voice like that … I know he's gone, I know he's not coming back, but when I hear his voice, I actually feel happy again. For an hour or so. It's like, I think maybe I just made a really stupid mistake and he'll be home soon. I know that's not true … but it's easier to think that then to think about never seeing him again.

I don't know. I just feel like I'm going crazy. Do people ever go crazy from grief?

## Conclusion

Clearly, Christy is struggling. Martin knows that one of the first things Christy will need to do is work through accepting the fact of her husband's death.

How should Martin proceed? Consider the mediators of mourning that may be relevant to this case. You may want to review the case study again, paying attention to what Christy's comments indicate about her mourning process.

# Credits

Subject Matter Expert:

Ed Muldrow, Ph.D., Diplomate in Clinical Social Work Interactive Design:

Brent Berheim Instructional Design:

Felicity Pearson Project Manager:

Amanda Holman

Licensed under [a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 License.](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/)