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embrace

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“Grief is like a journey one must take on a winding mountainside, often seeing the same scenery many times, a road which eventually leads to somewhere we’ve never been before.”

Gladys M. Hunt

A Grief Story

Out of the blue, my eight-year-old son Jake blurted out, “I don’t want you to die!” I knew the statement was related to my sister’s death, so I clarified. “Are you afraid because Aunt Meg died?” He nodded and I hugged him. I then explained that one day we will all die, but he had no reason to believe it would be any time soon. He accepted my answer and went off to play.

It amazed me how a child would listen and trust such a simple answer. We were both learning: Jake, about death and grief; me, about grief and life.

Meg’s death was not only a reminder about the frailty of life, but also about how I had not fully valued it. There were things I could no longer do with my sister, and yet now that sad void was slowly being filled by others.

I still missed her, though in reality Meg’s death had changed very little about the routine of my life. But it had changed my perspective on what it means to live life and what matters.

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Take Heart

Going it alone after you’ve lost your beloved is heartbreaking, challenging and beyond your control, but you do have control over how you will deal with the loss. By reframing change as opportunity for growth, you are well on a fruitful journey of self-discovery.

Excerpt from Care Note Created by Judith E. Courtney, M.P.S.,
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Who Am I Now That My Loved One is Gone



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Your Grief Journey

The Summit

Even after we have done the hard work of grief, we will not find closure to the loss of our loved one. In his book *Counseling Skills for the Companioning Mourner*, Dr. Alan Wolfelt talks about the difference between recovery from grief and reconciliation.

Even when we have fully and actively mourned, we as human beings never “get over” our grief; instead, we become reconciled to it. It becomes a part of who we are. What’s more, grief bursts—sudden moments of intense pain—will continue forever.

Like grief itself, reconciliation is a process, not a moment in time or a discrete “finish line.” Working through the emotional relationship with the person who died and redirecting your energy and initiative toward the future often takes longer and involves more effort than most people are aware.

When mourners begin to approach the summit of reconciliation, they find a renewed sense of energy and confidence, the ability to fully acknowledge the reality of the death and the capacity to become involved with the activities of living again. They are also able to acknowledge that pain and grief are difficult, yet necessary, parts of life and living. The sense of loss does not completely disappear, but it softens; the intense pangs of grief become less frequent. Hope for continued life emerges.

The presence of most of these signs indicates the final stage of grieving:

- Recognizes the reality and finality of the death
- Returns to stable eating and sleeping patterns
- Feels a sense of energy and personal well-being
- Is no longer preoccupied with thoughts of the deceased
- Has a capacity to enjoy experiences in life that should normally be enjoyable
- Establishes new and healthy relationships
- Is able to organize and plan one’s life toward the future
- Has become more comfortable with the way things are, rather than trying to make things as they were
- Is open to more change in one’s life
- Is aware of a “new reality”
- Acknowledges personal growth through grief
- Adjusts to new role changes
- Is prepared for resurgences of intense grief
- Sees that grief is part of life

Creating Meaning

You may still long for “life as it used to be” before you lost your loved one. There may be times when you start to feel like your old self, but then quickly remember that you are not that person anymore.

Not everyone will recognize the changes in themselves because of their loss, where others will feel the changes sharply.

Many factors play into these differences: the person you lost; your relationship with that person; and circumstances in your life that may complicate your grief.

No matter how big or small, it is important to recognize and accept the personal changes that grief has created in you. Some of them may be positive, such as becoming more empathetic and kinder to others because of the pain you felt. You may value your relationships with others more or value each day you live more.

If anything positive can come from it, it is that you can create positive meaning out of a tragic experience.

Grief can be the garden of compassion. If you keep your heart open through everything, your pain can become your greatest ally in your life’s search for love and wisdom.

Rumi

Spiritual Corner

“Something within me is waking from a long sleep, and I want to live and move again. Some zest is returning to me, some immense gratefulness for those who love me, some strong wish to love them also. I am full of thanks for life. I have not told myself to be thankful. I just am so.”

Alan Paton

It is like returning to health when one has been desperately sick. Each day seems a gift—the sun brighter, the air clearer and the taste of food a wonder on the tongue. The word “rebirth” is not too strong for this return to happiness and deep contentment with life. However, it is, in some ways, a different world into which we are reborn.

There are things we recognize from the world we once knew—the same furniture, the same town, most of the same people—but everything has a new coloration. The foundation has tilted, threatened to slide us into the abyss, and then righted itself. We are stronger now for having survived that storm.

Because it seems a new world, time almost slows down, as it did when we were children. Our gratitude for the wonders of this world is almost as profound and simple as a child’s gratitude for a world washed with our tears, as fresh now as a landscape after rain.

“To come through great sorrow is to be reborn into a new world.”

Martha Whitmore Hickman
Healing After Loss