

Phoenix Rising

This grief newsletter is sent to members and friends of Paradise Valley United Methodist Church following the loss of a loved one. PVUMC pastors are available to you if you need one-on-one support. Contact the church office for more information at 602-840-8360. If you wish to be removed from the mailing list, contact the church office or e-mail ddoran@pvumc.org.

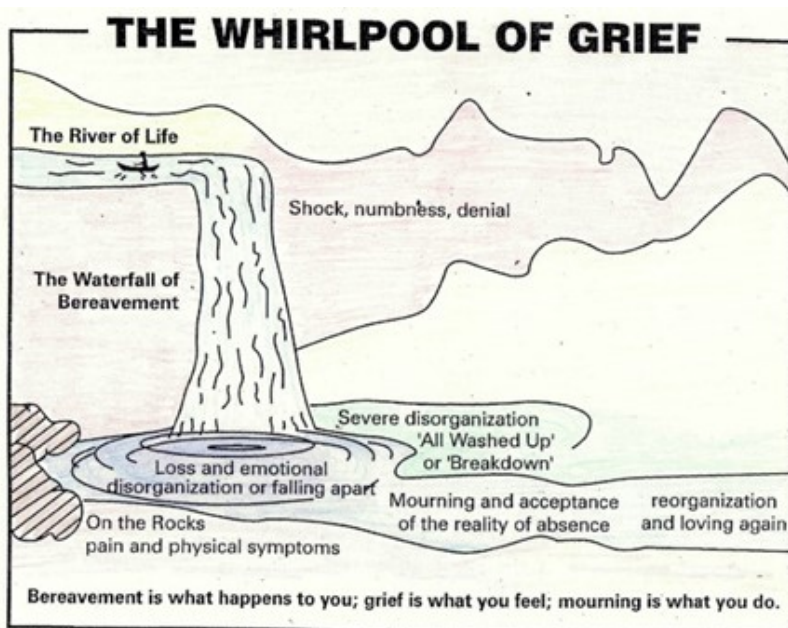
Debbie Doran, Editor

Courage After Loss

Courage means moving ahead in spite of bumpy roads; it means admitting you're afraid sometimes, and yet, going on...

Courage means roaring like an eagle on the wings of hope; it means searching for the seeds of truth and allowing them to blossom in our lives...

Courage means walking tall and unafraid, because we know that at the heart of courage there is God.¹



It's Okay to Talk about Joan

"One of the greatest gifts you can give someone who's grieving is easy, natural reminiscing about the person who has died." Joan died January 19, 2002. We'd been married for 33 years, 4 months, 19 days, 3 hours, and 37 minutes. Every part of that time in my life had been permeated with Joan's presence and support, her cheerleading and her counsel. Together we'd raised two children, built professions, and painstakingly crafted a ministry organization. Now the consequences of the vow—"until death do us part"—had come.

A friend in Vermont once told me about the return of rainbow trout to their spawning grounds. Sometimes, in the exuberance of the hard swim upstream against the down-rush of snowmelt, a fish would leap out of the torrent and onto the bank. That's how I felt—flopping on a rocky shore, alone. Well, alone is overdramatic, perhaps. Certainly, I was surrounded by family, friends, and colleagues. But I was bereft of all that was Joan except for memories. As Tennyson said many years ago, "'Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all." It's the same with memories. It's better to have them than not to have them.

In his book, *A Grief Observed*, C. S. Lewis reflected on the loss of his wife and talked about how memories are no replacement for the real thing. He's right—memories are not a replacement for Joan. But they are a consolation. To have memories, you must have remembered. One saying goes: "A problem shared is a problem halved." The arithmetic works differently with memories: "A memory shared is a memory doubled." I can certainly remember alone, and I do, but when someone remembers with me, it is much better.

Two months after Joan died, I was at a restaurant with my two daughters, son-in-law, and grandson. As my older daughter, Charity, tried to decide whether to order soup or a salad, she asked our server if she could sample the soup. Her husband, Jamie, said, "You must have gotten that from your mother. I remember her doing that a lot." Such a warm glow washed over me! What a kind gesture that was to me—to all of us—to have Jamie so naturally include in the conversation something that Joan used to do, something that we even kidded her about.

Right up there with the myths that the world is flat or that the moon is made of green cheese lies the one that says you shouldn't talk about someone who has died for fear of hurting those who are grieving. One of the greatest gifts you can give someone who's grieving is easy, natural reminiscing about the person who has died. Many people view the grieving process as a wound scabbing over and believe that raising memories is like picking the scab, slowing recovery. It couldn't be further from the truth. I can say that based not only on my own experience, but on that of many scores of people I've talked to.

“ One of the greatest gifts you can give someone who's grieving is easy, natural reminiscing about the person who has died.”²

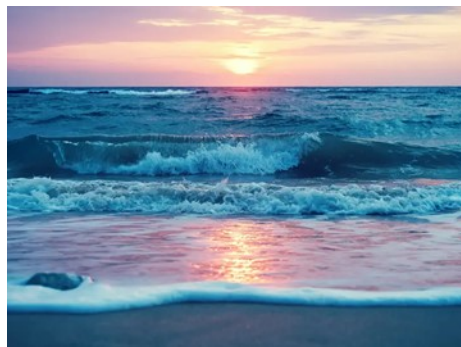
WAVES

I stand on a bluff and watch the repeating action of waves roll onto the sand and beat viciously upon the rocky shore. In another area, the waves creep to the sand and then flow back to the sea.

It reminds me of life's experiences as they fill my days and nights. Sometimes things roll over me in a gentle way, bringing peace and joy; other things strike fiercely, bringing fear and conflict.

The loss of a loved one destroys my world, and the pain crushes my ability to cope. In both life and the sea, the constant bombardment is unstoppable.

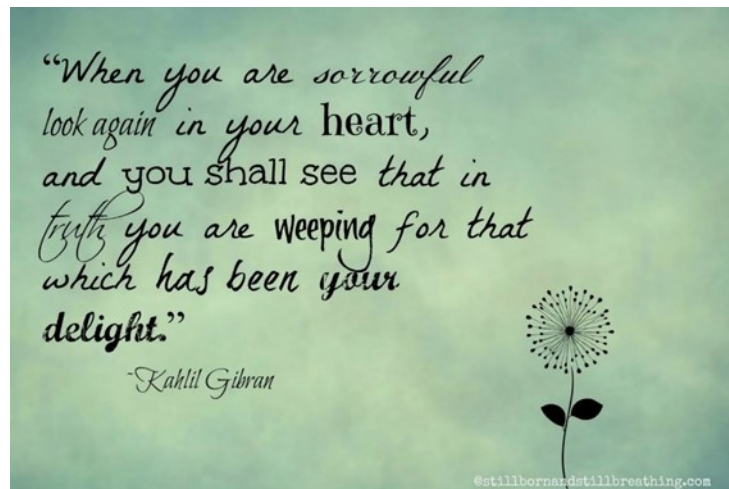
My faith gives me a resting place for the gentle times and strength in the ferocious times.³



MYSTERIES

The mysteries of life,
the unanswered whys,
& the emptiness of loss
Are part of living.

The love of God,
the examples of Christ,
& the comfort of the Holy Spirit
Guide us through
The mysteries of life.⁴



Footnote:

1. Anonymous
2. By Kenneth Haugk; March 10, 2004; Copyright © 2004 by Stephen Ministries St. Louis. All rights reserved. Permission is granted to reprint this article for use in congregations. Published in Today's Christian, November/December 2006
3. Paula Rugen
4. Paula Rugen 6/03