

OPINION

The Okanagan Sunday, February 13, 2011



Please,

no more logging

no more lasagna

It has almost been 14 months since the sudden death of my husband.

We have all gone through a myriad of emotions and feelings. Once the initial shock wore off and we realized we were going to carry on, we had to fashion a new coating to protect us.

In my case, while going through the motions of dealing with all the details and just getting through the day, I found the old me had died with my husband and a new me was yet to be developed.

I mentally placed a protective covering over my body and emotions. There was a reckoning, an inner strength that pulled me through the first weeks that I thank God for.

The emotions, circumstances and situations were all new. I had no idea what to expect or refer to, no guide. Although there was likely help there, I lacked the ability to ask for it.

In hopes of helping others, I have decided to share some of what our family has learned and have been working on a book on grieving. With the greatest respect and thanks to all of those wonderful friends and neighbours who dropped off delicious food during the first few weeks, I've titled it Please... No More Lasagna.

That's not meant to offend those wonderful chefs (18 of you) who dropped off food, but to bring a smile to those who pick up the book, realizing that a sense of humour was our life vest in a sea of tears.

We learned a lot about lasagna as well.

We were at the first of many forks in the road in our first year without Jack. We still had to get used to him not walking through the door, being home for dinner.

Sometimes, when a spouse dies, the other wants to die, too. But, I never felt more responsible for family and friends in my life.

Everyone was worried about how the kids were handling it. Emma, who has a developmental disability, was very black and white about life. Her father was either alive or dead.

Everything that used to be so simple in our lives now seemed to be a big deal. It may be helpful to think about each small step as a goal and congratulate yourself as you achieve them.

There are five stages of grief:

Denial: Setting the table for the person who is no longer with us, expecting them to come through the door, not accepting the loss. In this stage there may be no crying.

Anger: Why did this happen to me? Wanting to fight back or even in death, blaming the person for leaving.

Bargaining: Trying to make deals to keep them from leaving. Some bargain with their God, "I will never do anything untoward again if you just let him live."

Depression: Frustration, bitterness, overwhelming feelings of hopelessness, self pity, mourning loss of the person as well as combined dreams and hopes. Feeling lack of control, numb and some suicidal.

Acceptance: Realizing the person is really gone and it was not their fault or yours in most cases. They did not want to leave or leave you on purpose. This is where we find comfort in remembering great memories. The thought that we will find love and happiness again.

Emma went through every stage at her own pace, as did all of our children and family. We found we could go through all five stages at once or 50 times a day.

After a death, one of the first really hard things to do is tell people about it. I had to tell my children immediately as we were all at home when the paramedics realized their hard work was for naught.

It was decided that I would call Jack's brothers and sisters and that one of our sons would come with me the next day (Christmas Day) to

tell his mother in person.

As awful as it is to give people such news, it has to be done and may, in some way, help with acceptance of the loss. What an awful few hours as we called family and friends.

Their kindness helped us all go on.

We moved through our lives mechanically at first and automatically protected ourselves in order to cope.

Here are a few tips that helped us get through:

If you simply must be in a public situation, take a group with you. Only do what you absolutely must. Everyone will want to help you - let them.

Don't make eye contact if you don't want to be pleasant. You also don't have to listen to kind words that will ultimately make you cry. Most people mean well and will be there for you when you are ready.

Wear sunglasses.

Answering machines are made for a reason. Use them.

Lock your doors and leave a pad of paper and pen with a note saying you are having a time out or nap and if friends could leave a note for later.

Look after yourself first. If you do manage sleep, when you wake up, meditate and visualize a happy place that is calming. Try to remember that feeling of peace as you go through your day.

If you think you need help, ask for it. Call your doctor, the crisis line or a counsellor.

People want to connect when they know you are in pain because they care about you. If you can let them, great. If not, that's OK too.

Put boundaries on the amount of time you allow visiting. I suggested to friends that after half an hour they ask if I would like them to stay and that whether I said yes or no, they accept that.

You can choose to say no to flowers.

Some people find it tough to receive flowers, as about the time the flowers die is generally the time the support around you goes back to their own lives.

Once the funeral and initial craziness has passed, plan a trip or special meditation class. If you can handle going out, have lunch with someone special or visit them at home.

I found it helpful to do something every day that made me laugh and to balance it with something painful. The first is harder to come up with, but equally as important in moving toward your new "normal."

The day we had Jack's celebration of life, our entire family went to the H2O Centre. We swam, floated in the river and went down the slides, screaming and laughing. It was a wonderful release.

Do something that makes you feel comfortable and in control. Take part in a sport, go for a walk, read a funny novel. Something that requires nothing from anyone else and helps change the movie going through your head. Try to exercise as much as you can.

Be careful about music.

Our family is a musical one, and music means a lot to us. Songs from different times in our lives helped at certain points and made life unbearably sad at others.

Realize that you will get through this - even if you don't want to at that moment. Remember, when you can, that you had the pleasure of that person in your life and maybe are a better person for it.

Remember what you used to laugh together about, and laugh again.

Find something to look forward to. You will.

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Whose Challenge Is It Anyway?