

## BY CHOOSING TO CONFRONT GRIEF WE CAN OVERCOME OUR LOSS

My old friend Grief is back. He comes to visit me once in a while just to remind me that I am still a broken man. Surely there has been much healing since my son died six years ago, and surely I have adjusted to a world without him by now. But the truth is, we never completely heal, we never totally adjust to the loss of a major love.

Such is the nature of loss that no matter how much time has passed, and no matter how much life has been experienced, the heart of the bereaved with never be the same. It is as though a part of us also dies with the person we lose through death, or other forms of permanent separation. We will be all right, but we will never be the same.

And so my old friend Grief drops in to say “hello.” Sometimes he enters through the door of my memory. I’ll hear a certain song or smell a certain fragrance, or I’ll look at a certain picture and I’ll remember how it used to be. Sometimes it brings a smile to my face, sometimes a tear.

Some may say that such remembering is not healthy, that we ought not to dwell on thoughts that make us sad. Yet, the opposite is true. Grief revisited is grief acknowledged, and grief confronted is grief resolved.

But if grief is resolved, why do we still feel a sense of loss come anniversaries and holidays, and even when we least expect it? Why do we feel a lump in the throat, even six years after the loss? It is because healing does not mean forgetting and because moving on with life does not mean that we don’t take a part of our lost loved one with us.

Of course, the intensity of the pain decreases over time if we allow Grief to visit us from time to time. But if the intensity remains, or if our life is still dysfunctional years after our loss, we may be stuck and in need of professional help to get unstuck.

Sometimes my old friend Grief sneaks up on me. I’ll feel an unexplained, but profound, sadness that clings to me for days. Then I’ll recognize the grief and cry a little, and then I can go on. It’s as though the ones we have loved and lost are determined not to be forgiven.

My old friend Grief doesn’t get in the way of my living. He just wants to come along and chat sometimes. In fact, Grief has taught me a few things about living that I would not have learned on my own. Old Grief has taught me, over the years, that if I try to deny the reality of a major loss in my life I end up having to deny life altogether. He has taught me that although the pain of loss is great, I must confront it and experience it fully or risk emotional paralysis.

Old Grief has also taught me that I can survive even great losses, and that although my world is very different after a major loss, it is still my world and I must live in it. He has taught me that when I am pruned by the losses that come, when I let go I can flourish again in season and bring forth the good fruit that comes, not in spite of my loss, but because of it.

My old friend Grief has taught me that the loss of a loved one does not mean the loss of love, for love is stronger than separation and longer than the permanence of death.

My old friend Grief may leave me for a while, but he’ll be back again to remind me to confront my new reality, and to gain through loss and pain.

“I will turn their mourning into joy, I will comfort them, and give them gladness over sorrow.” (Jer.31:13, The new Oxford Annotated Bible.)

Aldofo Quezada, *The Tucson, Arizona Daily Star*