



FAITH & HOPE HOSPICE & PALLIATIVE CARE

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Epilogue

Bereavement Newsletter

March/April 2021

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Laughter and Grief

Grief is a place of sorrow and sadness that comes from the pain of loss. Yet, there is room for the entire range of human emotions during this difficult and often painful time. There is even room for laughter. This may come as a surprise. However, it is natural and normal to laugh occasionally.

During grief we often replay in our mind memories of the life that was lost. There are sure to be some happy memories from time to time. It's okay to laugh when these memories spring up, and it's okay to smile or feel happy when you do.

(continued on p. 7)

Book Recommendation

Nothing Was the Same
by Kay Redfield Jamison

This book provides a candid discussion of terminal illness, the fight to survive, and the grief that follows a death. Written by an award-winning author, this book is simple to read and provides stunning insight into love and loss in a way that few others could achieve. The author shares how her own history with mental illness affected her relationship with her husband and the impacts on her grief experience. Redfield Jamison also includes joyful memories throughout the book, sharing happy memories and special occasions shared with her husband.

This book spans much of the author's life but focuses on the years of her husband's illness. Redfield Jamison captures the emotions felt when they received the diagnosis, their preparation for aggressive treatment and their response when they realized that a cure was out of their grasp. The author continues telling her solo journey through grief and how she coped after her husband's death.

Published 2003; ISBN: 978-0307277893

A Note From Your Bereavement Services Coordinator

The daffodils in my mother's garden have started to bloom, and that means that spring will soon be here. The days are already getting longer and the temperatures are warmer.

In this edition of Epilogue, we look at the Tasks of Mourning as a way to cope with grief. It combines several ideas that I think are important to cope with loss, including working through the pain of grief and finding an enduring connection with the deceased. It also avoids the stages of grief that have been misunderstood and misapplied over the years.

We will also look at the role of laughter in coping with grief. It's a surprisingly helpful way to cope with loss. That combined with our Grief Bingo make this a rather fun edition of the bereavement newsletter. I hope that you enjoy it as much as I enjoyed creating it!



Reid Jacobs, APHSW-C, MSW, CT
Bereavement Services Coordinator



“Where you used to be, there is a hole in the world, which I find myself constantly walking around in the daytime, and falling in at night.”

- Edna St. Vincent Millay

Movie Recommendation

Things We Lost in the Fire

(2007) R | 1h 58min

Drama

Starring: Halle Berry,
Benicio Del Toro, David Duchovny

Brian (Duchovny) is a loving husband, devoted father and all around good guy. He is also very close to Jerry (Del Toro), a friend from childhood who now struggles with a heroin addiction. Brian's wife, Audrey (Berry), is leery of Jerry, fearing that he will take advantage of Brian's kindness.

Brian is tragically killed while trying to protect a woman being attacked by her husband. On the day of the funeral, Audrey realizes that she has not invited Jerry or even informed him of Brian's death.

The movie follows Audrey, Jerry, and the children as they grieve. The relationship between Audrey and Jerry changes, drawing them closer.

This movie does rely heavily on flashbacks, making it difficult to follow at times, but it presents a good depiction of grief and its impact on relationships.

Grief Explored: Tasks of Mourning

Two of the main concerns that I hear from clients is how to make sense of all the emotions they experience and how to move forward after a death. This is where different models of grief can be helpful. There is no right way to grieve and there is no model of grief that explains a universal experience of bereavement. Models don't give a prescription on how to grieve either. They can, however, help people make sense of their grief and guide them through their grief process.

The "Tasks of Mourning" model was developed by William Worden. His tasks should not be confused with the more well-known stages of grief. These are tasks that can be completed out of the order he listed them and people will often come back to tasks over time as well. There is no set timeframe for completing these tasks either. Worden identified these four tasks:

1. Accept the reality of the loss.
2. Work through the pain of grief.
3. Adjust to an environment in which the deceased is missing.
4. Find an enduring connection with the deceased while embarking on a new life

Now, let's look at these a bit closer. The first task requires a few things. On a simple level, this can be addressed by being able to say, "my loved one died," or to start speaking of the deceased in the past tense. Having a funeral or celebration of life can help complete this task too. Children can also have trouble understanding that someone who has died isn't going to come back. The adults in their lives can help them understand this.

The second task is one of the biggest or most daunting and complex to tackle. It encompasses the wide range of emotions that a person experiences after a death.

From sadness, guilt, hopelessness, and joy (yes, joy can exist when grieving) there are a wide range of emotions that a bereaved person may experience. The goal of this task is to recognize and engage with these emotions. Trying to bury the emotions or to "soldier through" can be detrimental. Accepting and acknowledging the emotions can help a person cope over time.

The third task asks the person to adapt to the new reality of the deceased person being gone. A death can have profound and subtle effects across all aspects of life. This could include managing finances, doing household chores or placing an order on Amazon. These may seem like simple tasks on their own, but they might be something new and challenging if the deceased person took care of them. The fog of grief can make it all the more difficult to learn how to manage these new tasks. More profound changes might include becoming a single parent, losing a home, or facing retirement alone. All of these require a significant amount of change to manage after a death.

Finally, the fourth task asks us to find ways to start their new life, or new normal, without the deceased, while also keeping some connection to them. There are lots of ways to do this. This could be swapping out your coffee cup for the one your loved one used, or imagining how your loved one would have handled a situation and doing that. One of my enduring connections with my grandfather is wearing his wedding ring that he gave me a few weeks before he died. This task fits well with the *Continuing Bonds* model that we explored back in the May/June 2019 edition of *Epilogue*.

Hopefully these Tasks of Mourning give you some guidance or inform your grief experience. If not, that's okay. There are many ways to approach grief and we will explore those in upcoming issues.

Sleep disturbance, such as difficulty getting to sleep or waking multiple times during the night, are common components of grief. The majority of those grieving the death of someone important to them will experience sleep disturbance during some part of their grief journey. Unfortunately, the effects of lost sleep can be profound and can complicate the grieving process itself. Sleep disturbance affects people on many levels. For example, lost sleep can make it difficult to think clearly, make decisions, increase stress, and impair memory. It can also worsen existing symptoms of depression, anxiety, and PTSD, while also increasing the risk of new or worsened conditions like diabetes, obesity and heart disease. Researchers have found that ongoing insomnia can even weaken the immune system.

So, what to do about this component of grief? There are some basic tricks that can help anyone suffering from sleep disturbance. These are commonly referred to as ***sleep hygiene***.

Sleep hygiene is a series of habits that facilitate restful sleep. These habits are good practice for everyone, grieving or not. There are, however, some unique issues that affect someone who is grieving.

For example, someone who's lost their spouse or sleeping partner may find sleeping in an empty bed difficult. It can become a constant reminder of the person who has died and the grief that this triggers. These people may find some benefit from using a body pillow or letting a pet sleep on the bed. (No, there is no replacing a loved one, especially with a pet or inanimate object, but it can resemble the physical sensation that one has become accustomed to.)

Sleeping on a spare bed or on the couch while the body adjusts are also good options to try.

Some people choose to use sleep aids such as prescription and over the counter medications, as well as herbs and supplements. Caution should be exercised when doing this. Some medications like Benadryl (diphenhydramine) can cause drowsiness that helps one get to sleep, but it can interfere with the sleep cycle. This results in less actual rest and decreases the restorative / rejuvenating aspects of sleep, leaving one feeling tired and not rested the following morning. Herbs like valerian root and chamomile are effective for many. The supplement 5-HTP is also used, though there is limited clinical evidence to support its effectiveness. Melatonin can be helpful for those whose sleep/wake cycle is off (sleeping in the day, awake at night).

Before starting any of these sleep aids, you should talk to your doctor, especially if you take medications or have existing medical conditions. Be sure to tell your doctor about your grief and how it may be impacting your sleep.

~

For more information about sleep hygiene, check out these websites:

- <https://www.sleepfoundation.org/articles/sleep-hygiene>
- <https://www.tuck.com/sleep-hygiene/>
- <http://healthysleep.med.harvard.edu/healthy/getting/overcoming/tips>



Recipes from the Heart

This is a Filipino dish that my mom loves to cook especially during the Holy Week. I grew up in a Catholic faith and belief that we don't allow to eat meat during Lenten season. Honestly, when I was a kid I don't like the taste of this dish because of the ginger. I hate ginger because it is quite pungent and spicy with a very slight woody flavor. Every time she cooked totsong bangus (milkfish) I'm not tasting it and I prefer to eat just the salted egg with rice.

The time passes by everything was changed. I started to love the food that I hate before. It reminds me of my past life to love and embrace all my failures. The ginger taste turns to be a delicious aroma to me now.

-Junne Trias, Accounting/Payroll

Totsong Bangus (Milkfish)

Ingredients

Cooking oil for frying

1 large sized bangus, sliced into 4-5 pieces

2 cups water

1 cup vinegar

4 tbsp. Ginger strips

4 squares taho (Fermented, salted soybean curd)

2 large onions, sliced


3-4 tomatoes, sliced

6 cloves minced garlic

Directions

1. Sprinkle a little salt on Bangus (milkfish).
2. Let stand for 1-2 hours and fry until golden brown.
3. Mash soybean curd and add vinegar & water.
4. Sauté garlic, then add ginger. Stir sliced onion and tomatoes.
5. Sauté for 5 minutes, then pour in soybean curd mixture and cover.
6. When it boils, add fried Bangus (Milkfish). Cook for 20 minutes.

Grief shows up in so many different ways. How many of these have you experienced?

| G B | R I | I N | E G | F O |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|------------------------|
| Insomnia | Looked at old photos | Felt lonely | Funeral impacted by COVID | Cried in grocery store |
| Felt closer to family | "I know <i>exactly</i> how you feel" | Adult Coloring Book | Kept a journal | Lost Appetite |
| Moved very slowly | Felt at Peace |  | Got lost | Laughed |
| Read a grief book | Slept too much | Joined a social media group | "They're in a better place" | Felt numb |
| Ate too much | Made a new connection | Felt Judged | Looked for them in a crowd | Guilt |

Bereavement Services Available

Despite COVID-19, we continue to provide our full range bereavement services, although all in-person support has moved to an online format. In addition to this bereavement newsletter & our periodic mailings, Faith & Hope Hospice also provides:

- Resources via email
- Phone-based support
- Referrals
- Annual Patient Memorial
- Web-based counseling for individuals and families

Contact Reid at **818-559-1460** to request these services.

“When someone you love dies, and you’re not expecting it, you don’t lose her all at once; you lose her in pieces over a long time – the way the mail stops coming, and her scent fades from the pillows and even from the clothes in her closet and drawers. Gradually, you accumulate the parts of her that are gone.”

- John Irving

Laughter and Grief (*continued from page 1*)

Hearing yourself laugh for the first time after a loss could be jarring. It may bring feelings of guilt too. “How can I be laughing now that my loved one is dead,” you might question. Know that it is okay. It doesn’t mean that you aren’t grieving enough; it is part of grief.

In the early days of grief, it may feel as though you’ll never feel happiness again. Over time that tends to fade and joy can start to return. However, this, like most things related to grief, is different for each person. Even in the early days of grief, a laugh or two may pop out. That laugh might also be tinged with sadness. Perhaps something happens that the deceased person would have found funny. You could be reminiscing about the deceased and thing of a funny story involving them. There are many things that may trigger a laugh.

Of course, there are times when laughing out loud might be inappropriate. If the laughing comes at the expense of someone else’s feelings, probably

reconsider. Also, some people may be uncomfortable with laughter during a difficult time. It’s good to be aware of this.

Laughing also has a number of healthy benefits. These include:

- Stress reduction
- Releasing endorphins
- Reducing stress hormones
- Decreasing blood pressure
- Increasing blood circulation
- Strengthening the immune system
- Improving an overall sense of well-being

So, unlikely as it may seem, laughter can really be an important component of coping with the big, difficult emotions of grief. Go ahead and laugh if you feel like it and don’t criticize yourself if you do.



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Epilogue

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Faith & Hope Hospice and Palliative Care seeks to be the premier provider of hospice, palliative, and bereavement care in Los Angeles County and the surrounding areas.

Our goal is to improve the quality of life for people facing life-limiting and terminal illness, the people important to them, and our community at large by utilizing an interdisciplinary, holistic approach.



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