



Stories & questions to help process grief and death, designed for adults

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Intentional Remembering

In the first few years after my husband died, I realized that my daughters and I were being careful and cautious about our grief. We didn't want the others to feel bad, so we mostly kept quiet with each other. We didn't share our pain much, but we also didn't share our memories much either.

I didn't want us to evolve into a family who couldn't talk about the husband/dad we had lost. I didn't want to wipe my husband out of our family. Maybe I was reading more into it than I should have but I began to look for ways to encourage (force) us to talk about Dad.

We began having "Let's Talk About Dad" evenings. We didn't have them regularly and they weren't even all that often. Usually it was just me, my daughters and their husbands or fiancés. Once we invited my parents. It was surprising to see how quickly my dad, who can laugh, joke and tell a story at any moment but often shies away from uncomfortable conversations, jumped into the conversation. He told so many stories of his beloved son-in-law!

Our "Let's Talk About Dad" times have had different formats.

We had a time of me going around the room and telling each of my family how they were like their Dad. This included the sons-in-law and a fiancé who had never met Dad. It was easy for me to state the attributes they each shared with this man we loved so much, and I believe it helped them feel connected.

Another time, we had a photo night. We dug out pictures, my parents brought some as well, and we told the stories behind each event.

And a different time, we played "Forty Question About Dad." I made a list of questions (and 40 was maybe a few too many because the night got long) and as I read them aloud, we discussed each answer. Some of the questions were meaningful and some were not, some made us think and some made us laugh. All together they helped us remember different facets of the man we loved.

What are some ways you have been intentional about your remembering?

How have you included others in your times of remembering?



Do you think spontaneous remembering is enough for you at this time of your grieving or would you like it to be more intentional?

Who can you invite to remember with you?

Code Words

A friend and I were talking recently about an upcoming event she is looking forward to. She and I are both widows and our conversations are filled with helping each other find ways to walk through the muck of grieving.

This upcoming event is one that will be filled with joy, except that her husband will not be there to share that joy. She knows already, months in advance, that the emotions may be too much for her. She knows her limits and does not want to feel she is taking the attention off the joyous event with evidence of her grief. She also knows she can only pretend to be handling the excessive emotions for so long. She doesn't want to be phony but strongly feels that an abundance of sad emotions does not belong in this setting.

She wants to find a way for her to leave the event early without causing a stir or offending her family members. We discussed some options and landed on a code word. She will decide upon a word, inform her close family members of the word, and when she speaks it to them, they will know that she has reached the point where she needs to leave and be alone for a while. Her family will understand why she needs to leave because she will have talked it over with them previously, at a time when emotions were not so overwhelming. They will understand because they will have had time to process before the event. In having a plan for an escape should she become overwhelmed she has prepared herself to monitor her emotions before they become unmanageable.

Have you dreaded attending an event such as a wedding, a family reunion, or another joyous gathering because you feared "ruining" it with your grief? Have you avoided attending for that reason?

What kind of plan might you come up with next time to make attending, for as long as you are comfortable, possible?

Who can help you execute this plan? Who will you whisper your code word to?



A few weeks after my husband died a woman approached me at church. She was quick to get to the point; here is a paraphrase of what she said to me: don't be surprised if all your women friends back away from you now. You are a reminder to all of us that if your husband has died, ours can too and we do not want to confront that reality.

Thirteen and half years later the pain that accompanied that comment still gives me pause. I do not remember who she was, I only remember the pain in her words. I do not believe she intended to hurt me. I also do not believe she is aware she caused pain that day. There is a good chance she does not even remember talking to me.

The lesson I learned over time is that I should have addressed that pain. I should have looked at it and worked it through, so it did not grow and fester and become bigger than it needed to be. I just took her comment, held it tight, and waited for it to be proven true.

Is there an unkind or unthinking comment that you have received that needs to be re-evaluated?

Is the comment true? How do you know it is true?

Do you have concrete evidence the comment is valid and true or are you allowing your emotions to validate the words?

Have you spoken to anyone about this comment? If not, who could you talk it over with?
Talking about a problem often brings clarity and discernment.

Is it possible that the unkind comment was spoken out of unaddressed or
misunderstood grief?

Can you reframe the comment within the context of what you have discovered through these questions?

