


Healing with Haven

February 2006

Making It Through A Couple Holiday

by Leandra Walker



I hadn't thought about it until I was watching TV last week. Suddenly the diamond ads that disappeared after Christmas were in my face again. "Tell her you'd marry her all over again." And "Three stones for your past, present and future." I wondered if I was supposed to remove two stones from my anniversary ring, because I have only the past with John now, no present, no future.

Then I remembered: Valentine's Day, the one day when it feels like a crime not to be coupled up with someone. It was hard enough in high school, and it's more painful as a widower. No one will be sending roses to my office or chocolates to my door. I won't be going out to dinner or dancing.

This is one of those times when we have to decide what's best for us on that day. I have no single friends, so I can't invite someone out to eat. Probably wouldn't want to see all those happy couples around me in the restaurant, anyway. I'm really not part of the singles' scene, not mentally or emotionally, so those singles dances are out. So, what am I going to do?

I still have a few days. Maybe I'll do the reading for that new class I'm taking. Maybe I'll create a little ritual of remembrance of days past. John was never a romantic. If he brought me roses more than twice in our 30 years together, I sure can't remember it. But I could always light a candle and tell him how much I miss the baseball cards he'd bring me instead. I've done that in years past.

This year, though, I'm thinking of something different. I'm thinking that if Valentine's Day is all about love, why can't I spend the day showing love to the world. There are many kinds of love, and although we've lost our romantic partners, that doesn't mean there's no love in our lives. I can send cards to close friends, give those little hearts with words on them to the nephews, and send flowers to parents.

One of the most important forms of love for us on this journey is Self Love. We have to be gentle with ourselves, and love ourselves. So, why not give my-self the kind of love and pampering I deserve? Maybe a trip to the spa. Maybe a massage. Maybe just a bubble bath with candles lit all around. Or a special dinner cooked from scratch.

Only you can decide how to face this couples-day alone. But please do make plans of some kind for how you're going to get through. If it was an important day with your partner, it can be a difficult day now.

You know, this year I might even buy myself a present from him. I'm not thinking diamonds, but baseball cards. 🏆

Wishing You Near

by Nick Alcantara

I have come
To realize
That time is so dear
When you are no
Longer here
I cling to memories,
Sweet bitter memories
That brings you near
If only
I can touch you again
Without bringing back the pain
Feeling your presence
That you are not really
Very far away
That would bring back
The joy and magic
Of being again
Together
I know you are
Just a whisper away. 🏆

Exploring the “Whys” of Grief” Part #1

By Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D., Fort Collins, Colorado From his book, “Understanding Your Grief”

“Reprinted with permission from Grief Digest, Centering Corporation, Omaha, Nebraska, 402-553-1200.”

“AT BOTTOM, EVERY MAN KNOWS WELL ENOUGH THAT HE IS A UNIQUE HUMAN BEING, ONLY ONCE ON THIS EARTH; AND BY NO EXTRAORDINARY CHANCE WILL SUCH A MARVELOUSLY PICTURESQUE PIECE OF DIVERSITY IN UNITY AS HE IS EVER BE PUT TOGETHER A SECOND TIME.”

-NIETZCHE

The wilderness of your grief is *your* wilderness—it is a creation of your unique self, the unique person who died, and the unique circumstances of your life. Your wilderness may be rockier or more level. Your path may be revealed in a straight line, or (more likely) it may be full of twists and turns. In your wilderness, you will encounter places that are only meaningful to you and you will experience the topography in your own way.

In life, everyone grieves, but their grief journeys are never precisely the same. Despite what you may hear, you will do the “work of mourning” in your own special way. Be careful about comparing your experience with that of other people. Do not adopt assumptions about how your grief should last. Just consider taking a “one-day-at-a-time” approach. Doing so allows you to mourn at your own pace.

This touchstone invites you to explore some of the unique reasons your grief is what it is—the “whys” of your journey through the wilderness. Of course, the whys that follow are not all the whys in the world—just some of the most common.



Your grief is a wilderness. No one can offer a map through this personalized journey, but understanding the “whys” of your grief can help you find your way.

Why #1: *Your relationship with the person who died*

Your relationship with the person who died was different than that person’s relationship with anyone else. For example, you may have been extremely close, or “best friends,” as well as husband or wife. Perhaps you loved the person who died, but you had frequent disagreements or diverse conflicts. Or maybe you were separated by physical distance, so you weren’t as close emotionally as you would have liked.

The stronger your attachment to the person who died, the more difficult your grief journey will be. It only makes sense that the closer you felt to the person who died, the

more torn apart you will feel after the death. Ambivalent relationships can also be particularly hard to process after a death. You may feel a strong sense

of “unfinished business” —things you wanted to say but you never did, conflicts you wanted to resolve but didn’t.

Whatever the circumstances, you are the best person to describe and work toward understanding your relationship with the person who died.

Why #2: *The circumstances of the death*

How, why and when the person died can have a definite impact on your journey into grief. For example, was the death sudden or anticipated? How old was the person who died? Do you feel you might have been able to prevent the death?

A sudden, unexpected death obviously does not allow you any opportunity to prepare yourself. But are you ever “ready” for that moment at all? After a death due to terminal illness, friends and family members often tell me that they were still, in a sense shocked by the death. I know this was my experience when my dad died. However, I did feel fortunate that I was able to share a special time with him before he died and that we had ample opportunity to tell one another how we felt.

The age of the person who died also affects your acceptance of the death. Within the order of the world, we usually anticipate that parents will die before their children do. But when a child dies, this order of the world is turned upside-down. Or your grief might be heightened when a “middle-aged” person dies in what was thought to be the “prime of life.” Basically, we often find our grief easier when we feel that the person who died had a chance to live a full life. When we believe that the life was cut too short, our innate sense of injustice colors our grief.

You may also be asking yourself if you could have done anything to prevent the death. "If only I had gotten him to the doctor sooner," you may be thinking; or, "If only I had driven instead of her."

The "if-onlys" are natural for you to explore, even if there is no logical way in which you could be held responsible for the death. What you're really feeling is a lack of control over what happened. And accepting that we have little control over the lives of those we love is a difficult thing indeed.

Why #3: The ritual or funeral experience

Decisions you make relating to the funeral can either help or hinder your personal grief experience. There is no single, right way to have a funeral. We do know, however, that creating a meaningful ritual for survivors can aid in the social, emotional and spiritual healing after a death.

The funeral is a time and a place to express your feelings about the death, thus legitimizing them. The funeral also can serve as a time to honor the person who has died, bring you closer to others who can give you needed support, affirm that life goes on even in the face of death, and give you a context of meaning that is in keeping with your own religious, spiritual or philosophical background.

If you were unable to attend the funeral of the person who died, or if the funeral was somehow minimized or distorted, you may find that this complicates your healing process. Be assured, however, that it is never too late after a death for you to plan and implement a ritual (even a second or third ceremony) that will help meet your needs. For example, you might choose to have a tree planting ceremony in the spring in honor of the person who died. Or you might elect to hold a memorial service on the anniversary of the death. The power of ceremony is that it helps people heal. You deserve it, and so does the person who died.

Why #4: The people in your life

Mourning requires the outside support of other human beings in order for you to heal. Without a stabilizing support system of at least one other person, the odds are that you will have difficulty in doing this work of mourning. Healing requires an environment of empathy, caring and gentle encouragement.

Sometimes other people may think that you have a support system when, in fact, you don't. For example, you may have family members or friends who live near you, but you discover that they have little compassion or patience for you and your grief. If so, a vital ingredient to healing is missing.

Or you also may have some friends and relatives who are supportive right after the death but who stop supporting you soon after. Again, for healing to occur, social support must be ongoing.

Even when you have a solid support system in place, do you find that you are willing and able to accept the support? If you are ashamed of your need to mourn, you may end up isolating yourself from the very people who would most like to walk with you in your journey through the wilderness of your grief.



Your natural disposition will greatly affect your grief journey.

Why #5: Your unique personality

What words would you use to describe yourself? What words would other people use to describe you? Are you serious? Silly? Friendly? Shy?

Whatever your unique personality, rest assured that it will be reflected in your grief. For example, if you are quiet by nature, you may express your grief quietly. If you are outgoing, you may be more expressive with your grief.

How you have responded to other losses or crises in your life will likely also be consistent with how you respond to this death. If you tend to remain distant or run away from crisis, you may do the same thing now. But if you have always confronted crisis head on and openly expressed your thoughts and feelings, you may now follow that pattern of behavior.

Other aspects of your personality, such as your self-esteem, values and beliefs, also impact your response to the death. In addition, any long-term problems with depression or anxiety will probably influenced your grief. 🏠

Grief & Loss Seminar Series

Haven Hospice's February seminar entitled "Bereavement is Not a Weight-Loss Program," will focus on nutrition and wellness. The seminar will be held February 23, 2006 from 7pm-8:30pm @ 2895 Temple Ave, Signal Hill. Light refreshments will be served. For more information please contact Erin Baker at 562-426-7500 ext 409.

Make a Difference in Someone's life

Do you have a few hours a week to listen, give support, or assist in the office? Haven Hospice is seeking people who would like to give some of their time visiting patients, helping in the office or doing community outreach. If you are interested in this rewarding opportunity, or know anyone who maybe interested in volunteering their time, please contact Tina Stephenitch, Volunteer Coordinator (562) 426-7500 ext 406 for more information.

Help us keep our mailing list current!

Are you moving and still wish to receive Healing with Haven? Or perhaps you no longer wish to receive our monthly newsletter? Please, call Tina Stephenitch at (562) 426-7500 ext 406.

Individual/Group Support

As many of you may already know, Haven Hospice offers individual support and group support to all people in the community who are going through the difficult journey of bereavement. For more information on our groups or to make an appointment for individual support please contact Tina Stephenitch, Bereavement Coordinator at (562) 426-7500 ext 406



Haven Hospice™

2895 Temple Ave
Signal Hill, CA 90755

Call toll-free at (877) 366-4466

