

# Grief Notes

September 2024

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

When we are grieving in the early weeks after our loss, we experience that grief in so many ways with many feelings, tasks to accomplish, and people to take care of including ourselves. It is often overwhelming for a while but gradually we start to go on. Life adjusts as it must. For some of us that adjustment comes sooner, perhaps much sooner than for others. For most of us as time goes by the early intense grief becomes something less intense. As with all grief experiences this is a very individual process.

As the days go by, at some point, we are likely to have times when the sharp pain of grief returns and hurts a lot again. This can be very hard and discouraging. It may happen for reasons we cannot figure out or it may happen predictably on special days. It can help to know how normal this is and that it is not a sign of something being wrong with our grieving process.

Holidays are predictable times for grief to intrude and this rarely takes us by surprise. However, for all of us there will be other special days that will be hard for us but not recognized by the world at large as days that

will challenge us. These include private holidays of the heart like anniversaries and birthdays. These also include events like weddings, graduations, and reunions where we feel the absence of the person who cannot be there. These can be difficult as the world goes on around us not aware that we are having a hard time missing someone we dearly want to be present.

We can anticipate these difficult times and find ways to help ourselves get through the day. Those around you may be unaware of your pain unless they are very close to you and those close to you may not experience the challenging days in the same way. You may have people you can share your concern with and invite them to do something with you to help get through the day. Families and friends may get together for a birthday to remember together, share a meal, or visit a special place. For an event like a wedding or graduation you can let people know that the day will be hard for you and let them know you may need to “take a break” and step away from the celebration for a while. Or you may ask someone to stay next to you for support.

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You may be a person who wants a private way to take care of yourself on these days. Depending on the occasion, you may decide not to attend. You may go by yourself to a special place and remember your loved one by yourself. You may visit the grave. You may light a candle next to their picture and speak or read special words. You may take time to talk to your loved one even though it is a one-sided conversation. You may even decide, if it feels right to you, to take the day off and go somewhere with no reminders except those inside yourself.

There are many ways we work to take care of ourselves when we need to, and I hope some of these suggestions are helpful to you. We shared a quote from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow in the Grief Notes we sent last December where he wrote of “the secret anniversaries of the heart.” We wish you comfort in coping with your own personal special days.