

## **When We Lose a Parent** **Marcia Kolaczowski**

When we lose a parent, we gradually become aware of all that we have lost with their passing. As we do, however, we can embrace once again what our parent has given us through the years on an ever-deepening level. May the following reflections assist you in accepting the loss and gift of your parents...in the past and present, and into the future.

### ***It is always too soon...***

When death comes to a loved one, it is always too soon. There is always one more conversation to share, one more sunset to watch, or one more special day to celebrate. Whether we are six, sixteen, or sixty, the finality of losing a parent is something rarely wished for. It always is too soon, and it is only right that we grieve deeply what we wanted to keep forever.

### ***It is never too late...***

Some of the most important words to speak to our loved ones can also be the hardest: thank you, I love you, I'm sorry, and I forgive you. Few of us rarely take advantage of all the opportunities to speak them. We may not have said them to our parents at all or perhaps they were not spoken with the sincerity or emphasis we wish. If we remember the truth that love lives forever, it truly is never too late to speak what our dying loved ones need to hear. Some adult children write a letter in a journal, read a poem or sing a song with their sentiments in it. Others place an item from nature symbolizing their heartfelt thoughts in a stream or river, whisper some heartfelt words in the wind or say a particular prayer to convey the movements of their souls to their parents. Love is forever; it is never too late to express it.

### ***The security of having parents...***

As we grow through or adulthood, there still is an inner security of having one among us who has journeyed through life's trials that we have not yet faced. Though our views and opinions may not always match, having parents through our maturing years brings an inner feeling of security. The loss of a parent can jolt us into letting go of a person on earth. But retaining what their lives stood for, in good times and in bad. A parent's death can be a profound invitation to reflect on the gift of his life. What mattered to them? How did they endure heartache? What am I to receive from their life story that I can implement in my daily living and loving?

### ***The quest to forgive...***

As we reflect on our lives with our parents, we may come upon memories that seem to have been less than blessings. Upon the death of a parent, adult children often will revisit painful areas once again, desiring and striving to accept the humanity of their parents and honoring their own inner pain at the same time. As we maneuver through these waters, the finality of death often frees us to find the courage to forgive from a depth beyond where we were capable of forgiving before. The choice to forgive may come in small phases over time, but the gifts to our hearts will be endless.

### ***The heart is where the home is...***

With the loss of one or both parents, the family home and gathering place can often be lost as well. Family gatherings, family relationships and dynamic, and a sense of family unity can often take on new dimensions. While these can be disturbing, remembering the fact that changes accompany family life every year and in every stage can be comfort. Rarely do things remain exactly the same in a family from beginning to end. Strive to embrace the new opportunities of this stage to “be” family with one another, whether we live across town or far away. Continue to celebrate the memories of the past and create new memories today as you embrace the love that is treasured forever.

### ***The gift of our lives...***

The reality of the death of our parents can serve as a mirror for our lives. We, like they, will not live forever. Whatever our age, our lives on earth will also come to an end. We may find ourselves more pensive as we examine our existence. What are we living for? Where did our parents try to lead us? Where are we going? What, if any, changes need to be made? Just as our parents’ lives served to guide and lead us while they lived, their deaths may serve similar purposes.

### ***Orphaned or abandoned?...***

Some adult children can experience feeling thrown to the wind after the loss of a parent. Seldom are we aware of the many ways we depended on our parents for approval, advice, assistance, support, for providing a refuge in trials and much more. Their deaths may challenge us to explore our own identity and inner strength and to even grow into new and deeper areas of wisdom and commitment. Feeling alone and vulnerable can be transformed from viewing oneself as a mere seedling to one who must continue the family tradition of becoming a redwood for the generations that follow.

### ***Has your faith suffered because of your suffering?***

One of the deepest heartaches of humanity is to witness the suffering of another and to be unable to remove his or her pain. We may have felt abandoned by other family members, friends, the medical system or even God. Our faith in ourselves, our family and in the God we professed belief in, may have been shaken to the core. The suffering and subsequent loss of a parent can serve as a time for retreat in our busy lives. Does God indeed cause suffering and even worse abandon us during it? What do we believe and why? Does my daily life reflect a faith? Do I need or want spirituality to be a greater anchor in my life? What must I do to achieve that?

### ***Going forward into the future...***

Whether we are young or old, the presence of our parents will be missed profoundly as we go forward to make our own dreams come true. Religious rituals, graduations, births, weddings, and various achievements will be celebrated without their physical presence. Families embrace various ways of honoring what parents lived for and taught us a way to safeguard what they imparted, lest what is important be forgotten. A lit candle, a fresh flower or plant, poetry or a prayer, a planted tree, a moment of silence, a shared song, words of wisdom are just ways of honoring one who was and always will be in our hearts and lives.