



Family and Caregiver Education

BEREAVEMENT

Memories

“I am afraid,” Paula, one of my clients, once told me, “that once the pain stops, the memories will begin to fade, as well...”

She added, “I never want to forget Francis. We were married for so long. I never want to forget his laugh or his smile, or all the times we spent together.”

Sometimes, in the midst of grief, we share those fears. We become afraid that once the pain ceases, the connections will fade. We hold on to the intense pain of grief because we fear that once we lose the pain, we will leave behind all memories.

We need not worry. Grief is not an illness. We do not get better, recover, or get over it; simply move onto other relationships and other memories. It is a journey that we undertake. The end point, if we can really talk about an “end point,” is not that we forget. Rather, it is that we can remember with more clarity. The memories that were once too painful to consider are now approached more easily.

For Paula, it meant that she could now laugh at stories that once caused her to cry. She could recount the cruise that Francis and she almost missed due to a delayed plane. Paula could share stories of the times they had. Now she could review her photograph albums once again, laughing and crying at times, but remembering.

This is a critical point about grief. We do not end a relationship with the person who died. The relationship becomes different. It exists in memory. We continue to maintain a tie with the person we loved. We may think of them often. Sometimes a day or a season, a place, or an event can stir those memories. Sometimes it might involve any of the senses. A song, a smell, the touch of a fabric, or the taste of a certain food may remind us of the person. The connection never ceases.

At times this may be painful. That too, is part of the grieving process. These memories will remind us of what is lost. For Paula, frightening events on the news would remind her of the crises that Francis and she had faced together. She missed him at her side.

Bereavement Services

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The memories though, also reminded her about what remained, what could never be lost. Paula knew that those memories could comfort and reassure her, even as she grieved.

Over time, Paula learned a great truth about grief. As she journeyed, the pain lessened. She could function again and move confidently once more in her world. There would be times, she knew, later in her grief, when the pain would be intense, even if not for long. There would be times that the memories would painfully reiterate what was missing. Mostly though, the memories would reaffirm that the tie would not end.

She would never forget Francis.

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Published in Journeys, A newsletter to help in bereavement
Hospice Foundation of America
October 2004 issue

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