

Stepping Stones™

NEWSLETTER

GRIEF HEALING: REMEMBERING OUR LOVED ONES ON VALENTINE'S DAY

BY MARTY TOUSLEY, CNS-BC, FT

We've barely made it through the holidays of December and January, and now the stores are filled with hearts and flowers and candy, all of it in celebration of the gift of love. But February 14th can be a difficult day for those of us who are grieving, and for some it will be the first Valentine's Day since our precious Valentine died. For us there is no celebration; there is only grief.

Sometimes, for fear of "letting go," we may find ourselves "holding on" to our pain as a way of remembering those we love. Letting go of what used to be is not an act of disloyalty, and it does not mean forgetting our loved ones who have died. Letting go means leaving behind the sorrow and pain of grief and choosing to go on, taking with us only those memories and experiences that enhance our ability to grow and expand our capacity for happiness.

If our memories are painful and unpleasant, they can be hurtful and destructive. If they create longing and hold us to the past, they can interfere with our willingness to move forward in our grief journey. But it doesn't have to be that way. We can choose which parts of life we shared that we wish to keep and which parts we wish to leave behind. We can soothe our pain by thinking of happy as well as sad memories.



2 Grief Healing:
Remembering
Our Loved Ones,
cont.

2 I Hold You
in My Heart

3 One Last
Good-Bye

FEBRUARY

continued on page 2

The happiness we experienced with our loved ones belongs to us forever.

If we decide to do so, we can choose to embrace Valentine's Day as a special day on which to commemorate our loved ones and to celebrate our love for them. Death ends a life, but it does not end the relationship we have with our loved ones who have died. The bonds of love are never severed by death, and the love we shared will never die either. For Valentine's Day this year, we can find a way to honor our loved ones, to remember them and to show them that our love is eternal.

We can build a piece of "memory time" into that particular day, or we can pack the entire day with meaning. Think of it this way: It's much easier to cope with memories we've chosen than to have them take us by surprise. Whether we are facing Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Memorial Day, an anniversary or birthday, or any other special day of our own choosing, we can immerse ourselves in the healing power of remembrance. We can go to a special place, read aloud, or listen to a favorite song. We can celebrate what once was and is no more.

Personal grief rituals are those loving activities that help us remember our loved ones, and give us a sense of connectedness, healing and peace. Creating and practicing personal grief rituals can also help us release painful situations and unpleasant memories, freeing us to make our memories a positive influence in our lives.

Marty Tousley is a certified hospice bereavement counselor and the creator and instructor of the Self-Healing Expressions course The First Year of Grief: Help for the Journey. Learn more about Marty and her grief-healing course at www.SelfHealingExpressions.com. For more information, you can contact Marty at tousleym@aol.com or visit her award-winning website, www.GriefHealing.com.

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*Though now you are gone,
I hold you in my heart.
The love of two souls entwined,
Is not easily torn apart.*

*I recall your sweet, gentle smile,
As we spoke of dreams to come,
And our whispered promises,
On a journey just begun.*

*I keep these as my treasures
Tucked safely away,
And when I open up my heart,
I'm consoled by my memories.*

*I whisper your name,
And for a moment you are here.
I know we'll be together again,
And that helps to slow my tears.*

*But for now, while we're apart,
And the days grow long and dark,
I'll keep you very close to me,
I'll hold you in my heart.*

ANONYMOUS





ONE LAST GOOD-BYE

KAREN CORKERN BABB
From: *Chicken Soup for the Couple's Soul*

I have sought to come near you, I have called to you with all my heart; and when I went out toward you I found you coming toward me. ~Judah Halevi

The hospital room, hushed and dim, had come to seem somehow unreal to me as the day slowly passed, as though I were witnessing a tableau within a darkened theater. Yet the scene was sadly real -- my brother, sister and myself, each lost in our own thoughts, silently looking on as our mother, sitting at our father's bedside and holding his hand, talked softly to him even though he was not conscious. Our father, after years of patiently withstanding the pain and indignities of a terminal illness, was near the end of his struggle, and had slipped quietly into a coma early that morning. We knew the hour of his death was at hand.

Mother stopped talking to Dad, and I noticed that she was looking at her wedding rings and smiling gently. I smiled, too, knowing that she was thinking of the ritual that had lasted for the forty years of their marriage.

Mother, energetic and never still, was forever ending up with her engagement and wedding rings twisted and disarranged. Dad, always calm and orderly, would take her hand and gently and carefully

straighten the rings until they were back in place. Although very sensitive and loving, the words "I love you" didn't come easily to him, so he expressed his feelings in many small ways, such as this, through the years.

After a long pause, Mother turned to us and said in a small sad voice, "I knew your father would be leaving us soon, but he slipped away so suddenly that I didn't have the chance to tell him good-bye, and that I love him one last time."

Bowing my head, I longed to pray for a miracle that would allow them to share their love one final time, but my heart was so full that the words wouldn't come.

Now, we knew we just had to wait. As the night wore on, one by one each of us had nodded off, and the room was silent. Suddenly, we were startled from sleep. Mother had begun to cry. Fearing the worst, we rose to our feet to comfort her in her sorrow. But to our surprise, we realized that her tears were tears of joy. For as we followed her gaze, we saw that she was still holding our

father's hand, but that somehow, his other hand had moved slightly and was gently resting on Mother's.

Smiling through her tears, she explained: "For just a moment, he looked right at me." She paused, looking back at her hand. "Then," she whispered in a voice choked with emotion, "he straightened my rings."

Father died an hour later. But God, in his infinite wisdom, had known what was in our heart before any of us could ask him for it. Our prayer was answered in a way that we all will cherish for the rest of our lives.

Mother had received her good-bye.

*Across the years
I will walk with you --
in deep, green forests;
on shores of sand:
and when our time on earth is through
in heaven, too,
you will have
my hand.
~Robert Sexton*

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I turn my head and look towards death now.
Feeling my way through the tunnel with the space of
emptiness and quiet.
The shimmering silence that awaits me.
This is my direction now; inward to the green pastures...
The cares of the world concern me no longer.
I have completed this life. My work is done, my
children grown.

My husband is well on his hero's journey.
I have loved much and well...
Those I leave behind, I love.
I hope I will remain in their hearts as they will
in mine...
Thank you for taking such good care of me...
And all of you who have been my friends, thank you
for teaching me about love.

~ Karen Vervaet
from "Karen's Journal," 3 April 1993



We are pleased to continue our tradition of caring through these complimentary issues of *Stepping Stones Newsletter* and our professional staff.

Breeland FUNERAL HOME

3304 S Liberty Street
Canton, MS 39046
(601) 859.3661

If you have enjoyed this reading, please let us know! We'd love to provide you with additional grief materials and resources to help you cope during this difficult time. If you would like more information, or if you would like to speak to someone who can assist you with filing for veterans' benefits, Social Security and insurance benefits, or who can help you prepare your own or a loved one's funeral plans in advance, please reply to this email, and a funeral home representative will contact you shortly. We sincerely hope that we have been able to brighten your day with this edition of *Stepping Stones*.

Please don't hesitate to let us know if there is anything we can do to assist you.