

SEASONS

PICTURESQUE FALL

Fall is such a picturesque and spectacular time of the year. The leaves turn to beautiful hues of reds, browns, and golden yellows. The changing colors of the leaves announce a change in the season. The change in the leaves is not random, but actually a complicated chemical process. Varying from tree to tree, the degree of color is the result of the tree's location, type, exposure to sunlight and multiple other reasons. The spectacular reds are also an indicator of the stress that a particular tree has endured during the previous season, due to lack of water and other factors. It reminds us that change is the only consistent thing in our lives.

Our paths through grief are as individual as each leaf on a tree. Each journey through grief depends on the many factors that constitute who we are and the nature of our relationship with the person who died. There are even more factors than the many that result in the change in the color of a leaf. To look at another's grief and attempt to compare oneself is futile. We are each unique and have experienced an incomparable loss in our lives. Adjusting to this loss depends on our own time schedule, similar to each leaf individually separating itself from the tree. As time passes, we recognize that we will forever be changed by this loss. However, we grow to accept and learn that this loss has not diminished us as a person, any more so than the seasonal loss of leaves does not diminish the strength of the tree.



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HOSPICE and PALLIATIVE CARE
of GREENSBORO

GETTING THROUGH THE HOLIDAYS AFTER LOSS

Here we are with the major fall holidays just around the corner. They are times that we used to look forward to eagerly and enjoy sharing with our families. But this year, because of the death of a loved one, it is next to impossible to get into the mood to celebrate. Most grievers say they dread this time and would like to just skip over the next couple of months and wake up in January. They are already struggling to handle only the necessary chores to get through every day, and adding any other demands feels like more than they can manage with their limited energy. Also, they cannot imagine adding any more pain to what they are already feeling.

Some of the following suggestions may be helpful to those who are trying to figure out how to get through the holidays and still have a meaningful time with their remaining loved ones:

1. First, admit your feelings to someone who will understand. Getting feelings out with an accepting friend helps to defuse them.
2. Take a minute to look at your expectations of yourself and those that others expect of you during the holidays. Which ones do you care to honor? Do they really matter this year? Don't be afraid to make changes.

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YOUR LOSS

*You're not sure how to handle it,
your feelings are tossed about.
You want to draw yourself
into a cocoon or
you want to run down the
street and shout.*

*The wind has been knocked out of you,
your feet can no longer stand.
Why did this thing happen to you, what
is the ultimate plan?*

*Was it not just yesterday that you were
laughing at things that were said.
And today all your mind
can concentrate on
is that now your loved one is dead.*

*Death comes in like a thief,
it steals away what is dear to you.
It leaves you in a state of confusion, you
don't know what is false or what is true.*

*The darkness is overwhelming,
friends try to
help but don't know how.
You grasp on to memories of yesterday,
you can't deal with the here and now.*

*Each day gets a little better,
you finally learn how to cope.
You don't always feel like
you're dangling
holding tight to the end of a rope.*

*I have been there where you're at and
in time you'll see the light.
So when you want to let go, don't do it,
hold on with all your might.*



Michelle King
8/06/02

Loved one was Lemuel Nicholson Wall,
who died on 12/16/00.

- Remember how limited your energy is. Make a list of all the things you usually do to prepare for each holiday. Then hold a family meeting, in person or by conference call, in which you all decide together which ones you feel you must keep doing and what you can easily eliminate. Let the others sign up for which ones they will do to lighten your load. In other words, don't hesitate to delegate this year rather than trying to do it all.
- At the same meeting decide where you will hold the usual holiday family times. Do it differently if it will ease your pain at a different house, on another day or at a different time. Try being really different and go out of town to a place everyone enjoys, like the beach or the mountains.
- Light a special candle to "include" your loved one in your family gatherings. Have a time of memory sharing when the whole family is gathered.

For those whose main holiday is Christmas, in addition to the above ideas you may want to consider some of the following:

- Decide if you want to limit shopping or do it differently this year. It helps to get it done as early as possible, before the stores are full of Christmas carols, or do as much as you can by mail. Have everything gift-wrapped, or invite friends who have offered to help over for coffee and a "package-wrapping party." If a really good friend has offered, let her help by giving her a list of items to buy for you. This is especially helpful after losing a child when shopping seems impossible and you still have other children to shop for.

- Buy an ornament or arrangement as a memorial to your loved one to enjoy every year. Some families start a special memorial tree to decorate and all the family members either buy or make an ornament to put on it. These often become the center of the decorations every year.
- Will you hang all the stockings or none? Some people still include the one for their deceased loved one and all the family members put notes or special remembrances in it.

Finally, take time to feed your own spirit and nurture yourself:

- Set up time to be with people you really enjoy and who handle your grief with acceptance and love. Include some who make you laugh or with whom you usually do some fun things.
- Spend as much time as possible focusing on the loved ones you still have in your life and soaking yourself in their love.
- Buy something for yourself that you really want, wrap it and put it under the tree as a gift to yourself from your loved one.
- Plan and divide work into small amounts. Do a little each day.
- Take part in the worship experiences of your faith.
- Do something for others that will make a difference—a gift in memory of someone, a donation to a charity, adopting a needy child, visiting a shut-in who is lonely, or include someone who needs you in your celebration.
- Utilize happy memories. Relive them and share them as a family.
- Remember to do whatever you do for your own reasons and because it is something you enjoy or really want to do. When it is

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all over and January has arrived, pat yourself on the back for getting through it as well as you did. There will never be another “first set” of holidays to get through again.

HELPING YOURSELF HEAL WHEN SOMEONE DIES

Part Two

Alan D. Wolfelt, PhD. (reprinted with permission)

You are now faced with the difficult, but important, need to mourn. Mourning is the open expression of your thoughts and feelings regarding the death and the person who has died. It is an essential part of healing. You are beginning a journey that is often frightening, painful, overwhelming, and sometimes lonely. This article provides practical suggestions to help you move toward healing in your personal grief experience.

Expect to feel a multitude of emotions

Experiencing loss affects your head, heart, and spirit. So you may experience a variety of emotions as part of your grief work. Confusion, disorganization, fear, guilt, relief, or explosive emotions are just a few of the emotions you may feel. Sometimes these emotions will follow each other within a short period of time. Or they may occur simultaneously. As strange as some of these emotions may seem they are normal and healthy. Allow yourself to learn from these feelings. And don't be surprised if out of nowhere you suddenly experience surges of grief, even at the most unexpected times. These grief attacks can be frightening and leave you feeling overwhelmed. They are, however, a natural response to the death of

SUPPORT GROUPS

Support groups bring people together who are experiencing similar losses to share their feelings and the ways their lives have been affected.

Call Tammy Chaput at 621-5565 to register for a support group or to schedule a counseling session.

If you have a question that you would like answered, please call the Counseling and Education Center at 336-621-5565 or write to us at 2500 Summit Avenue, Greensboro, NC 27405. We can also be reached by email at thecenter@hospicegso.org.

someone loved. Find someone who understands your feelings and will allow you to talk about them.

Allow for numbness

Feeling dazed or numb when someone dies is often part of your early grief experience. This numbness serves a valuable purpose: it gives your emotions time to catch up with what your mind has told you. This feeling helps create insulation from the reality of the death until you are more able to tolerate what you don't want to believe.

Be tolerant of your physical and emotional limits

Your feelings of loss and sadness will probably leave you fatigued. Your ability to think clearly and make decisions may be impaired. And your low energy level may naturally slow you down. Respect what your body and mind are telling you. Nurture yourself. Get daily rest. Eat balanced meals. Lighten your schedule as much as possible. Caring for yourself doesn't mean feeling sorry for yourself, it means you are using survival skills.

Develop a support system

Reaching out to others and accepting support is often difficult, particularly when you hurt so much. But the most compassionate self-action you can do at this difficult time is to find a support system of caring friends and relatives who will provide the understanding you need. Find those people who encourage you to be yourself and acknowledge your feelings — both happy and sad.

Make use of ritual

The funeral ritual does more than acknowledge the death of someone loved. It helps provide you with the support of caring people. Most importantly, the funeral is a way for you to express your grief outside yourself. If you eliminate this ritual, you often set yourself up to repress your feelings, and you cheat everyone who



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cares of a chance to pay tribute to someone who was and always will be loved. *(Continued in next issue)*

DEAR COUNSELOR

Q My husband always handled the household finances. When he became ill, he said that he needed to show me how to manage this chore; however, there never seemed to be time. Now that he has died, I am not only grieving his death but I am feeling overwhelmed with the responsibilities of the bills that are coming in.

A Handling the financial aftermath of someone's death is probably one of the major stresses that survivors have to contend with in the midst of their grief. Try not to panic or feel paralyzed by the enormity of this task. You will be able to manage things, but may need some help in the beginning. This is probably the time to call upon a trusted relative or friend to help guide you through the pile of medical bills, routine bills, insurance claims and legal documents that may have come in since your

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Bereavement Counselors may be reached through the Counseling and Education Center.

336-621-5565

husband's death. Think of someone who has good organizational skills, and can assist you in developing a system that you will eventually be able to follow on your own to see that bills are paid correctly. You may need to think about the services of an attorney to help with legal matters, such as probating a will, and an accountant to help with filing your taxes, or an estate or financial planner. If you do not already have an attorney, ask your friends or spiritual advisor to recommend one who is knowledgeable and ethical. With this assistance you will be able to successfully attend to your business affairs, until you are ready to manage things on your own.

