

Providing the Resources and Tools to Help Grieving Pet Parents Cope and Heal

A Special Interview With Erica Messer

By Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

Dr. Karen Becker:

Hi, I'm Dr. Karen Becker, and because of the overwhelming response we had to last year's Grief Week – I hosted a week specifically focusing on how and why we need to address the grief that we're feeling. If it's anxiety about a pet dying or a pet has died, being able to have tools and resources available to address the pain that we're feeling is really important. So, I did an awareness week covering grief and what I realized through providing these free resources to the world is that there are a lot more grieving people than necessarily people are talking about. And that they're looking for more resources, and a deeper conversation, and an ongoing conversation to facilitate their ability to move through grief. So, as an extension of this sensitive but incredibly important topic, I have a guest with me today. Erica Messer is joining me today.

She has had her own experience that you will hear from her heart and herself, but I am anxious and excited to interview her today because as a pet parent and also as a human that got stuck in grief, this is an interview that pairs well with our Grief Week Awareness program in that this interview will provide additional tools and resources, and ways of thinking about grief that weren't necessarily covered in that interview. So, without further ado, thank you Erica for joining me, and I appreciate you taking time to have this important conversation.

Erica Messer:

Well, likewise, thank you for having me and being willing to talk about it, and I hope that your listeners get a lot of validation and some help.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yeah. So, let's start by having you explain how you got to where you are, because I think for us to even talk about grief and then make it a platform or an ongoing conversation, or even moving on to helping others in grief, there's a pretty profound, impactful story that usually sparks a pivot. So, if you feel comfortable, if you would share your pivot point-

Erica Messer:

Yeah. Absolutely.

Dr. Karen Becker:

-that would be good.

Erica Messer:

Yes. How much time do I have?

Dr. Karen Becker:

Well, once we hear your point of pain, we are going to move past it. So, we won't focus on your – And some people say to me, “I don't want to talk about my pain point,” and I also get that. However, I know that you are a human that can talk about your point of pain, but then we will use that and move past in terms of how your experience has shaped who you are now.

Erica Messer:

Sure, sure. No, I can do this and I can do this without taking up the full hour. Well, I've been a musician my entire life and during the pandemic that came to a grinding halt, and I needed a companion. So, I adopted Wolfgang, who we called Wolfie, and I was with him 24/7. I mean, I was practicing at home and I started painting, but I just had all this time on my hands. So, he became my number one best friend in the whole world. And it's a sweet story how I found him. He was a little rescue with eye herpes and nobody wanted him. We bonded right away. He's like, “Oh, thank you, a savior.” But he actually passed from a tragic accident, and I go back and forth from telling people how he passed because I don't want to traumatize anyone else, but it was bad. It was an accident due to a friend. And so, there was shock and grief and trauma and blame, and all of these things just, “Poof, here you go.” The universe was like, “Here, handle this.”

And I really didn't have any tools at all to cope with any of that. And so, I was also living in Munich, Germany, and I didn't know a lot of people. It was a horrible situation. And we all come to horrible situations in our lives and it's like, how do we get through this? How do we live with this for the rest of our lives and not be scarred? And can I get through this and not be – How is this going to change me? I had all these questions, too. And I was really looking for – I said to myself, “Okay, I know I need some help. I don't have the tools for this, so there's got to be some books, or little affirmation card decks, or something simple.” And I just started looking and I was really frustrated with what I found because I would find books that looked great, but I thought, “Do I have to read this whole thing? I can't even concentrate right now.”

And I just kind of spiraled and I ended up just doing what I think anyone can and should do, which is just sitting quietly and asking, “What do I need to do to heal? What is it I need to do?” And kind of go inward. That was my experience. And gradually, some little nudges started coming, and ideas started coming, and one of the very first ones, which I'm sure many people have done, is to write a love letter or a love story. “Dear Wolfgang, here's all the things that I love about you. Here's all the things I don't want to forget about you. Here's all the fun things we did, how special you were,” and so on. And so, what I started doing was sharing these with my mom. She was helping me through my grief. I was calling her every day, and she said, “Sounds like you should write these down and make that deck you couldn't find as those cards.” And I'm like, “Yeah, whatever, mom, listen to this one.” Or “Let's talk about something else.”

And she kind of kept touching on it and coming back to that idea. So, in a nutshell, that's how I got here. I eventually gave in and we made this deck, and we made another one, and then things just started spiraling when we realized that it was applicable to many people, it wasn't just for me. And then we wanted to get it spread as far as possible. And it's just been building, and it's

been a great experience to be able to help others while I was helping myself. And that's just been a blessing out of everything.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yeah. Okay. So, for people that are saying, "Okay, what exactly do the cards do?" Are they tarot cards? Are they-

Erica Messer:

Right. Right.

Dr. Karen Becker:

What are you doing? Let's talk a little bit about the tangible nuts and bolts of – So first of all, I think it's a really good suggestion on writing things down, really good. I think also the fact that you lost your beloved from an accident – Dying of old age is one thing. Dying from an unexpected trauma is a whole different ball of wax in terms of emotions and any type of preparedness. There is no preparing because you didn't know it was coming. I mean, there's a bunch of stuff that we could and probably should unpack there, but you were Mack truck bowled over with grief that you did not see. It wasn't like you had an animal at the ER (emergency room), at 18 years of age, and the veterinarian said, "Listen, kidneys are shutting down." You didn't have these steps to say, "Oh my gosh, is this going down? Is this going down?" You didn't have any of that.

That's being introduced to grief in the most traumatic way, in my opinion. That gets hard to stand up and just trying to put some pants on for the day, that's a hard go, but you figured out a way to take a step by writing and I think that that's wonderful. So, did you take your steps and compile them then into something that's shareable?

Erica Messer:

Yeah. There are 30 cards designed to be read once a day with a simple tool, or practice, or suggestion. No, they're not tarot cards. Although, I mean, if that's helpful to people, great. I hope you find-

Dr. Karen Becker:

Whatever works.

Erica Messer:

-something that works for you, someone that can make sense of it, because I can't. But writing a love letter is one of the suggestions on the cards. There are also things about self-care and gratitude, releasing guilt. And I took these ideas, I actually flew home to be with my mom and said, "What about this one? What about this one?" And I started just shoving it in everyone's face saying, "Do you like these?" "Hey, sister, do you like these?" And so that's how we distilled down to 30 cards. And I like to display mine out on the bathroom counter, but really the practices and suggestions are applicable to my life today. Even the things outside [and] not particular to pet loss grief. We're working more as humans than we ever have, and we have to keep up with

that and take care of ourselves. So, it's really just building blocks to get you on your path to healing. It's how I like to think of it.

And I have to say that I'm not qualified. I'm not a health professional. I'm not a pet loss counselor, and I want everyone to know that, that I'm just a person and I'm sharing what worked for me. That being said, I used these as a springboard for people to search for the help that they need, should they need extra professional help. I did and it was great.

Dr. Karen Becker:

And so when you create – First of all, do you call them Wolfie cards? Is there a name? What do you call them?

Erica Messer:

Yeah. Wow. Well, we first called them Comfort Cards and what I learned was that was just too generic and there are already things out there called Comfort Cards. So I was like, "Okay, mom, we got to start over. What do we do?" And we knew we wanted it to be Wolfie's Wish. Well, that was her idea too. And I was like, "Well, what does that mean mom?" And she said, "Well, Wolfie's wish is that everyone finds joy again and walks through their grief in healthy ways." And I said, "That's a good one." So, we called them Wolfe's Wish Grieving Cards, and unfortunately, a lot of people contact me and think I'm selling cards you write and send to people.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yeah. But once you find a card to send to the person, you should include maybe this deck that would also provide some tangible steps that could help people in their grief, like maybe with the card send these.

Erica Messer:

Yeah, exactly. So, we actually won an award at SuperZoo last year for best new product in the gift category. So, that was great to say. We were like, okay, we'll keep going. And so, we do recommend that. It's a fantastic gift to give someone because what do you give to somebody that's grieving the loss of their pet? I mean, flowers are nice, but they die in a week and it's like, "Okay, well, here's something else." I mean, candles are great too. One of my friends has a candle memorial company and so there's lots of things. The most important thing to support friends and family is just to say, "How can I show up for you? How can I support you? What can I do for you? What does that look like?" Instead of us trying to guess what they need or say something that maybe is actually hurtful.

Dr. Karen Becker:

So, let's walk down that path because certainly that was the No.1 recommendation from the licensed social workers, and the grief counselors, and the psychologists, psychiatrists that I interviewed for Grief Week. They all talked about how important it was. Despite the fact that when you're in grief and you don't feel like being around anyone, it is really important that you have some emotional support during this process, even when you don't feel like it. And I agree

with you. Sometimes books, you look at some of the grief books – I don't want to say every grief book out there, but I am like you. I have a grief counselor on speed dial, and my grief library is bigger than most people's bathrooms. I have read a lot on grief because it's an ongoing issue in my life. I'm a veterinarian that kills things professionally.

There's stuff there. It's hard. Hard. So, I have a very large resource that I have used through reading to help my soul move through my incredibly hard job. But if people don't have a library they can go to – and what I will tell you in reading those books is some of them were incredibly helpful, and some of them were awful and I believe almost stalled me in my process because-

Erica Messer:

Oh, no.

Dr. Karen Becker:

-they were suggesting things that you were not applicable or not helpful, or also came at a direction that was like, oh my gosh. Just aligning in terms of principles that were way off base. It's hard to know what to align with when you're just trying to tread water and make it through the day. So, if you can get a referral on a book or a resource from a trusted friend that knows you and has read the book, take it. But for people who maybe this is their first animal and they've never even thought about [it], “Oh my gosh, I didn't expect this going down now.” And then they find themselves in the grips of grief, it's hard to know. You can Google books on animal grief. I've done that and it's overwhelming and not necessarily helpful. And just the fact that you say, “what we need to say to people” – So we're going to walk through two paths.

So, I understand that you're not a licensed therapist and neither am I. I'm a vet with a ton of experience around euthanasia and helping beloved souls that are at the center of someone's universe transition. That's my kind of street cred, but that's all I have, 25 years of intense street credentials. You've also created a resource out of your own pain. So, what we can do is walk as non-professionals and compare notes.

Erica Messer:

Okay.

Dr. Karen Becker:

When I say non-professional walking, it's non-licensed grief counselors comparing notes. Was it helpful to you to have your mom and people around you say, “I don't know what you need right now, but can you identify something?” Was that that beneficial for you?

Erica Messer:

Well, they didn't actually say that. I don't even think my husband and my mom really knew what to say. My mom is a serial cat owner and they're all buried in her yard and she knows that pain. But really, I think the natural thing to do is to just be with the person, and relate, and say, “I understand.” And then it's back on me again. So there was this – I didn't really know what to expect from support, and looking back in hindsight, that's what I'd like to share with people. If

my best friend's dog has to be euthanized today, what can I help you with? Do you want me to check in on you? Do you want me to leave you alone? Because everyone grieves differently. And so, I think it's just the conversation, just open the conversation to, "Do you want me to be with you right now?" And so, my mom would just be with me on the phone, through the crying, through the questioning, all of that, and she could bear that cross and not everyone can.

And so that's why I think grief groups or a pet loss counselor that understands that pain but can also help you get through it is really important. Because as a society we're told to, in America, we're told not to talk about grief. We're not told that, but people want you to feel okay. Our greeting exchange is, "Hi, how are you?" "I'm fine, thank you." And then you move on. And people are really uncomfortable when you're not okay. So, finding people that you can be real and authentic with, that understand your pain, I think is super important. And maybe those people are already around you and maybe they're not. So, there are Facebook groups, there are free grief groups. I list those on my website. And also, there's a new one called Pet Cloud, which I love. So, finding that support, and I like to think of it as backup, is one of the first things. Do you agree?

Dr. Karen Becker:

I totally agree and if you're blessed enough to have a strong social circle or even one person that gets you, that's enough that you can lean, and cry, and be real with. For me, I am blessed to have an incredible social circle of support. For me, my pain is in recognizing how many of my clients don't. They are alone. Their lifeline was their animal, and he or she just died, and they don't have anyone. Those are my clients that keep me up at night. So, if you don't have a social circle, I think it can be really hard because you're not used to sharing how you feel or people around you – My people know when something dies, I want to be alone. My people know that. But they know that if they want to drop off hot tea, or I'll eat food that someone else makes because I typically quit eating, and then if people want to bring me food, I'll eat it.

My people know what I do when I'm grieving. That's a blessing. If people don't have that, then they are very much alone and no one is making them food and no one is checking on them. And if they have a job, they have to show up to work and pretend like everything's fine or face the whole, "You're this upset because your cat died?" comments and all that goes along with not having people to talk to. So I want to spend 30 seconds plugging, however hard it is to contemplate, calling a grief counselor or logging into a Zoom call. No matter how painful it is to think about reaching out. My recommendation as a veterinarian is regardless of how uncomfortable it is, if you're in grief and you're not able to move, you're paralyzed in grief, I think we should really stop and talk about the benefits.

It feels weird to connect with strangers. I think people's issue is "I don't want to go in a group, I don't know anyone in there. I'm already in pain and then I got to hear about their pain? I don't want that." But that's not really how these groups work. So maybe you could walk us through, talk to me a little bit about your experience with grief counseling, because I think once people hear it, they're like, "Okay, that's not so bad. Actually, that's really good. Actually, I need that."

Erica Messer:

Yeah, and I do want to say one of the most – This Facebook group, I think it's just called the Rainbow Bridge Pet Loss Support Group on Facebook. It's just, like, I think a couple hundred thousand people. And you can go on there and just write what happened, and you just get this flood of support of “I understand. I relate.” We're all strangers and suddenly just everything goes down and you get 200 messages that say, "You're going to be okay. I feel your pain. I'm with you." So, I want to say that that's a great starting point for people that maybe aren't comfortable talking. But one of the projects that I have going is my YouTube channel and I interview pet counselors so that people can go and see what they're like to talk to, what they specialize in, what their demeanor is, what their beliefs are, and kind of break down that barrier.

So, for me, I wanted one-on-one support. And so, I found that and it was scary because I'm just Googling. I didn't even know that a pet loss counselor had existed as a profession. I was just Googling, I think I've lost my mind, and I need some help, and my cat died. And so, I kind of went down that rabbit hole because I was desperate. So, I found a counselor. She was amazing. And she told me the simplest thing, Dr. Becker. She would tell me to breathe a lot. And I'm thinking, “But I am breathing. Why does she keep telling me to breathe?” And what would happen is I would get choked up on our sessions and then she would say, “Just breathe.” And it was like it allowed the grief to go somewhere. And so, there were a lot of simple things that I learned and instilled, and that's one of the cards now is just breathe. And on the back, it talks about why and why that's helpful. And it's so simple that it really does need to be out on your counter so you're reminded, right?

They're just little cards. So, that was really helpful to me to start understanding my grief and also working through it. And I like to call them “cry storms,” those waves of grief that come and they just overwhelm you and they happen out of nowhere. You're at work, you're in your car, you're in line at the post office. I was on a flight back home to Germany and I go to the bathroom and I come back and wham, hello, grief storm. And this man next to me was like, "Are you okay?" And I said, "Well, no."

Dr. Karen Becker:

No.

Erica Messer:

"My cat just died." And he was so kind. He's like, "I never had a pet, but there's a girl at my church and she just lost her cat and she's really upset." And he was kind of curious and wanted to be helpful, and it was just so nice to have someone to talk to. So, I really do think that being honest with what's going on is so important because at least people understand why you left the door open, or left the car on, or left your wallet on the counter, because our brains are trying to register what's going on and our bodies are processing it. So, support is very, very important in some form.

Dr. Karen Becker:

And I also love – the neat thing about your cards [is] because everyone needs different levels of support and what feels comfortable to them is completely unique and as individual as they are, so [for] some people hearing words [is] too much, reading [is] better, because audible is really hitting us, and we can't predict what words are coming. If you're reading something, you can put the book down and you don't have to keep reading, and that's a buffer. So, I like the Facebook group because you can read words and when it's too much, you don't have to continue. If someone's in your living room that won't leave, that's trying to be helpful, it can be a lot. Whereas going to a Facebook support group, you can take it in the doses you need to be able to-

Erica Messer:

Exactly.

Dr. Karen Becker:

-process as you can, and then you can log off. And so, you're able to kind of set that pace. When it comes to grief counseling, I'm anxious or I'm interested to hear your story when you say that you just kind of Googled, "I need help. My cat died." I have been through many personal grief counselors, but I like the fact that you're interviewing them. And what I have found, even when I did grief week last year, the depth and breadth of therapists are amazing. But that means that finding one that resonates with you can be a little bit of a task. So, if you're looking, I've had my clients say, "I believe animals go to heaven, and I just spent 200 bucks on a grief counselor for two months that told me that of course they don't."

Erica Messer:

Oh, no.

Dr. Karen Becker:

And they're totally damaged. So, my thought was, "Well, we need to research your grief counselor to see where they align. So, let's align you with a grief counselor that at least will be sensitive to your beliefs, but also preferably also believes that animals go to heaven because they're out there." So, let's talk a little bit about your YouTube channel where you interview grief counselors, because I think [a] part of any good therapist, whether it's marriage therapy or grief therapy or whatever, having a third party qualified individual can be incredibly beneficial to us, but you have to resonate with that person's energy and that means you have to do a little bit of research. And it's okay if you have a session and you don't feel any resonance, it's okay to move along. But it's also really awesome that you have a YouTube channel where you basically interview them so you get a sense of who you might be partnering with. Have you interviewed lots of grief counselors and is it an ongoing thing?

Erica Messer:

It's an ongoing thing. I think there's five up there right now because I like to make sure that I am interviewing somebody that I know and like and trust.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yes.

Erica Messer:

And so, I'm still building out those relationships.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yes. Yes.

Erica Messer:

Of course, mine are on there and I'm not going to say who it is, but I like to – Exactly what you said, just peel back that first layer. Because when I was seeking out a grief counselor, a lot of my anxiety was about, “Can I be vulnerable with this person? Are they going to shame me? What if this person tells me I really have lost my mind?” Okay. I had to prepare myself and put on battle gear to find a therapist. So, I thought, “Wow, one of the things that I can do to bridge this gap is have a little introduction.” They're like five minutes. And I think that's a really good thing. So, if somebody is seeking a grief counselor, see if they will give you an introductory session at no cost, just to get to know each other, and see if you can feel comfortable with each other because it's a two-way street.

And then I would say to people, “Try three sessions, and if you feel like you can connect with this person and they're leading you down a path that is going to be healing and helpful for you, great. Might not be a good fit though, and you have to be willing to take that risk because there's no guarantee that this person is going to be a good fit for you. But I think if you have specific beliefs, that's a really great thing to throw out there in the introductory email or contact or phone call.” Like, “Hey, I believe this. Is that going to be a problem?” “I'm this, I'm that.”

I have mental health issues and so that was part of the reason I was really worried I was losing my mind, because I have experience not being okay. So, I really needed someone to just literally diagnose me as, “Am I all right? Am I okay?” And yes, I was having some PTSD-like symptoms. Of course, I mean, that just makes sense. But to find out that I wasn't losing my mind and that the way I was feeling was normal for losing an animal I cared about? [It] was like the record scratched and I realized, “Oh, other people feel this way? And there's not really resources and people aren't talking about this?”

“Holy moly, what is wrong? I got to do something.” And that was the moment I said, “Mom, we're going to make these cards. I don't know how and I don't know what we're doing, but we're going to fundraise.” And within five days, people I don't even know we're just throwing money at us. And I had so much support from my friends and family. I would not be where I am today and gotten as far along as I am, because people believed in me and they knew that this is needed. Something is needed. Is it the end? Is it the last resource? No, I hope not. I hope that this just starts – that this is a conversation that grows and grows, and people hear this and maybe they're thinking about something they wanted to do, and it's a springboard. So anyway.

Dr. Karen Becker:

So, I think that that's wonderful. And I also think that the cards are for people that just the thought of picking up a phone or having to engage, having to speak to a stranger about such an

intimately painful thing, it's like, "No way." The cards are a stepping stone to begin doing something. When you're in grief, we all know cognitively we have to do something. We just don't know what to do. So, when we can't even think enough to create a game plan, the cards kind of give you a roadmap of things that you can do. And even if it's on autopilot initially, and autopilot is better than no pilot, so we like autopilot, just keep it going. Just get up and do it every day because you will eventually feel a shift. It feels like you never will, but you will.

And then you're able to potentially figure out what's best for you. "What do I need?" That's a question that we need to be asking ourselves when we're in grief, "What do I need right now? Do I need water? Do I need to go to work?" You need to wake up and tell yourself, "How can I best care for myself right now?" But sometimes we need reminders of how to do that. But I would like to go back for a split second to talk about mental health because the death of animals can stir up stuff, and it can stir up old stuff, and it can actually stir up stuff that we didn't even know we had.

Erica Messer:

Yeah. Yeah.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Can you talk a little bit about – I don't know if you've interviewed experts that have discussed this, but we're not going to get through life without grief and grief comes in all forms. But the death of an animal can stir up other painful things that have happened in our lives that it's almost like a domino trigger effect of an avalanche of unaddressed grief. That one thing leads to another, which leads to another thought, which leads to another memory, and the trauma just keeps compounding. What have you learned through your journey about how to address compound traumas?

Erica Messer:

Yeah, I've learned a lot about that. For me, with Wolfgang's sudden and tragic death, I don't feel that it brought up past trauma and I just feel lucky for that. But what I do relate to is the downward spiral of "this happened, I'm not okay." And then it's just easy to sink. And that's what I was worried about, sinking and staying down. And I know from experience that practicing gratitude, and I know it sounds simple and it's talked about a lot, but just the act of a little gratitude has pulled me back from those depths before. And so I had that to draw upon. And I do think that practicing gratitude is a huge helpful tool that anyone can do anywhere at any time. But in my research, I have learned about compound grief. Whether it's a past relationship, or the death of a loved one, or this job you didn't get, grief is hidden and it's complex, and it's like a puzzle.

And so, you're right that the death of a pet can just open up Pandora's box and people aren't equipped to deal with these feelings because we aren't taught how. It's not Home Ec (economics) or there's no "101 on Life" book. So, having resources is really important. And I don't have all the answers and I don't have all the resources, but I have a starting point and I hope to keep growing that. But I think that for those people, they need to seek a counselor or support group

that deals with that so they can peel back those layers and get down to maybe the first grief. I don't know the process because I haven't done it myself, but I assume it's something like that. And I actually have a friend who told me about it, and she asked me, "Are you having compound grief because of this and this?" And I said, "No, I don't think so, but that's really interesting. Tell me more." And she said, "Well, I did and I found a great support group, and we do art together online, and it's led by a counselor."

So, there's so much out there that is available that we don't know about. So, thank goodness for Google and thank goodness for all the information we have accessible now, when you take the time to look, if you can focus enough to look.

Dr. Karen Becker:

And how wonderful, I don't know, I wish that there was an umbrella, I wish that there was some website we could send you to — viewers, readers [and] listeners — that said, "Here are all the different —" just so you could see the depth and breadth of the tools that are available. And to my knowledge, there isn't that website available where you could go and say, "I'm not a talker. I'm not a hugger. I really don't want anyone to touch me. I don't want to hear words right now. I need music. I need art. I need movement therapy. I want to do Qigong. I want to do a spin class with other people who are sobbing." That's all out there, but it's not under one roof. I mean, that's a good goal. Do you like how I'm choosing goals for you? That would be a lovely resource if we're able to.

Erica Messer:

I do. I do. I like that a lot.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yeah, because everyone needs something different and it's not all in one place. And having to dig when you're in pain is hard.

Erica Messer:

Well, hopefully maybe someone listening to you will reach out to me and say, "Hey, I want to be on your resource" or "I know somebody."

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yes. Yes.

Erica Messer:

I mean, I'm always building it, but there's no way I could be the best No.1.

Dr. Karen Becker:

No. Well, and you're also so young. You're so young. Yes. Yeah.

Erica Messer:

But I try, but I try.

Dr. Karen Becker:

So, I have two questions. Before we close, two questions. Number one, when did your babe have trauma? When did Wolfgang die? What year?

Erica Messer:

It was October 9th of 2021.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Okay. So, you've actually done an incredible amount of hard emotional work since then. You've done a lot in a short period of time. So, good on you for working on your grief while using your grief to help others. You've been able to – You are still grieving and you deal with it, but you're also able then to channel that into what you're doing now.

Erica Messer:

Thank you.

Dr. Karen Becker:

So, my two questions are, for people that want to know how to get to your YouTube channel or the website for the cards, let's give those resources. If you could tell me now, maybe social media, website or however people could best get ahold of you, or watch the videos on YouTube. Let us know how to get in touch with you.

Erica Messer:

Well, everything is at wolfieswish.com. So, I have a resources page there and that's where all of the – I have a Facebook support group and then I list other ones, so there's just a nice chunky resource page there. And I also have a blog there. So wolfieswish.com is the first place to go. There's also a page there that's our shop and you can see the different card decks that my mom and I wrote and printed. I also have a children's book about pet loss. I just never get to talk about all these other things. And then, just real quick, you mentioned music and music was a huge tool. Being a musician was a huge tool for me to work through my grief. And so, I've also created a playlist of healing harp music and I'm currently working on getting certified as a clinical musician to help people and animals.

It hasn't been finished yet. It's just like a thing I'm finishing this year. But music is really important, and that's something that I know and that I can do something about too. So, there's all those resources there. And then on Instagram, which I'm active on daily, I run it. It's [wolfies_wish](https://www.instagram.com/wolfies_wish), and my name is Erica Messer. So hopefully with those combinations you can find me. The logo here over my shoulder is our icon on Instagram, and we actually already have a German account and a French account as well.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Nice.

Erica Messer:

I'm going fast, working hard.

Dr. Karen Becker:

That's good. And I bet that you did not ever think – if I would've met you in 2019 and said to you, "Hey, Erica, what do you think you're going to be doing in 2023?" It would not be this. And yet, here you are.

Erica Messer:

No. No. I was supposed to be this German pop star by now. That might still happen. But no, I did not see this coming. And you know what? It's okay. I do tell people all the time, if I could trade all of this back for Wolfgang, of course I would. And I think we all feel that way. But I used that pain as a motivator and I used that sorrow as fuel. And I'm lucky. I'm lucky that I found a way to channel that.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yeah. Yes.

Erica Messer:

Not everyone does.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Yeah. And I am also thankful that you did not spiral downwards and let grief roll into chronic depression because it does for so many people. It's the tipping point that pushes people off the getting by cliff. They were never on the happiness cliff, but they were getting by, and then something beloved dies and it's the beginning of them no longer experiencing any joy. And I think what's most important for me to relay is that there are resources and tools that allow – if you feel that way, there are people and tools that can help you, but you have to be able to help yourself this much. Very, very rarely, if ever, will people come to your door and say, "Listen, here are all the things. You need to choose what's going to best resonate with your soul right now. Here are all your options. I want to help you." That rarely, if ever, happens. We are going to have to take the first step in finding tools and grief management strategies that resonate with our own soul, and we know us best.

So, one thing I would encourage every listener or reader that's hurting right now is that you know you best. And when you see it, or hear it, or feel it, or look at it, or participate, you're going to know, "Yes, this resonates with me and this is going in an okay direction at least initially," or "I feel a little bit this much relief initially versus I'm going to sit here with all of these horrible feelings and do nothing about it." That is the piece that I want no one to have to struggle with alone. So, I think recognizing that we have to take the first initiative in helping ourselves is a really important thing. Erica, is there a question I should have asked you but I didn't? And if not-

Erica Messer:

No.

Dr. Karen Becker:

Okay. That's good. And so, if there was one thing you'd want the whole world to know, if there was one tidbit, factor or idea, if there's one thing you could share with the world that you would want everyone to know pertaining to pet loss and grief, what would it be? That's a tough question.

Erica Messer:

You can do it. No, it's not. It's easy. You can do it. You can get through it. If I'm sitting here smiling today as a bipolar person that is treated for that and other things, you can do it too. But I have to say, it takes work. There isn't an easy fix. I had to be willing to face my grief and I was willing to get through it. I wanted to be happy again. I wanted to have this again. Right? And that can take a long time and that's hard work, but you can do it. You can do it. And there's support and I'm here for you. I'm rooting for you.

Dr. Karen Becker:

And thankfully, there are more and more people, professionals, groups [and] platforms that are here for all of us that have heartbreak and deal with heartbreak on a regular basis. There is a growing body of support for all of us that are hurting. We have to be able to take the initiative to tap in. So I appreciate you, Erica, for-

Erica Messer:

Thank you.

Dr. Karen Becker:

-for stepping up and for doing what your heart has led you to do in terms of helping others that have experienced this profound, unfathomable pain. It's really wonderful that you are helping others come out of it.

Erica Messer:

Thank you.

Dr. Karen Becker:

And so, thank you very much for all that you're doing.

Erica Messer:

Thank you for all you're doing.