



Grief's Passage seeks to offer you information, practical tools, inspiration and hope as you make this journey. In this issue we encourage you to reflect on the changes that have occurred in your life – and in you – over this year. We look at the ways that you are forging a continuing bond with your loved ones, as they remain with you in spirit. We also turn our attention to the future as you continue to heal and grow.

“Anniversaries serve as a chance to take stock; to see where the river of time and circumstance has led, to review some lessons and to plan what lies ahead. And, if nothing else, to celebrate the fact that we’ve made it this far.”

- Peter V. Fossel, “Rural Persuasion” column, Country Journal

You have nearly made it through the first year after the loss of your loved one. For most people, this first year is a roller coaster ride full of adjustments, difficulties and changes. It may feel like just yesterday that you lost your loved one or perhaps the year has dragged on interminably. As the year anniversary approaches, you may experience:

- A temporary resurgence of strong grief feelings.
- A reliving of some of the events that surrounded the death.
- A sense that you have made progress, but also a continued sense of pain and emptiness at times.
- A greater acceptance of your loss or a strong wish to stay connected with your loved one.

Dealing with a Year of Firsts

The first year of grief is marked by many painful first occasions, including birthdays, anniversaries and holidays. Additionally, milestones like the birth of a grandchild or a family wedding can be painful and trying when a loved one is missing. The days and weeks around these special days can be increasingly difficult and anxiety provoking. Know that this deepened grief is likely temporary and very normal. In order to make these days as peaceful as possible, we recommend planning ahead to increase coping and support. You may decide to:

- Keep yourself as busy as possible around these difficult days, allowing distraction to aim getting through.
- Create some quiet down time and take time off from work or away from social engagements.
- Celebrate these days with special rituals or memorial actions.

Other people decide to just get through. There is no right or wrong way. The important thing is listening to your own needs and allowing yourself to have the kind of day you need in order to make it through as gently as possible. Additional support can be essential during these difficult times. Reach out to friends and family to get together and let them know about the difficult day if you feel comfortable. If you have to attend a family reunion or wedding by yourself because you have lost your companion, consider asking a friend or relative to go with you. Know that you are with your rights to decline an invitation if it seems too difficult. During difficult milestone days in particular, design a day that sounds and feels as comfortable as possible. Since you are already hurting and feeling disoriented, try to give yourself a soft landing on these tough days.

As we look back over time
We find ourselves wondering ~
Did we remember to thank you enough
For all you have done for us?
For all the times you were by our sides
To help and support us ~
To celebrate our successes
To understand our problems
And accept our defeats?
Or for teaching us by your example,
The value of hard work, good judgement,
Courage and integrity?
We wonder if we ever thanked you
For the sacrifices you made.
To let us have the very best?
And for the simple things
Like laughter, smiles and times we shared?
If we have forgotten to show our
Gratitude enough for all the things you did,
We're thanking you now.
And we are hoping you knew all along,
How much you meant to us.

- **Liam Tipton and Kyle Perry in tribute to their Grandmother, Zena Kathleen Tipton, 1935 - 2006.**

Lessons Learned

I know better **what** and **who matters**.

*I no longer sweat the small stuff.
I've got different priorities.*

I feel **gratitude** more deeply.

*For the love I had.
For the love and joy I still have.
For kindness that has been shown me.*

I feel more **connected** to others.

*I understand more. I care more.
We are all vulnerable in loss and change.*

In Search of Forgiveness... and Self-Forgiveness

Among the many difficult emotions that come with loss, **guilt** and **anger** are two of the most unwelcome. As much as we don't like to feel either, they also can be the hardest emotions to let go of. If you are trying to find self-forgiveness, or forgiveness, perhaps these thoughts and ideas will help you.

Guilt . . . often we regret what we did or did not do, or what we said or left unsaid. Some of the most caring, loving folks wind up feeling the most guilt, often because they wish they could have done more to prevent the illness or alleviate their loved one's discomfort. Whatever the source of guilt or regrets, it often feels hard to make it right when our loved one is no longer here to forgive us.

Some Suggestions:

- Write a letter to your loved one; ask his or her forgiveness. Say what you wished you had said when he or she was alive.
- Make a list of those things that you did right. This may help to shift your focus and remind you of all you have given.
- Talk it out. Tell the truth about why you feel guilt. Find a friend, a trusted clergy person or a grief counselor – a caring, objective person who can help you process through guilt.

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- Remember that you are human, and that makes you imperfect, just like the rest of us.
- Remember that your intentions were good.
- Realize that relationships are complicated, especially in times of illness and stress, and that difficult moments, difficult conversations, are always a part of the experience.
- Realize that you did what you could at the time – the answers may seem clear now, but things surely were not so clear back then.
- Pay it forward. You cannot go back in time, but you can do something kind for another loved one, or even a stranger.

Anger is an equally unpleasant experience – and yet many of feel it – at the doctors, the disease, family members, friends, God or our loved one who died. It is very natural to feel anger during a time when you are going through so much hardship and change, and so much is being asked of you. The suggestions made above for guilt may also help you face your anger and process through it. An additional way to deal with the anger is to distract yourself with gentle exercise or a good book or conversation. Some find that music or relaxation exercises also help.

From Grief to Growth

It's a true turning point in your grief when you are able to give up asking, "Why?" and instead ask,

"Now that this has happened, what shall I do?"

- Kathlyn S. Baldwin, "Taking the Time You Need to Grieve Your Loss"



Image courtesy of morgueFile

Grief changes us. In the process of grief, many people grow by becoming kinder, realizing they are stronger than they thought, finding new interests, deepening their faith, reaching out more to others or starting new and interesting chapters of their lives.

***How have you changed or grown?
How do you hope to grow?***

Continuing the Bond

As time goes by, you may find yourself searching for ways to continue your relationship with the person you lost. Some people dedicate a place in their home or garden to memorialize and spend time with their loved one. Some people write an occasional letter or regularly talk to the deceased. Looking at pictures or keeping a meaningful memory of your loved one can help keep them close.

**“The heart of grief,
It’s most difficult challenge,
Is not “letting go” of those
Who have died
But instead making the transition
From loving in presence
to loving in separation.”**

- Thomas Attig

“My sister died a year ago, and we were very close. She was my best friend and confidant. I have missed our daily conversations terribly since I lost her. Sometime a few months ago I started talking to her while I walk the dog. Maybe it sounds strange, but it has really made me feel connected with her. I usually wait til I am walking at night and look up at the moon or stars to tell her about my day, just as I might have on the phone back when she was alive. I imagine her looking down at me from the stars and I feel like she is with me.”



Image courtesy of morgueFile

As long as I can I will look at this world
for both of us.

As long as I can I will laugh with the birds,
I will sing with the flowers,
I will pray to the stars,
for both of us.

- Sascha, Motivateus.com

If grief continues to take its toll on you, and you would like some help with it, please feel free to contact HPCG’s Counseling and Education Center. A bereavement counselor can work with you to:

- Help you get unstuck if you feel you are not making progress.
- Address any concerns (anger, guilt, conflict) that are getting in your way.
- Help you set new goals, establish new social outlets, find new meaning.

Talks, workshops and grief support groups are also available. There is no cost. Call, email or visit our website for more information.

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