

## **It's A New Year....But I Still Grieve**

“The holiday celebrations are coming to an end...everyone is making New Year’s resolutions. I can picture it in my mind every year, a clean slate, offering a year full of promise and optimism. For a brief moment I am almost excited at the prospect. Then, before I know what has happened, my old companion has joined me to remind me that for me at least, all is not perhaps shiny new and bright. My old companion is grief.”

This story was relayed to me by one of the bereaved whom I saw in my work as a grief counsellor with Hospice. Some might consider “the old companion known as grief” unresolved grief. But in the context of this life story, this was not the meaning at all.

Quite the contrary, this spry lady in her late 70’s had suffered many losses. She had lost two husbands, one early in life and one recent; had lost two children, one at birth and one in mid-life, was dealing with the illness of her contemporaries and her own declining health. Her losses stretched over a lifetime. She had successfully faced each loss, working with her faith community and professionals to adapt.

While she had adapted and accepted the loss of her loved ones and she was in the midst of acceptance of her declining health, there were moments where grief visited. Be it picking up an anniversary card which evoked memory via a lump in the throat. Or a song playing that conjured a bittersweet memory of a dance together. Or the feel of a baby blanket that was never used. But the key is that grief came only for a brief visit. This is not unresolved grief, but rather a gentle reminder that we loved and still love despite the absence of our loved ones. Love endures beyond death. These brief visits from grief remind us that we are human.

As for the New Year, the slate may not be quite as shiny and bright as this courageous lady might have expected, nor for any of us who have lost loved ones for that matter. After loss, perhaps the slate is a bit aged from knowledge and wisdom. But it is this knowledge and wisdom that leads us eventually to healing and compassion.

That knowledge and wisdom comes, however only to those who manage to work through their grief, confronting the issues as they arise. We often hope that once this “grief work is done” we will return to normal; that our lives will be righted and that life as we knew it will be restored. Veteran griever know this is not the case. Once we have lost a loved one, our lives are indeed transformed to a new normal. This transformation takes place very slowly, almost without our understanding. But it does occur.

Wishing you a transformative New Year full of happiness, healing and a compassionate heart.

*Fay Ellis Jones Eller, PH.D.*