

Touchstone

*Mo sheasamh ort lá na choise tinne’
‘You are the place where I stand on the day when my
feet are sore’*



Issues –1-19

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Quotes of the Month

African Proverb.

When someone dies in parts of Africa they don't say they "have passed" or "departed," but rather that they... "have arrived!"

This beautiful expression is saturated with the belief that their beloved dead have finally arrived at the destination toward which they have been traveling all their lives.

"Nothing ever goes away until it has taught us what we need to know."

Pema Chodron

The Irish poet and theologian Pádraig Ó Tuama, in the phrase above, may say it best when death and the grief that follows enters into our lives. During these difficult times, following the death of a loved one, it may seem that there is no place to stand...there is no one who understands.

As part of our hospice family we want you to know that we stand shoulder to shoulder with you as you move forward in grief. And we want you to know that our care and love for you did not end with the death of your loved one.

We know that as family and friends return to their everyday life those left behind must now live with their loss and the pain that death brings. We want you to know that we at Senior Solutions will continue to provide care and support for you and your family for the next twelve months and, if needed, beyond.

Grieving is hard work and no one can escape it. Yet in our society today the most common response when asked, "How are you doing?" is, "I'm OK." However we know in our heart that this is not true. Others will tell us "time will heal" but this also is a falsehood. And there is no such thing as "getting back to normal" or "closure."

The last thing we need on our journey through grief is advice or quick fix suggestions... clichés or platitudes. At this time, especially in the first days, weeks and months... words do not really matter.

Although grief is a normal process, what matters now is loving kindness, care, listening and most importantly an opportunity to talk and share your loved one's story. We at Senior Solutions promise to be this kind of support for you in the months that follow.

Touchstone, our monthly newsletter, is just that. A way to keep in touch with you as you travel through the journey of grief and the changes in life it brings.

You are family, and as family we want you to know you can reach out to us at anytime. In the meantime, "Touchstone" will offer personal stories in Deacon Dan's "Postcard" reflections, support information from Shela our Social Worker, and book suggestions and website recommendations.

The Touchstone Newsletter will be mailed to you over the next twelve months. Please feel free to share it or we would be happy to mail additional copies to family or friends you know who are also going through the grief process.

Peace and Grace,

Sheena Hensley and Senior Solution Staff

*Help thy brother's
boat across, and lo!
thine own has
reached the shore.*



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Postcards-by

Deacon Dan McGrath

(Note: My wife died Oct. 23, 2015 these postcard reflection were written following her death)

When I would prepare families for funerals at Holy Spirit Parish I would sometimes say, "Your loved one is just fine, they are in a great place. I'm not sure what heaven is like but until someone sends me a postcard back I trust that heaven is a wonderful place." My late wife, Carol, and I would always have a good laugh over that.

Since her death, Carol has been faithful in sending me and others many "postcards" over these past five months. There have been pictures falling off the walls, light bulbs coming on, geese flying over the house, even messages in songs by the Beatles (Carol loved the Beatles) and other music, and messages in letters or one of many reflections she wrote that would provide just the right healing and hopeful message at just the right time.

As I begin to frame some sort of re-entry into my life without Carol by my side (although she is always with me but now in a different way) it has been difficult. How does one learn to love, laugh, live, make decisions and plans without your soulmate of 46 years? To be honest, I'm not really sure.

As I said, I have sat with many families during their time of loss and I thought I had a good understanding of what grief was. I thought I could "handle it." After all, I was trained as a Deacon to say all the right "churchy clichés." However, having gone through the personal experience of Carol's death, I can honestly say, **I had no idea what real grief was about.** And how little comfort churchy words and clichés offer in bringing any comfort. The hole in my heart and the despair I feel is beyond words. The best I and others in my grief bereavement group have come to expressing our grief is: "It just sucks." Even that falls short.

Carol's death has been devastating for me and there are no words that bring comfort during this time. How does one answer the standard question: "How are you doing?" When going through such loss one thinks only of making it through the days and nights with any kind of equilibrium intact. The idea that there is a "bright

side" to this is unbelievable, even offensive at times. A better question might be "How are you feeling?" And then be prepared to really listen and bring lots of tissue.

William Shakespeare said: **"Well, everyone can master grief except he that has it."**

One thing I am certain of is there is no cure for grief and the freedom one feels from not having to be a caretaker any longer is a freedom that I despise. After the death of a loved one we never, never, never are the same.

But there is hope.

The poet Maya Angelou said: "Self-pity in its early stages is as snug as a feather mattress...only when it hardens does it become uncomfortable."

One of Carol's postcards led me to a reflection were she wrote: "We have to begin, at some time in our life, to promise ourselves on a daily basis, we will be grateful." So that's where I will begin.

I am first grateful for the gift of being able to cry. I have discovered over this past year as Carol's caretaker and after her death that tears release the pressures of grief. I can't speak for others, but after I have a good cry, which is many times during the day, I always feel better afterwards and find hope in tears and memories.

I am grateful for my family, especially my son, daughter, grandchildren and sister-in-law who have protected me, nurtured me, and encouraged me to "keep moving forward one step at a time." As they deal with their own loss and pain they have never lost sight of hope, even when at times it seems unavailable and out of reach.

I am grateful for my therapists and the grief support group that I attend ...as they tend to me. Their wisdom has guided me to believe that there is hope in the gift of time and that growth and healing comes in kindness, compassion, talking to and reaching out to others.

I am grateful for all who are comfortable to talk about and share special stories about Carol with me and include her in our conversations...There is no better therapy and gift to me than when you speak of Carol.

Carol would be the first to say... "Grief never ends... but it changes. It's a passage, not a place to stay. Grief is not a sign of weakness nor a lack of faith.

It is the price of love.” There is hope in resting and reflecting on one’s life after the trauma of devastating loss. I’m reminded of a poster I saw that said: “So tell me where should I go? **To the left, where nothing is right, or to the right, where nothing is left?**”

I leave you with the refrain in one of Carol’s postcard songs titled: "The Gathering of Spirits" by Carrie Newcomer.

Let it go my love, my truest...Let it sail on silver wings...Life's a twinkling that's for certain, But it's such a fine thing. There's a gathering of spirits...There's a festival of friends...And we'll take up where we left off...When we all meet again.

Deacon Dan and a postcard from Carol

More Postcard reflections visit: www.postcardreflections.blogspot.com

[Touchstone](#)

[Book of the Month Suggestion](#)

Alan Wolfelt Book:

Grief One Day at a Time: 365 Meditations to Help You Heal After Loss. Companion Press. Here’s a sample...

“One thing: you have to walk, and create the way by your walking; you will not find a ready-made path. It is not so cheap, to reach to the ultimate realization of truth. You will have to create the path by walking yourself; the path is not ready-made, lying there and waiting for you. It is just like the sky: the birds fly, but they don’t leave any footprints. You cannot follow them; there are no footprints left behind.” — Osho

Each of us has to create our own path through the wilderness of our grief. Though others have gone before us, they inhabited their own unique wilderness; they created their own unique path. We have to walk; we create the way by our own walking. And so we look ahead, seeing no clear path. We only know we need to move. So we take a step. And that step helps us know when and how to take another. I will create my path through grief by discovering and walking it myself.

There are two great universal and prime paths of transformation have been available to every human being God has created...**great love and great suffering**...they level the playing fields for all of us.

“We may forget with whom we laughed...**but not with whom we shed a tear.**”

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How Long Is Too Long to Mourn?

There’s no “normal” amount of time to grieve. Your grieving process depends on a number of things, like your personality, age, beliefs, and support network. With time, the sadness eases. You’ll be able to feel happiness and joy along with grief. You’ll be able to return to your daily life.

Do I Need Professional Help?

In some cases, grief doesn’t get better. You may not be able to accept the loss. Doctors call this “complicated grief.” Talk to your doctor if you have any of the following:

- Trouble keeping up your normal routine, like going to work and cleaning the house.
- **Feelings of depression.**
- Thoughts that life isn’t worth living, or of harming yourself.
- Any inability to stop blaming yourself.

A therapist can help you explore your emotions. She can also teach you coping skills and help you manage your grief. If you’re depressed, a doctor may be able to prescribe medicines to help you feel better. When you’re in deep, emotional pain, it can be tempting to try to numb your feelings with drugs, alcohol, food, or even work. But be careful. These are temporary escapes that won’t make you heal faster or feel better in the long run. In fact, they can lead to **addiction, depression, anxiety**, or even an emotional breakdown. Instead, try these things to help you come to terms with your loss and begin to heal:

- **Give yourself time.** Accept your feelings and know that grieving is a process.
- **Talk to others.** Spend time with friends and family. Don’t isolate yourself.
- **Take care of yourself.** Exercise regularly, eat well, and get enough sleep to stay healthy and energized.
- **Return to your hobbies.** Get back to the activities that bring you joy.
- **Join a support group.** Speak with others who are also grieving. It can help you feel more connected.

WebMD



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Book Suggestions

- ⇒ Healing After Loss-Martha Witmore Hickman
- ⇒ When Things Fall Apart-Pema Chodron
- ⇒ Good Grief-Granger E. Westberg
- ⇒ Safe Passage-Molly Fumia
- ⇒ Grief One Day at a Time-Alan Wolfelt
- ⇒

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Website Suggestions

- ⇒
- ⇒ www.postcardreflection.blogspot.com
- ⇒ www.hospicenet.org
- ⇒ www.helpguide.org/articles/grief-loss/coping-with-grief-and-loss

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