

Grief Notes

October 2021

Grief, Time, and Special Days by Linda Hopkins, Bereavement Coordinator

In the early days after my father died, I became aware of a new relationship to time of day and day of week. He died on a Monday evening at 9:30 on the 5th of a month. For many weeks and for a few months after he died, I was very aware of 9:30 in the evening. I counted the Mondays and I knew how many weeks it had been. These words by Longfellow spoke to me:

*The holiest of all holidays are those
Kept by ourselves in silence and apart;
The secret anniversaries of the heart.*

I suspect that like me you will find there are special days personal to you that will challenge you in your grief. Days like birthdays and wedding anniversaries will likely be more difficult. Those around you are unlikely to be aware of your pain unless they are very close to you.

The one-year anniversary of a loved one's death is a difficult day for most people. For some of you reading this that day may be just around the corner and for others it may still be a long way off. It is an unusual day because we know just what was happening and what we were doing on that day. These memories are hard and there is pain and anxiety in anticipating the day. Some may choose to ignore the day entirely and find it is most helpful to stick to routines. Many find it helpful to be proactive and plan ahead. What one decides to do that day is very personal.



Here are a few suggestions for coping with difficult days:

- Have a special dinner with a dish that your loved one enjoyed.
- Visit the gravesite and leave flowers or some other meaningful memento.
- Visit a place that was special to you and your loved one, either alone or with someone who will be supportive.
- Plan a day away from home and acknowledge the day in a different setting.
- Plan a self-care day where you do something you enjoy.
- Light a candle next to their picture.
- Place a memorial in the newspaper.

For me, sometime during that first year I realized that a month had come when I did not have the usual anxiety and sadness of the 5th. That in itself was an odd experience. It was good to not have the painful memory but bittersweet in realizing I was getting used to his absence. On the first anniversary of my father's death, I went to his favorite restaurant and ordered what he loved most there.

Whether we feel ready or not, difficult days come and go and often the dreaded days do not live up to troubled expectations. It may be helpful for the bereaved person dreading the approach of this important day to think beyond that day and realize that no matter how difficult or emotionally draining it may be, the day will come and go and time will carry us on to the other side.