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{chapters}

turning the pages through grief

Meteorologists across North America are talking constantly these days about the “winter that failed to show up.” After last winter’s never-ending blasts of cold, ice and snow, this one was a welcome respite. Those who are accustomed to cold winters, however, never really believed it could be this easy and reminded each other, “Just wait...the cold is coming!”

When
WINTER
Looks like



Like some “winter cynics,” you might be thinking, “But this spring will never last.” And in one sense, of course you’re right.

Bereavement is a process and is filled with ups *and* downs, good days *and* bad ones. Just when you think you’re doing “pretty well,” a new wave of sadness knocks you off your feet. So what can you do?

Believe it or not, grief is sometimes like that. In the midst of the wintry blasts of loss, sadness and pain will be welcome respites of spring flowers and warm days in your grieving. A friend or family member gives birth to a child

and you feel—even if momentarily—a sense of gratitude and hopefulness. You actually hear yourself laughing aloud at a funny scene on a favorite television program. A brief glimpse of hope comes over you when a close friend points out how far you’ve come in your grief.



Celebrate the spring days when they come. Since I live in Texas, some of my friends “up north” don’t believe I really understand winter; they are probably right. But when I arrived in Rochester, New York on the last day of winter, I was greeted by a sunny, 80 degree day. As I sat with my northern friends on the patio, they talked of how much they enjoyed these beautiful early spring days. In a word, they celebrated the springtime temperatures, even as they acknowledged another freeze will likely come.

In our grief, we can do the same.
Celebrate the good

Continued...

Spring 2012

“I don’t think you lead by pessimism and cynicism. I think you lead by optimism and enthusiasm and energy.”
{Patricia Ireland}

{Q&A}

How am I supposed to “let go” of my late wife?



There's no need to, really. When a death occurs the relationship doesn't necessarily end, but it changes. What we have to adjust to is the loss of the physical presence of the person and all that it meant to us. And, in time, we must learn to re-engage emotionally with others. The deceased person is still a part of us and always will be. What we “let go” of is the pain we feel at their absence. Eventually, when we are no longer consumed by our personal sorrow, anguish and confusion, we can freely love that person we continue to carry with us.

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days even when painfully aware that there still will be bad days ahead.

Understand grief is cyclical. One mark of human maturity is the confidence that today's conditions do not necessarily predict tomorrow's experiences. Grief is filled with ups and downs because *life* is filled with ups and downs. The very experiences that once brought joy might now be accompanied with sadness and pain. Holidays, for most grieving people, are characterized by at least some sadness for many years. Awareness that bereavement has good days and bad days helps us to anticipate the bad days. But remember today's bad day is not a predictor of how every day will be from now on.

Express your grief in healthy ways. Write in your journal or plant a tree or shrub in your loved one's memory. Talk to friends in a bereavement support group; no one will understand better the cyclical, up and down nature of grief than these friends who live with this cycle day in and day out. What is not helpful, however, is to pretend that this loss doesn't hurt. It hurts and it hurts deeply—some days more deeply than others.

Whatever you do in your grief, don't try to do it by yourself. Everyone needs at least one person—and most of us need a few people—who we feel like “have our back.” Those people may be in your own family, your faith community, a club of which you are a part, or among your own friendship circle. Lean on them and tell them about the bad days when they come. But also tell them of the good days, the moments in your grief that are filled with bright sunshine, gentle warm breezes, and the scent of spring flowers. Because both the winter and the spring are all part of the experience we call grief.

Winter Grief, Summer Grace: Returning to Life after a Loved One Dies
by James E. Miller.
Augsburg Fortress, 1995,
\$ 16.99.

Through beautifully lyrical prose and striking photography, Jim Miller sensitively acknowledges that grief is a process similar to the changing seasons. This book features full-page color photographs, inspirational quotes and moving passages that will help anyone walking the journey through grief.

Though words alone cannot convey the encouragement of this book, these words express the kind of prose for which Miller is famous: “Spring leads ever so naturally, ever so comfortably, into summer. New shades of green appear. Leaves grow full and varied, plants reach upward and outward, fields blanket themselves in bold displays of color. The sun stays longer than before. Mornings begin brighter, afternoons turn warmer, and evenings beckon in a way they have not in a long while. There is a sense of renewed vitality. What happens around you in nature can also happen within you in your grieving.”

{bookmarks}

*footnotes

Life is a series of experiences, each one of which makes us bigger, even though sometimes it is hard to realize this. For the world was built to develop character, and we must learn that the setbacks and grieves which we endure help us in our marching onward.

—Henry Ford



William G. Hoy is a counselor and educator with more than 25 years experience working with people in grief and the professionals who care for them. In addition to his oversight of a large hospice bereavement program, Dr. Hoy teaches on the faculties of Baylor University and Marian University.