

On Grieving

I have recently experienced the loss of a very close family member and am grieving. As a psychologist, I have dealt with many patients who have suffered a loss. I know the Kubler-Ross model of the five stages of grief and have successfully explained them to my patients to help them. I have spoken to large groups about this model and have sat with others during their grief.

But nothing prepares you for when the grief is your own. I have grieved before when my parents, my in-laws, and close friends have passed on. But it is not the same when the person is very close to you. The experience of loss is huge, truly huge.

I am not angry nor do I feel guilty about any of my or my family's actions. Rather, I think we were all very loving. We hoped for the best and supported our family member during this time. We know that death is a part of life but who of us are truly prepared for it? We didn't expect it. We had our ups with good news and our downs with bad news but we hung on, hoping and waiting.

Alas, it was not to be. I am still in a state of disbelief knowing the reality but refusing to accept it. I am not in denial but am adjusting to all the changes. Current and future plans have all been wiped out. Other family bonds have been strengthened and friends have now become extended family members.

Death has a way of changing your perspective. What once seemed very important now really doesn't matter. And after all what really matters? Family, health and good friends is what matters. I alternate between acceptance and not believing it. Friends who have been through this tell me that it will take time. Yes, I know that but every day is still difficult and what about my and my family's future without our loved one? The sense of powerlessness and helplessness is overwhelming. We work to control as many events in our life as possible yet we have little control of death. It is very humbling.

But fortunately death has a way of touching others to bring out their caring and compassion. It seems like a natural process that friends step up to help to make sure that we are not alone, that we eat, and that we sleep. They too are grieving and somehow this helps to overcome the sense of being alone. One should never have to face death alone.

If I can sum up my emotions into one word, it would be loss... loss of the ability to share past experiences, loss of the present relationship, and loss of future plans. It is loss without any ability to change things. The emptiness is painful. But what choice do we have?

So I and my family will go on and make the adjustments, never forgetting about our family member. We will remember what we had not what we lost. Treasure the lives of those you love as we recently learned that life can be quite fragile. We have dedicated ourselves to living and to becoming better people in some small way each day.

This is how we deal with death...by honoring our family member's memory to make our lives better. This is truly how a memory can become a blessing.