

Grief Notes

December 2020

Facing a New Year of Grief by Joel Wiggin, Bereavement Coordinator

In ordinary times, holidays are days when the absence of a loved one is deeply felt. When grieving, the whole season is difficult. New Year's Day is one of those holidays that we sometimes don't think that much about and maybe don't even celebrate, but for people who are grieving, the approaching new year may bring with it a lot of emotional responses, including anxiety, fear, and deep sadness.

2021 will soon be here, and most of the world is breathing a big sigh of relief and hoping for a less stressful year than 2020, but griever may be approaching the new year with trepidation. One person expressed to me that the new year weighed heavy on her mind because she could not shake the nagging feeling that it would be the first year that her loved one would not be present. She was holding on to the ending year because it held the comfort that in that year the person she loved had been alive and physically present with her. The approaching year felt like a new and cold place, void of the relationship which had dominated at least part of the last year. In short, she was feeling the absence more distinctly with the coming new year. Other people may express fear over the coming year. They know that many firsts (or seconds) await them when it comes to special dates such as anniversaries and birthdays. They may also wonder who will be there for them in the coming year as the death fades further into the rear-view mirror for others. All these things may prove overwhelming for the bereaved.

If this describes you, there are things that can be done to mitigate some of these fears and anxieties.

1. **Be Comfortable with Your Grief:** Sometimes we feel anxious over date-related milestones because of the pressure they put on us (or more correctly, we put on ourselves) to be in a better place or to be further along in our grieving process. To be honest, I am not even sure what those phrases are supposed to mean anyway. Grief is so different from person to person. It isn't a race and there aren't really any finish lines. As you approach the new year, be ok with your grief and ok with the fact that you may feel just as sad on January 1 as you did on December 31. Your grief process is your own. Don't let dates like the start of a new year make you feel rushed or somehow inadequate.
2. **New Tears and New Starts:** There is no question that you will carry your grief with you into the coming year. It will undoubtedly have its moments of deep sorrow and pain, but the new year also means that the journey you are on is full of new opportunities. Your grief may change and morph over the coming months, and you may find that the year is full of new supporting relationships, new opportunities to honor and remember your loved one, and new moments where you begin to make sense of the life you now find yourself in.
3. **You Won't Forget:** Often the anxiety we feel over the approaching year comes from a fear that in the new year we will somehow forget our loved one, as if the ticking of one more year will somehow sever that connection to them. If you look deep into your heart, you know you won't forget them. You will carry their memory with you into the new year and that memory will continue to be an important part of who you are.