

## A Grief Story

I could see the mountain peak clearly now, perhaps a half mile further.

It had been an early start this morning, because Mom had always said to be off the summit before the afternoon storms arrived. For a number of years, with her declining health, she had to miss the trip. And when she passed, I thought my hiking adventures had ended too. However, as I thought about ways to mark the anniversary of her death, something led me back to the place we both enjoyed.

Mom had a collection we jokingly called “Meg’s Box of Rocks.” In it were the rocks she took from the summit of each mountain she conquered. One rock from the top of each.

Today, I was returning one of the rocks she took. I had decided that the memory each rock held would not die with her. I would add to the memory as I returned them one by one. And as I thought about it, I smiled at the possibility of someone else picking up her rock and making their own memory.



“In times of grief, prayer and ritual can bring a sense of balance and peace. They give us an opportunity to say goodbye, to express our pain, to adjust to transition, to remember our loved ones and to place those ‘remembrances’ in the context of the present. They connect us with our past, define our present life and show us a path to the future.”

*Mauryeen O’Brien  
Praying Through Grief*

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## The One-Year Mark

**Has it really been a year?** How can time move so quickly and yet stand so still?

There have been so many “firsts” this year, I feel like I have lost count. It seems like it was just yesterday when my loved one died.

Yet there are times I feel I have turned a corner.

As I step back, I realize that even though I have experienced pain, I would never want to trade in the many memories, moments of joy, times of happiness and even sadness, just to avoid this pain.

## Creating Your Own Rituals

During this first anniversary of your loved one's death, Eventide extends our thoughts of comfort and peace. Making a plan of how you will spend this anniversary time may help you cope with the feelings that come. Some people consider the time around the first anniversary as a chance to create new rituals to honor their loved one.

Rituals are actions done in ways that mean something much more than the acts themselves. We may engage in rituals as we seek peace or connectedness to family, a particular person, our culture, society, traditions, ancestors or even to our own selves.

Whether small or elaborate, the rituals in which we engage tell what is important to us in our lives. Your own rituals may be derived from your family, culture, ethnicity or a particular religious or spiritual tradition. Rituals provide a certain order or meaning to an uncertain life.

Grief is chaos. Times of grief are when we need ritual most. Unfortunately, in our society, there are few rituals specifically designed for grieving people, aside from the funeral or memorial service. These are necessary and helpful, but grieving people need more than a couple of rituals to help calm the deep chaos death can bring.

Creating your own personal rituals to remember your loved ones allows you to work through your grief in a safe and constructive way. Some people plan rituals in honor of a loved one's birthday or an anniversary. Others choose to express their grief through small, daily or weekly rituals.

Find a ritual that works for you and honors your loved one.

- > Lighting a candle
- > Recognizing a birthday or anniversary with a toast or special event
- > Creating a memory scrapbook
- > Creating a memory bear or pillow out of loved one's clothing
- > Watching their favorite movies or listening to their favorite music
- > Planting a tree or flowers in their memory
- > Giving a Christmas poinsettia or Easter lily to your place of worship
- > Making a donation to charity
- > Visiting their burial site

## Complicated Grief

In Embrace Issue 2, we discussed the three N's of grief and loss. Remember that mourning and grief are **Normal**, they are **Necessary** for growth and change, and a **Natural** response to losing someone you love.

Sometimes, however, grief can become complicated. If you have unresolved feelings related to your lost one, or to other losses you have experienced in your life, your grief may be more complicated or drawn out because of other things like your health or not being able to attend a funeral.

It is important also to remember that there is no wrong way to grieve, but there can be negative behavior choices as a result of unresolved grief. If you sense this is happening, you may need a supportive, trained professional to help you.

Getting help for yourself is not a sign of weakness; rather, it is a sign of a desire to help yourself grieve and heal from the losses you have experienced.

“The best anniversary gift you can give to yourself and your departed loved one is the gift of healing—even if it's just a beginning.”

Linus Mundy  
On the First Anniversary of Your Loss

## Spiritual Corner

God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our sorrows so that we can comfort others in their sorrows with the comfort we ourselves received from God.  
2 Corinthians 1:4

No one better understands the power and challenge of grieving than another grieving person. As a parish pastor, I noticed that grieving folks were often the most empathetic caregivers to the newly grieving. Only fellow grievers know how it truly feels to lose a loved one.

There is no such thing as “complete closure” to one's grief. It continues with us for the rest of our lives. However, one who is farther along on this journey of grief is often called upon to serve a friend who is new to the journey.

Whether one's loss happened one year ago, or 10 years ago, the opportunities to comfort others in their sorrows will be there.

“Your memory has walked beside me for a year, and I'm so grateful for the company.”