



WEIGHT LOSS FOR BUSY PHYSICIANS

— with Katrina Ubell, MD —

Katrina Ubell: Well, hey there, my friend. How are you? Welcome back to the podcast. If you're new here, then a hearty welcome to you. I'm so glad that you're here. This is actually a really exciting podcast for me to introduce. I'm going to get to that in just a second. Before I get into the topic for today ... I know it's kind of crazy to be excited about grief, but I really am. I'll get to that in a second.

Okay, I want to introduce my guest on this podcast. This was just we had so much to talk about that this ended up being a two-parter. This first one's pretty long. I want to have you stick with me through it, though. It might take you a couple sessions, right? Little chunks to get through it. Maybe finish listening to it when you're getting ready in the morning or when you're doing some chores around the house or things like that, going for a walk. But, I cannot tell you how amazing, I think, that this interview is, these two parts.

Krista St-Germain is a certified life coach. She went through a, I mean, arguably very traumatic experience. She tells you all about it and the whole circumstances by which her husband ended up dying. Through her experience of that, she actually found so much help through life coaching and then became a life coach herself. So who she coaches now in her business is widowed mothers, but she has so much to offer for anybody who has experienced any sort of grief, any kind of loss. We even talk about the loss that so many of us are experiencing now with graduation ceremonies being canceled and all kinds of different things, just loss being loss. So even if you're not grieving someone right now, there's so much that can be learned from this.

I think this is going to be a set of episodes that you'll want to come back to. At some point, you'll want to share with friends or someone that you know who is struggling with a loss. This is, I just think, super, super good stuff. She's really an expert in this area and then brings the life coaching flint to it as well.

She and I totally connected over our joint loss, me having lost a child and her having lost her husband. I just think that it's ... She actually suggested to me to come on the podcast, and I was like, "Are you kidding me? How come I never have had you on? Absolutely. You have to come on. Your message and your help is so great."

So this first section is focused on the stages of grief, how we originally learn them, and how they really actually apply. Then, we also talk about how to know if you're avoiding your grief and what's a normal way to actually process grief and get through it. Then, we also spend some time on forgiveness after loss and should you do it. So many people say you have to do it. Do you want to do it? How do you forgive someone who has really done something that most people would agree is unforgivable? It's just such a great, great topic to discuss.

So it's one that I think you'll have fun listening to. It probably sounds like it's very heavy, but we have a good time, as we always do. I think you're really going to enjoy. So please enjoy my conversation with Krista St-Germain. And definitely tune in next week for the second part of that conversation because there's a lot more to come. Have a great week, and I'll talk to you soon.

Welcome to the podcast. Krista St-Germain, thanks for being here.

Krista St-Germain: Thank you so much for having me.

Katrina Ubell: Krista, I am super excited to have you on here. I don't know if you remember when we first met, but I do. We both were coaches already, and we were instructors teaching other people to be coaches. I met you, and I said, "Hey."

Krista St-Germain: Oh, that was the first time.

Katrina Ubell: I knew that you were coaching on grief, and I was like, "Hey, we should talk grief sometime."

Krista St-Germain: Yes. I forget that was the first time-

Katrina Ubell: And you're like

Krista St-Germain: ... we met.

Katrina Ubell: ... "We should."

Krista St-Germain: That's not normal, is it?

Katrina Ubell: "I love talking about grief."

Krista St-Germain: I love it.

Katrina Ubell: It's not normal for most people. I love talking about grief. And I was like, "Ooh, I can talk about grief with her." Then, we had a really lovely conversation and really hit it off. So I'm super excited to have you here, especially as a two-parter, to be able to share all your wisdom about grief. There's some stuff we're going to talk about that I can't wait to hear about because I don't know anything about it. And I don't consider myself a grief expert, but I do think I know more than the average bear about grief, and I can't wait to learn more.

I know this is going to help my listeners so much, not even necessarily in their own work or their own grief, although I think it really will, but also just in their ability to help guide other people who are grieving around them, whether that's patients or people in their friend or family circle or whatever. So, thank you for being here. Super excited about this. I always start off with just asking you to tell us just a brief little overview about you and what you do.

Krista St-Germain: So I'm a life coach. And specifically, I coach widowed moms. So about almost four years ago, my husband, Hugo, we were coming back from a trip, we both drove in our cars. I had a flat tire, and he, being the manly man that he was, decided he must change that flat tire instead of calling AAA. And in doing so, he was hit by a man who we later figured out had meth and alcohol in his system. And he died about a day later, so something that I obviously didn't see coming. I really had never envisioned myself doing this kind of work specifically with grief until I had such a loss in my own life. So kind of immediately went to therapy, back to therapy. I had already had a therapist who I loved who had supported me through other things in my life. That got me back to what I would say is functioning, that place where everyone's telling you how strong you look, and you're back to work, and you're getting the things ticked off the to-do list but inside you're feeling empty and hollow and kind of wondering if this is really it. Is this all that the world has to offer? Then, I discovered coaching.

Coaching was so powerful for me, that transformation that I experienced and the realization that I actually could go and create a life that I genuinely loved instead of resigning to some sad version of what it was currently for me that I decided to be a coach. And specifically, that's what I love to do for other women, is just help them figure out how to navigate their own next chapter and making it into something they want instead of resigning themselves to something they think they should just be able to handle or tolerate.

Katrina Ubell: Totally.

Krista St-Germain: So yeah.

Katrina Ubell: So you left your whole corporate career and everything, and this is what you do full-time now.

Krista St-Germain: Yeah, yeah. My husband and I had worked together at the same company, and I wasn't overall passionate. We made business jets, beautiful business jets. He loved aviation. I didn't really ... I loved the people there, but it wasn't meaningful work for me. So I think one of the things that often happens is when you experience a significant loss, you start looking at things so differently and you start valuing or time and your impact on the planet in a way that you didn't before. So for me, I started thinking, "It's good money. It's safe. But it doesn't mean anything to me, and I really want to do something that means something to me and at the end of the day that I just feel rewarded about doing," and aviation just wasn't it.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah, I think I can trace back a lot of the changes in my life positive and just leaving medicine and going into coaching and all of that back to the changes that happened to me with my daughter passing. It was a slow, slow progression, but I can trace it back to, like you're saying, valuing myself and my time that much more, just being more open to just all experiences. I mean, I don't know how it can not change you, going through something like that, and it led my down that path, too.

So thank you for sharing that. I'm glad you went through the whole story because I had already been thinking, like, okay, we have to get that out in the open. Because I know most people are like this anyway, but doctors especially would be like, "I can't even hear what's she's saying until I know how he died. What happened? Was it cancer? Is he in the military? What happened?"

Krista St-Germain: Right.

Katrina Ubell: But it really was this super, super tragic, tragic

Krista St-Germain: Yeah, totally out of nowhere.

Katrina Ubell: ... freak accident.

Krista St-Germain: Yeah, freak accident followed by some unfortunate events in the hospital. But all in all, less than a day from start to finish.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah, yeah. So super duper crazy. Still, you were telling that story, and I've heard that story many times, and I still just go chills all over because it's just ... And the way you talk about Hugo, too, just ... I don't know. Because it's okay to ... I always think when people like, "Oh, I don't want to talk about it," I'm like, "No, we do want to talk about the people who died."

Krista St-Germain: I know.

Katrina Ubell: We want to talk about him. I just love how you talked about how you had divorced. You finally were in relationship with someone who was so awesome, and that was Hugo. I mean, it's all variations on bad, right? But it was just that ... It was like you had that taste of how good

Krista St-Germain: It is exactly that. It's the taste of ... Because my first marriage, it wasn't what I wanted. But my second one, Hugo was proof to me that that is possible. It didn't last as long as I wanted it to, clearly, but gave me hope that it is out there. You can find it.

Katrina Ubell: Right, right. Which is super cool. Okay, well, thank you for sharing that.

Krista St-Germain: Yeah.

Katrina Ubell: So the first thing we're going to talk about is the five stages of grief, which they do teach us about in medical school. But there's more to that story, and you're going to enlighten us, so go ahead and tell us.

Krista St-Germain: I'm so curious. But now I kind of want to know what they taught you in medical school.

Katrina Ubell: The standard. This is the way it goes. But not in that order.

Krista St-Germain: Did they teach it as linear?

Katrina Ubell: No, they didn't teach that. I wasn't taught that it was linear. It was like you can totally do it in a different pattern. You can move forward, move back, which at the time I was kind of like, "Well, I ... " I haven't experienced a lot of grief at that point, and so it was kind of just more like learn it for the test kind of thing. But I do have to say that when ... So my daughter who died was born on Easter Sunday. The hospital staff apparently tried to text him, or page him, actually, back in those days, to let him know. He missed that one page. They just tried once. So he didn't even find out, my doctor, what had happened until the next morning. So he came in first thing, and I think he totally did everything. I mean, OB-GYNs deal with a lot of infant loss like all the time. It's pretty standard for them. I think it was such a shock to everybody that I think he came in, found out, had to come and talk to ... He hadn't had really any processing time or anything.

But anyway, the point is one of the things he did bring up was he was like, "Oh, you remember the five stages of grief and ..." He kind of tossed it out there and sort of like

Krista St-Germain: Here you go.

Katrina Ubell: ... "This is the thing I know about grief. Here." You know?

Krista St-Germain: Here.

Katrina Ubell: His intention was so good. But I remember being really angry at the five stages of grief. I was just like, "This is stupid. This doesn't even make any sense," so enlighten us.

Krista St-Germain: Yeah, and I think that's partly because of the way that it came about, and that's maybe what's most misunderstood is that, originally, the five stages of grief, you'll find it first in *On Death and Dying*, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's work. Her work was based on the process of studying people who were dying themselves. So it was really about the idea of how do we come to terms with our own loss, which is not necessarily how we experience the loss of someone we love. So that work as a little misunderstood because of just how it was used. Then later, she went on to write a book called *On Grief and Grieving* similarly using the five stages. But what matters is that this is one of many theories. It's just the most popular one, right? It's misunderstood, but it's the most popular. And because we live in a culture that really doesn't like to talk about grief and death, we don't know anything else, and so we just default to what we do know, which is not entirely accurate. So first of all, the stages are not linear. There's no sort of progressing one through another. There's nothing

Katrina Ubell: But even calling them stages kind of makes it seem

Krista St-Germain: I don't even like ...

Katrina Ubell: ... like a step. It really is a misnomer.

Krista St-Germain: And it is a misnomer, and it's not even as though everyone goes through all of those "stages." So it's anger, denial, bargaining, depression, acceptance. And sometimes people experience all of them. Sometimes they don't. What I love about any sort of theory is that it helps normalize the experience that you're having. Because when you're in grief, most of us think we're crazy.

Most of us think there's something wrong with us, or that we're doing it wrong, or that what we're experiencing is abnormal. So to be able to be told that if you're angry it's okay, that's useful. But to be told, "Well, this is the part where you get angry. Right now you're in the anger stage."

Katrina Ubell: Right. Especially if you get angry for one moment. You're just mad, they're like, "All right. Here's anger." And you're like

Krista St-Germain: Right?

Katrina Ubell: ... "Okay."

Krista St-Germain: Then later, anger might come back. It's not as though we experience an emotion once or some sort of stage and then we're done with it. So just really misused. So yes, many-

Katrina Ubell: Yeah, almost would be better to just be like, "Here's this bag full of emotions that are totally normal to experience when you're going through this process."

Krista St-Germain: At any point

Katrina Ubell: At any point.

Krista St-Germain: ... and at any duration. Right. And no timelines apply. And when you think of the concept of stages, unfortunately, what people take from that is that there's some sort of endpoint.

Katrina Ubell: I think I took it from that. I was like stage meets. Think about the stages of child development. It's like you develop past that, and then you're done with that, at least most of the time until you're an emotional childhood as an adult. But most of the time we think like, oh, we're complete with that moving forward. I was very in my grief very much like, "Okay, this hurts super bad. So if someone could just let me know when it's going to not be so bad and it's going to start being better, that would be awesome." And everyone's answer to me was always it just takes time.

In particular, there was one ... It was actually I used to take care of her kids. So at the time, she was a patient of mine, and she had reached out because she had had a somewhat similar experience I think six years prior. So she had heard what happened to me and actually came to the funeral and everything, reached out to me. We spent time together, and I remember just saying like, "But, how long does it take? I need to know when it's going to be better. I can do this." Which of course now I know is so resisting in willpower like, "Okay, I can do it. I can just hold my breath and my soul through if I just know when it's going to end." And of course that's not at all what the experience is like. And that felt very frustrating to me. Everyone's like, "You just have to be patient." I'm like, "Screw that. Screw being patient. I hate that."

Krista St-Germain: I think it's helpful if we tell people that it's not always going to feel as painful as it currently feels, but then we swing to the other side. And if we think that time is what heals, then we tend to avoid the experience of processing the emotion and doing processing all the ick, and we distract ourselves with things just to try to make the clock go faster.

Katrina Ubell: Right. If I can just get the time to pass, then it's supposed to be better. Oh, yeah. I see. I can see that, yeah.

Krista St-Germain: And sometimes, especially with widows, for some reason, we seem to think that something magical happens at the one-year mark. People tell us this.

Katrina Ubell: Yes, well because didn't women used to have to wear black for a year as like this whole thing like at a year you're done. Now you can come back and interact with society.

Krista St-Germain: Yeah, yeah. And as though if you survive the first anniversaries and everything that happens in the first year, if you get through that one time, then somehow magically it becomes easier, and it's just not at all what people typically experience, regardless of what their loss is. So I love the idea that, yes, it won't always feel as intense as it currently does and that time can be helpful, but we can't hide behind time heals and expect that just magically, poof, we feel amazing.

Katrina Ubell: One thing that happened to me that I thought was super helpful and I've told actually many people about this is that I was probably a few weeks out from my loss, and a friend of mine came over to just say hi or whatever. She said that she had just recently spent time with her grandmother who is well advanced into her 90s. So she was spending time with her grandmother, and she told her grandmother what happened to me because it was on her mind. I mean, everyone in my life was so ... Everyone was like, "How could this have happened?" Similarly I'm sure to you, right?

Krista St-Germain: Yes.

Katrina Ubell: Nobody could process it. Everyone was just like, "What?" So she said she told her grandmother, and her grandmother was like, "Oh, yeah, that happened to me, too." She's like, "What?" So my friend was like she had no idea. She was like, "Oh, yeah, he would've been," however old, "73. He was between your uncle so-and-so and your other uncle. I think about him all the time." And I was like, "Wait, what? Even in her 90s still thinking about him? Still missing him?" I'm like, "Oh, this is never going to end." That's really when it hit me. There is no when you're done. There's no resolution of this whole experience. It's just going to have various forms throughout my whole life.

That actually was helpful to me because I was like, "Oh, okay. It's not like I'm doing it wrong if I'm still experiencing these emotions. It's just part of the deal."

Krista St-Germain: Yeah, exactly.

Katrina Ubell: And I can open up to my whole life I'm going to miss her. And to be honest, it actually felt kind of good because it felt a little bit wrong to think about moving to a place where then I would just, I guess, what, never think about her or just have it not be an issue? It just seemed like that wasn't honoring her. So I felt like it kind of gave me some permission to just be like, "Okay, this is normal. This is okay."

I think what was also helpful about hearing that was it used to be that when someone had a stillborn baby they would've even let the mother see the baby. They thought it was better. So the woman would deliver the baby, and they would literally just take the baby out of the room and everyone would pretend like it never happened. Then, like get back at it. Have another baby. That's pretty much how it was handled. So I'm pretty sure that's how it was handled

Krista St-Germain: For her.

Katrina Ubell: ... for my friend's grandmother, right? So I'm like, "Okay, so even when the common practice is to sweep it under the rug, and don't talk about it, and don't even ever mention it again, you still remember that baby." I'm like, "Oh, okay." It's okay to do that. It's okay to still remember your baby.

Krista St-Germain: Yeah. It's just some of the language that we use doesn't point to that. When we say things like your grief journey, journey implies that there's an end.

Katrina Ubell: There's an endpoint.

Krista St-Germain: You're going to get somewhere. But you're exactly right. It's something that changes you, and it becomes part of the fabric of your life experience. And that's neither good nor bad, but it is. And it's not something

Katrina Ubell: It's like an incorporation.

Krista St-Germain: Yes.

Katrina Ubell: Just like you have all kinds of life experiences, this is one of them.

Krista St-Germain: Yeah, 100%.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah, yeah. So good. So basically, stages of grief is like don't even call it stages. It's just these are emotions that you may or may not feel. And if you feel them at any time, it's normal.

Krista St-Germain: It's okay. Right, and they don't last.

Katrina Ubell: You don't have to then go to I'm doing this wrong, something's wrong with me, and making it that much worse.

Krista St-Germain: Exactly. And that's so much of the suffering that I see in people who are grieving, is them trying to compare themselves to how they perceive it should be done based on what they know about the five stages or what other people are telling them and the feedback that they're getting. They should be moving on.

Katrina Ubell: Yes.

Krista St-Germain: And really, just instead of just letting it unfold as it does and loving themselves as it unfolds.

Katrina Ubell: Yes. Which, by the way, extrapolates to all emotions, right? Just knowing this is a normal human emotion. It's normal to feel stressed. It's normal to feel nervous. It's normal to feel frustrated. It's okay to experience this. I don't have to make that just go away, right?

Krista St-Germain: Yeah.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah, so good. Big parallels there. So how would somebody know if they are avoiding their grief? Because I think that this happens a lot and I think ... What I found for myself was I would think that I'd get to a pretty good place, and then there would be another layer that'd come up. And I'd be like, "Oh, huh. Didn't know that was there."

Krista St-Germain: So did you know? Were consciously trying to avoid that other layer?

Katrina Ubell: I wasn't. I didn't. I wasn't even aware that it existed. Then, it came into my awareness. What happened for me was because I hadn't really ever experienced any kind of really significant loss ... I'd had one grandparent who was alive while I was alive. She died when I had just turned seven, and she lived overseas. So I didn't know her and have a relationship with her, but I didn't get to go to the funeral or anything. She wasn't a part of my day-to-day life or anything like that. And that was pretty much all I've experienced.

So I immediately went to Amazon and bought all the books on infant death and loss and stillbirth that I could find and read them all. Some were more helpful than others. But, luckily, I read those and they all said you have to go through ... You can't skip this part. And what many of them said is that if you try to just stuff it down, what people find is that years later they've gained a ton of weight or now they're divorced or some other kind of consequence that they really didn't want. I was like, "Well, wait a minute. I don't want to get divorced over this whole thing." This was all happening before I even learned about coaching, before I knew anything about how coaching could help with my weight, but I already had been struggling with my weight plenty. And I was like, "Hold on a second. I don't want to end up gaining 100- plus pounds over this whole thing. Seems like I have to actually do this."

You know some people remember quotes so well? I'm not a quote rememberer in general, but there was one quote in one of the books that I read that has seared itself into my brain, and that is, "Grief is patient. It will wait for you."

Krista St-Germain: It will wait.

Katrina Ubell: I was like, "Oh, I get it."

Krista St-Germain: Yes. Yeah.

Katrina Ubell: I can do it now, or I can do it later, but there's no skipping this part. So I was kind of like, "Okay, I'm all in on doing it." So the people who are avoiding the pain are the ones who are like, "Maybe if I just skip it then I won't have to feel it." So let's talk about that. I'd love to hear your take on that.

Krista St-Germain: Yeah, and then it's made even more interesting by what they're being told from other people, right? So just stay busy.

Katrina Ubell: Because everybody else is an expert

Krista St-Germain: Just stay busy.

Katrina Ubell: ... even when they haven't had that or ... Just stay busy, right?

Krista St-Germain: Just stay busy. So I think it comes from ... The way that you know is when the emotion that you kind of sense is there is in the fear family. When you are afraid to stop doing something for fear that if you stop you will fall into a black hole, there's something we want to pay attention to, so if the idea of not working as much as you're working scares you a little bit because you're afraid of what will happen when you're alone with your own thoughts, if the idea of not running as much as you're running, exercising as much as you're exercising. It's any behavior including distraction with TV, and food, and alcohol, and any of those things, shopping, anything we're doing to just try to keep a lid on the emotion because it feels like a black hole that we're going to fall into and we just keep telling ourselves if I just don't allow myself to go there, then it'll get better.

Katrina Ubell: You know, I've been seeing in my clients a few of them who've totally put off their grief work are finding that now that they can't work, because, of course, we're recording this right now while we're in quarantine, that they're like, "Apparently, I have work to do. I can't run away from it anymore."

Krista St-Germain: Yeah, it's showing up.

Katrina Ubell: It's exactly what you're talking about now.

Krista St-Germain: The inclination to sleep more than you really want to because it's easier emotionally to sleep.

Katrina Ubell: It's such an escape. I remember that, too. I actually had seen a therapist right away. I went home on Monday, and Wednesday I think I gotten in to see this therapist. She had helped me with just some struggles that I was having with fertility issues. Luckily, she got me in right away and she gave me some good advice. She said, "Do not sleep more than eight or nine hours a day." I thought that was such good advice because I would've not left the bed and just try to sleep it all away. Whenever I was really nervous or scared about something as a kid, I would put myself to sleep. That was my coping mechanism to just check out. So I really would make myself get up because I really ... I didn't know what was happening. I was in such a dazed and shocked kind of existence. I was like, "Well, someone told me I can't sleep more than nine hours. I guess I got to get up."

I personally didn't have trouble falling asleep because I think being so emotional was so exhausting and I was wiped. So anyway, yeah, that's good. I'm glad you're bringing that up about sleeping too much.

Krista St-Germain: Yeah, I think it can be a little deceptive because you might think that you can spot that by a behavior that has a negative overall consequence in someone's life, but that's not necessarily the case. So you could throw yourself into reorganizing and redecorating your house as a way to avoid the feelings that you have. And it might look exceptionally productive to the outside world, and it's not morally right or wrong, but it also could be a way that you are trying to escape the feelings that you don't want to feel.

Katrina Ubell: I've definitely read this and heard multiple say this that after a loss you shouldn't move for a year, you shouldn't switch jobs for a year, things like that. Do you think that that advice comes out of the advice of don't make rash changes from a place of trying to escape?

Krista St-Germain: Yeah, don't make rash changes from a place of trying to escape. Also, just recognize that what's happening in your body and in your brain is really. You aren't able to think this clearly. You aren't able to process as well as you once did. And you aren't able to logistically or logically process things because the emotions that you're experiencing are so high and because the stress is just having an impact on you, on you physically. So I think that's where that comes from. Do I always think it applies? No.

Katrina Ubell: Well, it's like any time somebody tried to come up with hard and fast rules it's not going to work for everybody. But I do think ... When I heard that, I was like, "Oh, that's kind of good," good advice in the sense of just take your take. Don't be in a rush. Because I think sometimes we're like, "Well, hey, if I just switch jobs, if I just move, if I just get out of this area, then I'll feel better."

Krista St-Germain: Yes.

Katrina Ubell: "Then it won't be so hard if I don't have to see that area where that thing happened or if I don't ever had to go back by that place again or all the reminders of that person in that area. Then it'll be better." And yeah, you won't have those reminders, but it's not like you're going to forget that person existed in your life.

Krista St-Germain: Well, right. And what we know and I know what you teach as a coach is that it's never the thing that causes the feeling. It's always what we think about the thing that causes the feeling. And so if we just keep trying to change the thing, the job, the house, the whatever, then we might be really disappointed later when we realize we're somewhere else in some other place but still having the same emotional experience of it because our brain came with us. We didn't actually do the work at the thought level, and that's ... It can be an unfortunate surprise when people think the answer is to change what is outside of them. But sometimes with grief, changing what is outside of you actually can be useful. So maybe there was a really traumatic thing that happened in your house, and maybe it is best for you to have a different living environment.

Katrina Ubell: Right, right. Totally. It's so situational, right?

Krista St-Germain: It's the guidance, but it is so situational.

Katrina Ubell: Do you ever find just working with widows that people recommend, or suggest, or encourage them to try to find someone new, like get out there and start dating again quickly or get married quickly?

Krista St-Germain: Crazy town. It's crazy town. Yes. And it just makes me

Katrina Ubell: I only bring that up because people, of course, once you've lost a baby, they're like, "You guys are young. You can have another." I didn't want a baby. I wanted my baby. I wanted that one.

Krista St-Germain: I think people just are so uncomfortable with negative emotion, and they don't know how to feel better when we feel bad.

Katrina Ubell: Yes.

Krista St-Germain: So it is just their way without knowing it and with being very well intentioned of trying to get you to feel better so that they can feel better. And that's where all of those silver lining thoughts come from. You're young. There's plenty of fish in the sea. Don't worry. You can have another baby. Always trying to find the silver lining hoping that that will make you feel better so that they can feel better.

Katrina Ubell: Right, yeah.

Krista St-Germain: Not helpful to the griever.

Katrina Ubell: No. Not helpful to the griever. It isn't. We're going to talk about later, though, about in the second episode that we're going to do on this how to be helpful to the griever. But before we move on, you were telling me about the dual process model of grief, and I want to make sure that we talk about that, like how to actually process the grief. What is recommended?

Krista St-Germain: I know that you teach a lot about how we use specifically food to get away from our feelings. So what I think is important to understand is that when we're healing, we actually don't want to spend 100% of our time doing the loss-oriented work, right?

Katrina Ubell: Totally.

Krista St-Germain: We don't want to just be all in the grief, and trying to do the grief work, and trying to feel all the feelings and being really intellectual about the loss and all the processing. It's too much, and so what that

Katrina Ubell: But we kind of feel like we should be, right? I remember laughing at my son who was four at the time and then feeling so bad that I laughed.

Krista St-Germain: Yes. God forbid we would have humor through grief.

Katrina Ubell: I know.

Krista St-Germain: So inappropriate sometimes maybe.

Katrina Ubell: It's so inappropriate.

Krista St-Germain: Yeah, so the dual process model just basically says that we oscillate back and forth. We have loss-oriented activities and restoration-orientated activities, and it's okay and it's necessary for us to oscillate back and forth between the "work" of grief and rest from it. We can rest from it without buffering from it. Rest doesn't mean escape in ways that don't serve our lives or our bodies or our mental well-being. It's how do we give our brain and our body a break from the work of grief so that we can when we're ready come back and maintain that back and forth oscillation.

Katrina Ubell: Yes. Which is how children process grief.

Krista St-Germain: Naturally.

Katrina Ubell: They just do it on their own without knowing what they're doing, which that's actually super fascinating to me. I'm just making this kind of connection now in my brain. I remember when I was going through everything just being like, "Kids, they're so healthy. They do this in such a healthy way. It's so great," whereas we're over here just thinking we should feel bad all the time.

Krista St-Germain: You got to do the work.

Katrina Ubell: It's like oh, actually ... It's not like, oh, kids know how to do that. We do, too, if we stop thinking that there's a certain way that it should be done, or that we're doing it wrong, or that it's somehow dishonoring the deceased if you're not feeling terrible all the time or something like that.

Krista St-Germain: Yeah, no. It's absolutely a part of our healing, and we have to have that back and forth balance. And I think another thing we want to look at is using a substance to get away from a feeling is very different than consciously deciding to take a break from the work of grief. So consciously deciding, okay, I actually want to sit down and do a craft project, or I want to sit down and watch mindless television. But it's because I know that my brain needs a break and I will benefit from that.

Katrina Ubell: I can escape into the Kardashians right now, and that would be okay.

Krista St-Germain: And I do it with intention and self-love, and it doesn't come because I'm thinking that I can't handle what's on the other side of it. It's because I know that healing involves rest.

Katrina Ubell: Yes. Well, and what I love about that, too, is because the grief process is intense, right? I mean, this is my thought. I'm like, "Do I really want to say this?" But I'm just thinking it can be depleting energetically, right? I felt like it would take a lot out of me, and you can only keep that up for so long. It's like even if you're doing that deep sob cry, you can only do that so long before your body's done.

There's just nothing left. You have to take a nap or you need to go for a walk or whatever you need to do. So our bodies even tell us naturally if we're paying attention that it's appropriate now to leave that where it is and move into that rest space.

Krista St-Germain: Yeah, and that can be

Katrina Ubell: And rest doesn't mean necessarily taking a nap. It really can be just going about your day, the regular other things, going to work, thinking about something else, basically.

Krista St-Germain: Yeah. And people need to figure that out for themselves and stop judging activities as good, bad, right, wrong. What is useful to them that gives them the break that they need and is restorative in nature? It's not covering. It's not burying a feeling. It's helping them take a break, and they're different.

Katrina Ubell: Well, we're going to talk, like I said, later about how to support. Some it makes me think one of the supports you can offer to somebody is helping them to see that they really can do it. They don't need to be told how to do it. I was like, "I don't know how to do this. Let me read the books. Clearly there's a how-to way to safely, and effectively, and successfully get through a grieving process. I just need to find out what that is," rather than looking at that way, instead going, "You can honor yourself."

I mean, it's so similar to when you think about intuitive eating, right? Like eating when your body needs food. Also going, "Hey, what do I really need? Was my body and brain need right now? Is it to process some of this grief?" Because I would always say I had days where I felt like the tears were at my neck and then I had days where the tears were at my eyeballs. They're just ready to spill out. Those days, it's like, "Hey, I probably need to let some of them out so that they can recede and then I don't feel like I want to sob at every single second." And just honoring that instead of like, "Am I doing it right? Am I doing it right?"

Krista St-Germain: I'm amazed at how often I get that question. It comes in different forms, but that's the bottom line question is am I doing it right. Am I okay?

Katrina Ubell: So let's talk about forgiveness after loss. I think there's so much forgiveness that often can happen, forgiving yourself, forgiving the person who died, forgiving if you think that somebody else was to blame for the death. Say there's a drunk driving kind of a situation, blaming the drunk driver, so working on forgiving that person or just a whole number of things. Let's talk about that. But you also, I also want to make sure you talk about your personal story of forgiveness because it does involve one of the doctors that took care of Hugo in the hospital. And I just think that that's going to be super powerful for all the doctors who are listening who might have had a situation or experience similar to being that doctor and what your thoughts are about that.

Krista St-Germain: I guess before we jump into that, my overall thought on forgiveness is we want to not think of it as morally good or bad. It's always an option. But if you're the one that has the forgiving to do, it's not something you should do. It's something that if you want to do, you can. I see a lot of people really struggling because they're telling themselves they should, but yet they aren't ready to.

Katrina Ubell: You have a lot of firm beliefs about forgiveness and who should forgive, and why you should forgive, and ...

Krista St-Germain: Yeah, and it's morally right to forgive.

Katrina Ubell: Yes.

Krista St-Germain: And God forgives. People put a lot of expectations on themselves as it relates to forgiveness, and that actually makes it a whole lot harder sometimes and a lot more painful.

Katrina Ubell: Like the more you feel like you're forced to do it, the less you want to.

Krista St-Germain: Right, right. So if you want to, it's an option. You don't have to. And when you decide, if and when you decide you want to, you can. So I think that's important.

For me, it was kind of three major components of forgiveness that I went through. The first one was just forgiveness with myself because I had the flat tire and I had lots of thoughts about where I parked my car, if I'd only pulled it up further on the highway, if I had only gotten the car checked before the trip. All the things that I decided with my brain that I should've done differently than I did and then needed to forgive myself for. And so part of

Katrina Ubell: Believing that had you done those things differently

Krista St-Germain: He wouldn't have died.

Katrina Ubell: ... he would still be alive.

Krista St-Germain: It wouldn't have happened. It was totally preventable. This is what I was telling myself. I should have insisted we called AAA because I knew it was dangerous. I felt it in my bones it was dangerous, but I ignored that voice. So I had to go back and do that work. What I found really helped me the most was just really looking at why I did what I did and knowing that, of course, when we look back on something, we have new data. We have information we didn't have at the time. But nobody, nobody in the moment makes an intentionally bad decision. We're all doing the best we can with what we know at the time.

And to be able to go back through each stage and remind myself that I really was doing the best I could with what I knew ... And of course if I had known there was going to be an accident I wouldn't have parked there. Of course, I would've insisted we call AAA. But I didn't know any of that until afterwards, and that was what I had to come to for myself to be able to let that go and stop blaming myself and forgive myself for what I felt was my role in that. Now, who even knows, right? Who even knows what would've made a difference. So that was the first part was just

Katrina Ubell: You find out that people sometimes are reluctant to ... I find that a lot of people are very reluctant to believe that they made the best decision they could with the information they had. It's almost like this desire to cling to basically the beating themselves up, like they deserve. Like if I just beat myself up for the rest of my life, then maybe that makes up for

Krista St-Germain: Makes up for the awful thing that happened.

Katrina Ubell: ... bad outcome or, yeah, this awful thing that happened.

Krista St-Germain: Or, I think sometimes people think that it's actually genuinely useful. They think that if they don't beat themselves up, then somehow they won't apply the lesson or they'll do it wrong in the future. So it's kind of like how we weight loss we'll tell ourselves that we kind of want to shame ourselves into change but it never really works. And I think it's like the same thing here where we see something that happened in the past and we didn't like it, and so we beat ourselves up about it thinking that somehow that will lessen the chance that it happens in the future. Doesn't work that way.

Katrina Ubell: Doesn't work that way.

Krista St-Germain: Doesn't work that way.

Katrina Ubell: Okay.

Krista St-Germain: So that was the first part of it. Then, the second part, of course, was the driver that hit us and caused the accident. That, actually, that was work that it took a while, and it came in stages. But first, we found out that he had meth and alcohol in his system and had some prior convictions and other things happening in his life.

Katrina Ubell: And he survived the accident, right?

Krista St-Germain: Oh, he survived the accident. Yeah, he popped right out of the car right there as it happened. So I'm running around to the other side of the car. I actually happened to be looking down. I was sending a text to my daughter to tell her would be late so I didn't actually see the impact. I just heard it. But there was no brakes, right? So he hit the back of Hugo's Durango, which trapped him in between his car and my car because he was getting in the trunk trying to get to the spare tire. So then the driver kind of stumbled out of his car, basically, in disbelief, and ended up in the ditch. But, I was, of course, very distracted in trying to call 911 and deal with that.

But then they have him in the hospital at the same time and know that he was being treated there and just had a lot of anger towards him and had to work through that. Ultimately, for me, it was kind of going back to that same line of thinking for myself. Nobody, in my opinion, on a Sunday afternoon at 5:30 has meth and alcohol in their system if they're loving their life. This is clearly not a man who was happy, and he was probably doing the best job with what he knew, too. Even though it felt terribly short of what my expectations would be of a human driving a car on a highway and even though I think he should be held responsible of what he did, it wasn't hard for me to get to a place where I didn't believe that he did it on purpose.

Then, also just realizing that to hold on to anger for him didn't hurt him. He couldn't feel my anger. Other people can't feel our feelings. So to hold on to that anger would really just punish me, and I didn't want that. I genuinely didn't want that. We never went to trial, but just at his ... the hearing where they tell you how much time you're going to get in jail, I felt really good about telling him that I forgave him. I think it was very healing for both of us, for him to hear it, and for me to say it, and for his family to hear it from me that that didn't define who he was. That was just a moment in time, and that didn't have to define what he did with his life. And I really sincerely believe that. I asked him, "Please go forward and live for my husband, too. But don't let this-

Katrina Ubell: Oh, gosh. That makes me choked up.

Krista St-Germain: Yeah, it was

Katrina Ubell: I mean, what a gift you gave him and his family, right?

Krista St-Germain: I hope so. His family definitely, yeah.

Katrina Ubell: I mean, who knows what he'll do with it, but just giving him the opportunity to just know even the people on the other end of the worst thing you've done in your whole life are rooting you on. You can change this. You can turn it around.

Krista St-Germain: Yeah, it doesn't have to define you. And nothing we've ever done in our past has to define us, you know?

Katrina Ubell: Yeah.

Krista St-Germain: So that was the story with him. Then, the doctors in the hospitals. So long story short, procedure didn't go as desired. A resident was doing it. His supervisor tried to kind of come in and save the procedure, and was unsuccessful. So he coded, and so they did CPR and tried to save him for about an hour. It was one of those unfortunate things that in a procedure can go wrong and did. What happened was basically after we watched them do CPR for as long as they did and try, then you go back in the little room and they come to talk to you. It's all over. The doctor who was ... I don't know what the ... You're the doctor so you can tell me what the term is, but who was in charge basically and tried

Katrina Ubell: The attending.

Krista St-Germain: Oh, attending.

Katrina Ubell: Like the one who's not a trainee. Okay.

Krista St-Germain: Yeah, he was not a trainee. He just broke down into tears. I mean, it was clearly emotional for him. And told me that what had happened and that the resident had done the best job he could, and this was a complication, and that he tried to fix it and he couldn't. He was just so sorry. My family was in there with me in the room and one of my family members said something like, "So, basically what you're saying is that you killed her husband. You killed him."

Katrina Ubell: Oh, wow.

Krista St-Germain: It was quite the moment, right?

Katrina Ubell: Yeah.

Krista St-Germain: So he's crying. I'm crying. Everyone's crying. And he said something about how he needed to go and he had other patients that he was struggling to be able to think of how he could possibly help in his current emotional state.

I don't remember the words he said, but that's basically what he told me. I don't know. In that moment to me, I just felt super compassionate towards him because he was being so honest with me. Nobody wanted my husband to die.

Katrina Ubell: No.

Krista St-Germain: Nobody wanted that procedure to go the way that it did. So I just gave him a big hug, and I told him, "It is what it is. I know you didn't do it on purpose. You need to go. You need to do what you need to do for these other patients who need you." I don't know. I think some of my family thought I had three heads at that point. That was not the emotional experience I was having.

Katrina Ubell: You were already destined to become a coach.

Krista St-Germain: It was just, though, like you have such compassion. We're all doing the best we can as humans, and sometimes it just doesn't go the way we want it to.

Katrina Ubell: No doctor ever goes into procedure, or a surgery, or anything going, "Hey, let's just let this one go. Let's not try that hard this time." Always, the expectation is we're going to do everything remotely possible to have the best possible outcome always.

Krista St-Germain: And I watched him. I watched through that window. I watched him work hard. I watched. I could see the anguish on his face and there was not a

Katrina Ubell: So this was on the floor? Where was this?

Krista St-Germain: No, this was in the intensive care unit.

Katrina Ubell: Intensive care, okay. Because obviously if they're in an operating room you wouldn't be able to see.

Krista St-Germain: Right. So they were prepping him. He was going to lose a leg, and they were waiting for that doctor to be free to take his leg, maybe two, but at least one. So they were trying to run a PICC line to get him ready for another procedure after that. And because there was so much damage in his leg, they ran it up high and then punctured a hole in his heart basically.

Katrina Ubell: Oh.

Krista St-Germain: So again, not a medical person. I don't even really care to revisit all the medical details of what happened, but, you know

Katrina Ubell: I was like, "For most people, that's not relevant." But for the people listening to this

Krista St-Germain: It is probably relevant.

Katrina Ubell: ... they'll probably be like, "I need to know what happened." Yeah.

Krista St-Germain: So maybe that just opened a bag of worms for all of you listening. I don't know. But, the point being he didn't mean for it to happen. He tried his best to bring him back, and he couldn't. And we can't own that kind of stuff. We can't take that burden on. So to me, it was just easier to just tell him that and let it go and move on. Because it is what it is. And whenever we are where we are, it's so much easier just to decide that that's where we are instead of railing against it.

Katrina Ubell: Byron Katie has that famous quote, "Everyone dies right on time." And when I first heard that, it wasn't until maybe seven years after my daughter had died, and I resisted that big time. Like, no. I was really like won't even entertain that. I just was, for me, very much still in that medical mindset of, no, seriously, if we look at the odds and whatever and had I done this, then the chances of her being alive would be that. It wasn't. I mean, it took a while for that to really sink in for me to understand what that means is none of it was ever in guarantee. I can believe that there would've been a different outcome had I done something differently, but there's no guarantee that it would've happened that way. And all everyone dies right on time does for us is it just gives us the gift of stopping resisting what actually happened.

Krista St-Germain: I like to think that-

Katrina Ubell: So did you hear that? Did you know that already that that ...

Krista St-Germain: I did not know that exact phrase. How it was first presented to me was the idea of should and shouldn't. So for me, it came from Brooke Castillo, which was that to say that something that has happened shouldn't have happened. Byron Katie's when we argue with reality, we lose, but only 100% of the time. I struggled with this idea that he should have died.

Katrina Ubell: Right.

Krista St-Germain: Right. I was kind of somewhere in the middle where I could see the pain that he shouldn't have died was creating for me. But to actually believe the thought that he should've died felt wrong for a long time, even after I became a coach.

Katrina Ubell: Yes.

Krista St-Germain: And at some point, I realized, oh, wait. It's not that it's a should or shouldn't, it's that I have the choice to believe a thought that brings me peace. I don't have to believe that thought any time before I want to believe that thought. But when I want to believe it, if I want to believe it, I can choose to believe it. And at a certain point, then it felt empowering to be able to make that choice to believe that what should've happened was what was supposed to happen as opposed to having that kind of imposed on me.

Katrina Ubell: Right, like, "Hey, you need to think about it this way."

Krista St-Germain: Right. That's how I first received it, and it was another kind of one of those, well, eff you moments. Tell me my husband should've died.

Katrina Ubell: What do you know about it?

Krista St-Germain: Right. Yeah, no, he shouldn't.

Katrina Ubell: Yes. Well, same thing. My baby should've died. I was like, "No."

Krista St-Germain: No.

Katrina Ubell: That's not what was supposed to happen. But I think what helped me was ... And it's sometimes hard for me to even articulate how this really helps, but really thinking that it was ... just believing it was never going to be any different than it was. I just didn't know. I thought I was going to deliver a baby that was alive and was going to live a long, normal, healthy life. I just didn't know that that wasn't what was going to happen. And I can have some compassion for myself in that, just going like, "Oh, I just was confused. I just didn't know."

Krista St-Germain: Yeah, every

Katrina Ubell: And that is not like should or shouldn't. It's just like it was always going to happen the way it did not because of predetermination or anything because it was somebody knew, but because it did happen that way.

Krista St-Germain: Yeah, and that is really

Katrina Ubell: You didn't know that that was Hugo's last day on earth.

Krista St-Germain: Exactly.

Katrina Ubell: He didn't know either.

Krista St-Germain: Yeah, he didn't know either. And any time we ever tell ourselves a story, which is what we all do as humans, we have these ideas of how things should be in our mind and then they don't line up with how we think they should be. So that's when we create the problem. That's when we suffer.

Katrina Ubell: Right. Exactly. Exactly. Man, Krista, this is some good stuff. This is going to help so many people. Thank you so much.

Krista St-Germain: Good.

Katrina Ubell: Especially that story about the attending physician explaining everything and all of that. I mean, I'm not ever going to tell anybody how they should respond and whether they should be emotional with a patient or not or whatever, but I do think that being willing to be open and really share what's going on for you rather than trying to be some version of super buttoned up and excessively professional, I think that really does.

Krista St-Germain: For me, I think it made all the difference. If I had found out later that it was a mistake and ... Or however it had come to me, but it'd come to me in a matter of a letter, or data, or something like that, I would've had a completely different probably experience of that than seeing him be so human with me. It helped me feel so much compassion for him as a human who was doing his best.

Katrina Ubell: Yeah, he didn't go into work that day thinking that that's what was going to be happening, right?

Krista St-Germain: Oh, yeah.

Katrina Ubell: I just think about him and what happened when he went home and how long he was really struggling with that whole experience.

Krista St-Germain: I even got a Facebook message a couple of years later, actually, from one of the nurses.

Katrina Ubell: Oh, yeah?

Krista St-Germain: She was like, "You probably don't remember me, but I was one of your nurses in the intensive care unit. I was there that day, and I was with you in the room when you talked to the doctor and all of that." She said, "We still talk about that."

Katrina Ubell: Oh, wow.

Krista St-Germain: "We still talk about that experience and what a day that was for all of us." You have to know as

Katrina Ubell: Ugh, how moving.

Krista St-Germain: Yeah. People are trying, and it just doesn't always work out.

Katrina Ubell: Right, right. And even when other people can't see that and they offer you such a lovely way of their ... a lovely perspective, it's still the truth. You still get to ... You know you were doing the best that you could given whatever the situation was.

Krista St-Germain: Yeah, you don't need other people to agree with you to be able to find that space for yourself. Other people can have their own intensive negative emotions, and intensive reactions, and their own thoughts, and they will. And that doesn't take away from your ability to believe that you were doing the best job you could with what you knew and let go for yourself so that

Katrina Ubell: Totally.

Krista St-Germain: ... you can continue to go and serve other people.

Katrina Ubell: Right. Exactly. That's the thing, you can't let one experience like that completely shut you down. Yeah, that's not the point of going into medicine in the first place. Right. Yeah. Ugh. Super, super good stuff. So we're going to come back for part two, which will be

Krista St-Germain: Love it. Do it.

Katrina Ubell: But in the meantime

Krista St-Germain: People are like, "Wow this was ... Do we want to hear part two?"

Katrina Ubell: In the meantime-

Krista St-Germain: This was intense.

Katrina Ubell: This is some good stuff. So if people want to find out more information about the work that you do, how can they find you?

Krista St-Germain: Yeah, they can find me by going to Coaching with Krista, and it's spelled with a K, K-R-I-S-T-A, coachingwithkrista.com. That's my website. They can connect with me there.

Katrina Ubell: Okay. Awesome. Thanks, Krista.

Krista St-Germain: Thank you. Such a pleasure.