



## STOP TRYING TO MOVE ON, JUST MOVE FORWARD

“Stop! Don’t touch that! You’ll get hurt!”

But it was too late. Color and curiosity already captured me as Mom and I walked the shores of Lake Michigan. As a girl, I loved collecting anything, rocks, butterflies, bugs, shells. And now, glass pieces: sharp sparkly shards scattered along the shore. Blues, greens peppered with browns.

“It hurts!” I cried. Even before Mom’s warning, I had sliced my hand. Mom wrapped it in a towel and wiped my eyes. “You’ll be fine. It will heal.” She held me close.

In the weeks that followed Mom did allow my sister Teri and me to return to the beach and watch the progress of our glass. Our Beach Glass. We would stand there mesmerized as the glass tumbled in a swirl of sand and foam with each wave, forward, backward till they rested on the shore, etched and smooth. The same, but different. I held the glass in my palm, a warm peaceful feeling instead of shock and pain. I slipped it in my pocket.

As Continuous Care Coordinator, this memory returns again and again as it has over years of ministry with people in so many painful situations, offering the hope that the sharp edges of grief can be washed and etched with love, forgiveness, time, and gratitude.

“When will I get over this?” a widow asks. “Will I ever feel normal again?” a mother cries. “They just don’t understand! My brother tells me I need to move on, get over it, but I can’t,” another shares.

“Do you want the truth?” A surprised look always greets me, a mixture of hope and futility with a slight tenuous nod. “The truth is you love deeply. This person means more than anyone can know. You don’t leave

relationships behind. You grieve because you love and you miss not only the person, but the life you created together.

I watch a tear roll down a cheek. “The truth is that the pain will soften and you will feel happy again, even though you’ll feel sad sometimes. You will always miss him. You will always remember the good and the bad. But the grief morphs, if you embrace it. It’s up to you to intentionally decide to choose hope and work through your grief, creating a positive future.”

“Everyone tells me to move on. What if I can’t move on?” There’s a desperate nagging fear in her voice. “I can’t get anything done. I can’t even give away his shirts!”

“Let me offer you grace. Just accept where you are right now. You’re still in shock. Your mind doesn’t work the same. It may take months, but you will heal.” I stop. Let that sink in. “I want you to listen carefully as we think



about what it means to move on.” She nods and I lean in, softening my voice. “What if you stop telling yourself to move on? That’s not a helpful phrase. Moving on feels like you are leaving all those good memories, and that

treasured relationship behind.

“What if instead of ‘moving on,’ you decide to ‘carry on,’ to ‘move forward’ taking all you have loved and learned with you as you journey on your next steps of life?”

She gives me a quizzical look. “You mean I don’t have to move on?”

“Consider making your mantra: I AM CARRYING ON. I AM MOVING FORWARD. When people tell you to move on, or you tell yourself to move on, it’s because the grieving process is so uncomfortable. People put expectations on you because they just want the whole thing to be over. They want “closure.” But it’s not that way. The pathway of grief takes time. A lot of time. And it weaves in and out. Just when you think you’re “normal,” the tiniest thing will happen and emotions well up. And that’s ok. Be generous with yourself.”

This is when I tell the Beach Glass Story. “That piece of glass is like the grief of your

loved one. At first it’s sharp, but with time, the edges soften. You carry it with you. You move forward honoring the memory of your loved one. You walk with



hope treasuring all the lessons, all the love. You take him/her into new relationships, onto new paths. You feel the beach glass in your pocket. As you rub it between your fingers? You decide in the midst of grief to choose hope.”

Hello, I’m VickiJolene Reece, the Continuous Care Coordinator at Locke Funeral Services. I come from a large family, the eldest of five girls. I am widowed and have two adult daughters. I was also a long term caregiver and know the grief and worry caregivers feel. As a United Methodist pastor, I’ve helped hundreds of people deal with just about every form of loss, at homes, farms, workplace, ICU, ER, nursing homes, and even accident sites.

My circle of family and friends includes Christians, atheists, races, and different beliefs. I respect and love them, and it’s mutual. So it will be with anyone who needs support.

I want you to know that I am here for you if you need a caring person to help you on your journey, be it a phone call, a cup of coffee, or our Thursday Grief Group. Let’s journey together as you deal with the sharp edges of grief. (319) 233-6138.

*And just to remind you that there is healing and hope in the midst of grief, I have a piece of beach glass for you. (VickiJolene Reece)*



## Quotes

“The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate now knowing...not healing, not curing...that is a friend who cares.” Henri Nouwen

“But there was no need to be ashamed of tears, for tears bore witness that a man had the greatest of courage: the courage to suffer.” Viktor Frankl

“Grief is like the ocean; it comes on waves, ebbing and flowing. Sometimes the water is calm, and sometimes it is overwhelming. All we can do is learn to swim.” Vicki Harrison

“Climb the mountains and get their good tidings. Nature’s peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their freshness into you, and the storms their energy, while cares will drop off like falling leaves.” John Muir

## **HOLDING ON or LETTING GO? ALWAYS BE HUMBLE AND KIND!**

“What do you think you’re doing? Mary burst into her bedroom, catching Tonya with an old flannel shirt. *His flannel shirt*

“Mom, I’m just trying to help!”

“I don’t need your help!” Mary looked at the pile of Bob’s old clothes. Those jeans he refused to get rid of. Tears stung as she remembered his voice. *They finally fit just right honey. Ok. I won’t wear them in public.* The blue suit he wore on their first date. *I knew then I wanted to marry you. Just didn’t think you would. Prettiest girl I ever saw.* She picked it up, holding it close, remembering their first kiss. Tears. Tenderness. She wanted to flop on the bed and sob. Instead, she defended her decision.

“I don’t need your help! Put everything back!” Mary yanked the flannel shirt out of Tonya’s hand, caressing it to her chest, feeling its softness as she lifted it to her flushed cheek to soak away her tears.

“Mom, I’m sorry.” Tonya reached out, hugging her mom, crying with her. Mary’s stiff body began to relax.

“This was your dad’s favorite.” She grinned. “He never let me wash it. Said that would ruin it.”

The two sat on the bed. “Remember when we went camping?” Tonya breathed into the frayed flannel hoping the scent of campfires, marshmallows and fried fish lingered.

Mary nodded. “I’m just not ready honey.”

“I’m sorry Mom. I miss him too. But you gotta let go. You don’t need all his stuff.”

“I will, just maybe later. Go through the boxes in the basement and garage first. I know you miss him. Even at 50 you are still his little girl.” She paused, as if reading her daughter’s mind. “You really want this shirt, don’t you?”

“I do, but not if you need it. I just wanted to

wear it to remember all the good times. Do you have another so I can make a pillow for my couch?”

“I’m glad you told me. You just took me by surprise. I want you to have it honey. And you know? When I’m ready, maybe we can sew the kids’ teddy bears. Lord knows the man had more of his fair share of flannel shirts!”

Tonya chuckled and took her mother’s hand, pulling her up and toward the door. “Let’s take a break! Come on Mom, you still make the best Snickerdoodles in the county. Remember when...?”

“Oh, your dad! He always...” The screen door slammed. “Tony! It’s about time you got here! We were just talking about the time when your dad...”

### **CONSIDER YOUR REAL GOALS: FAMILY CARE**

Family belongings. Even the smallest, seemingly innocent insignificant item can become highly valued more than pure gold. A childhood toy, Dad’s fishing rod, or Mom’s wooden spoon. Then there’s items of high monetary value. Who gets those? Did Mom really promise that to the other? “No, she didn’t! That’s mine! You don’t even want them, you just would sell them for the money!” Sadly, it is at this point when family arguments erupt and the damage can last a lifetime. Make it your goal to “come out whole.”

### **10 WAYS TO BUILD UP FAMILY AS YOU DOWNSIZE**

**Decide to be Humble and Kind** Value each person. I found it helpful to listen to “Humble and Kind” by Tim McGraw as my sisters and I went through our childhood home and 50 years of memories.

**Delay Demanding Downsizing** Respect that people grieve in different ways. Allow each

other grace to process shock and disorientation after death. Making too many decisions is confusing and upsetting. Consider doing little for a while, unless necessary.

**Honor Your Father and Mother** Realize it's more than "stuff." You are looking at Collections, Gifts, Dreams, Memories, and yes, many things avoided and stuffed into drawers, attics, and basements. Lots of good intentions to be fulfilled "someday."

**Forgive** Old feelings will come up. You will never feel like forgiveness. It's a decision to release yourself from resentments. Your heart will experience peace (eventually) when you do the real emotional and spiritual work behind the physical work.

**Choose Grace & Gratitude** Lift up a grateful prayer for the pleasure items gave you. Share fun or tender memories of holidays and celebrations around the dining room table before mom must sell it in order to move into Senior Living.

**Sit Down and Talk** Share and clarify expectations and desires. Really listen. Affirm what you hear. Write down the first choice of one thing that each really wants to remember the loved one. Be honest and respectful of each other. Do not rush a parent to give up something that is still in their own home. Avoid sneaking things out of the house. You are better than that.

**Bring in a Neutral Person** Diffuse divisive situations with a calm person.

**Start with the Least Emotional Items** Save sentimental for last.

**Change What You Say** Instead of "getting rid of" things, (which will hurt your mom when you are talking about the China she loved and

"none of you kids want") consider saying "how can we find a new home for this? Who would be helped/blessed by this?" This works. It helps to know that cherished possessions will be appreciated by others (even if you give things to charity). And sometimes? You graciously accept

the lovely things that she cherished to use in new ways. Mom's silver sugar bowl now holds my pens.

**Laugh and Cry through the Stories** Appreciate all the time, work, love and sacrifice represented in everything saved. Yes, some hoard. But most pack up treasured memories. "Mom, why did you save that old thing?" "Because it was special. You made it for me when you were five years old."

**Feel the love.** ♥♥♥ (*VickiJolene Reece*)



## IT'S ALRIGHT TO CRY

"You should be here!" Marla screamed in frustration clenching her pen, stabbing it toward heaven as she stared at medical bills, insurance forms, death certificates, and more bills. "Why didn't you teach me how to do this? Why didn't I ever ask?"

She felt like a deer trapped by headlights: paralyzed and panicked. Her stomach roiled. Her throat tightened. Her eyes, still swollen from her last battle, stung. *Will this ever end?* With that she fled, escaping from the room, flopping on her bed, sobbing into her pillow.

*Marla, grow up, big girls don't cry! You've cried long enough. Will I ever feel happy again?* The river of tears erupted, the pain coursing through her, the current so strong, as she gasped for breath. Reason and expectations threw her no lifeline. *I need help. This is too much.*

Maybe Marla fell asleep, and it was a dream. Maybe. But Marla remembers someone tenderly stroking her hair and patting her back. A gentle soothing voice whispering in her ear. Her grandmother? Marla cried even harder. She missed her Nana so much.

"There, there my little one, you go ahead and just have a good cry."

A baby gasps for her first breath and gives out a healthy cry. A good cry. People smile because it proves we are truly alive. And so it goes, the rest of our lives. The tears come to clear the dust out of our eyes. The happy tears come as a father walks his daughter down the aisle. And the sad tears come with grief. And it's those emotional tears that actually help us heal.

Not all tears are chemically the same.

Neuroscientist Dr. William H. Frey II has spent twenty years studying crying and tears. He is the author of *Crying: The Mystery of Tears* and the co-director and founder of the Alzheimer's Research Center at Regions Hospital in St. Paul, Minnesota.

## CRYING IS HEALTHY AND HELPS HUMANS SURVIVE

"Crying is not only a human response to sorrow and frustration, but it is also a healthy one," Frey says. "Human's ability to cry has survival value." He goes on to teach that crying releases stress, reduces sadness, and lowers blood pressure. Emotional tears differ from other tears in that they remove toxins and stress hormones. They truly do get 'the sad out of you.' And once you start? Keep going according to the science behind crying. Cry for several minutes. It takes that long for the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS) to be activated so you can truly rest.

## CRYING GETS THE SAD OUT OF YOU

Do you remember the massive football player Rosie Grier? Back in the 1970's he sang "It's Alright to Cry" for the children's musical "Free To Be You And Me."

*It's alright to cry*

*Crying gets the sad out of you.*

*It's alright to cry*

*It might make you feel better.*

And Rosie was right! A good cry releases endorphins which ease emotional and physical pain giving you a sense of well-being and calm. Grieving, anger, guilt, sadness, reproach, depression, tiredness, and confusion are normal feelings after losing a loved one. Crying is one healthy way to help you process and move forward with your life.

## CRYING WITH OTHERS

It can be a challenge to overcome what we were told in childhood: 'only babies cry,' or 'be a man, big boys don't cry.' Listening and talking to an understanding support group allows you to openly mourn. It can be a huge relief to be with others who encourage you as they pass you a tissue. Consider our Grief Group on Thursdays.

## WHEN YOU CAN'T STOP, TAKE ACTION

If you do find you cannot stop crying after a period of time, please talk to someone, and see your doctor. Especially if you have any of these feelings:

Extreme hopelessness

Trouble sleeping

Changes in weight and appetite

Thoughts of suicide

Deep depression

At the beginning of the grieving process, some may think, 'I can't go on!' Suicidal thoughts can pass through a griever's mind and are normal. IF THEY ARE PASSING THOUGHTS.

However, if such thoughts persist, pay attention. Don't believe what you are telling yourself. You are grieving and better days are ahead. You may feel hopeless now, but you have a hopeful future. Your story isn't over!

If you sense you or anyone in your family is considering suicide, you must take action even if you are sworn to secrecy. Call 911 for an immediate emergency. Turn to a trusted pastor, teacher, counselor, family member, or friend. The Iowa Department of Public Health offers "YourLifeIowa" for all problems. Call 855-581-8111 or text 855-895-8398.

Again, take immediate action. Don't lose hope. Choose hope. © VickiJolene Lindley Reece

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JOIN US EVERY THURSDAY!

## 2024 Continuous Care Support



### Grief Support Daytime Meetings

TIME: 1:00—2:30 p.m.

LOCATION:

Cabin Coffee, 2040 Kimball, Waterloo

### Grief Support Evening Meetings

TIME: 5:00-6:30 p.m.

LOCATION:

Locke at Tower Park, 4140 Kimball, Waterloo

### DATES:

March 7, 14, 21, 28

April 4, 11, 18, 25

May 2, 9, 16, 23, 30

June 6, 13, 20, 27

*Please feel free to bring a friend*

All groups are free and open to the public! Call with questions at 319-233-6138.

**WEATHER ALERT: If schools are closed due to weather, the meeting is canceled.**

Want to be on our mailing list? Call and we'll add you to our quarterly newsletter list.