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Chapters

turning the pages through grief

Things left undone

by Paulette LeBlanc



In the midst of grieving someone who has died, the last thing most people are thinking about is a vacation, getting a new pet, or spending the day frolicking on the beach. But what if those were only some of the plans you thought you were making with the one who died?

I often say there is no rule regarding the correct way to grieve, however, there is also no rule that says you cannot forge ahead with plans you had with the deceased, now that they're gone. If your anniversary is coming up, and you before your partner died, you had planned to celebrate with a trip to Paris, go anyway. One way to celebrate their life might be to make a list of everything you had planned to do together, and begin crossing those things off one at a time as you complete them. You can even enlist some things you know the deceased would not have wanted

to do. If your sister died, take that trip to Scotland you two were always talking about.

There is something about death that often makes people feel as though they have to put away anything having to do with the person who died. It is entirely possible to honor their memory by going ahead with your plans...and theirs. You knew the person who died. If you're grieving

them, chances are, you knew them well. Why not honor the memory of that person by doing the things you'd wanted to do together? Build that outdoor patio, renovate the house, or sell the boat and buy a wave runner.

While it is recommended putting off making any major changes in the midst of the turmoil that comes with death, there are many inconsequential things you can do in the meantime, as you find your way through the season of grief. If you and your spouse never had a regular date-night, and it was something you'd always meant to do, by all means, go out to dinner and see a movie once a week. Accomplishing things left undone can be very gratifying, even therapeutic. If it helps, you can imagine they are there with you for each accomplishment. If you're uncomfortable doing these things alone, perhaps you can enlist the help of a friend or family



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*Do it badly; do it slowly; do it fearfully;
do it any way you have to, but do it.*

~Steve Chandler

continued...

Everyone has something they always meant to do. If that something seems a little out of reach right now, that's okay. You can always put off a vacation, road trip, or purchase. When the time is right and you are feeling up to it, you will know. If taking baby-steps ultimately leads to your healing, take those baby-steps. Rather than a trip to Paris, maybe plan to go

somewhere closer for now. If a once a week date-night was on your list, perhaps once a month will work until you're feeling a little more like yourself. There are many things, however, that you can do now, such as eating a healthier diet, taking a cooking class, learning a new language, or joining a gym.

If you didn't have a list with your loved one, you can always make one of your

own, accomplishing those things you'd always meant to do. There's never a wrong time to start doing the things you feel right about, and the new activities may help you through what is undoubtedly one of the most difficult periods of your life.

Whatever you decide to get you through this, please remember to be kind to yourself in this season of grief.

thinkpiece



What I've Learned About Having a Relationship With the Dead



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A large part of grief is learning to have a relationship with a person who has died.

I have shared this belief countless times and I have to wonder how many times it was met with bafflement. That would be a fair response. The idea of having a relationship with the dead is a sentiment that sounds really odd . . . until it doesn't.

For most of us, across our lives, we have understood relationships as the countless different types of connections between people. Relationships between friends, between colleagues, between family, between acquaintances. There are close relationships and distant ones, easy relationships and strained relationships. But what is the one thing that relationships almost all have in common? They are relationships between people who are both alive. It seems almost like a relationship prerequisite, doesn't it? Both people living?

With that in mind, it is no surprise that early in my grief I believed my relationship to the person I'd lost now lived only in the past. Throughout their life it was like I'd been filling a box with all of my connections to them, and now the lid to that box was slammed shut. Though I could open the box and look in to see our past, I thought I would never be able to add anything again. The relationship was a memory, there would be nothing new. I spent my time looking backward – feeling close only when I visited the places we

used to go, did the things we would do, when I saw the things they loved. I held the things they held, dug through the box to remember exactly who they were when they were alive and thought of the words they said and advice they gave.

With time, I slowly realized that I was wrong, that my connections lived in the present too. I started noticing and appreciating things they would have loved but didn't live to see – books and music and people. With each of these little connections, I would feel a deep, stabbing pain because these were a reminder of their absence — of all the things they would never experience and we would never experience together. But strangely, there was also an immense feeling of comfort because these things were also reminders of their presence — of the connections I still had to them in my new, everyday world.

I found myself imagining who they would be now, how they would have grown and changed with the time that had passed. What new movies would they have watched this year? What would they think of my new job? Soon I ‘heard’ them giving me advice that they never gave. I started going to places that they always wanted to travel but never did, and places they never even knew existed but would have loved. Though it took a while, I eventually realized that our relationship was not frozen in time, it was not locked in the past. I could keep adding new things to the box.

easy does it



Holidays are stressful enough, but if you are grieving you may not be up for the usual festivities, and the work that comes along with them. The following are some tips and tricks to get you through the season.

- Focus on what you can control about holidays. if you are not in the spirit of things. You cannot stop the seasonal music in stores, but you can limit your decorating, or shop online.
- Have your local caterer or supermarket make and deliver your holiday meal. It is more economical than you might think!
- Plan ahead. If your deceased loved one always carved the turkey, ask someone else to take on that task ahead of time.
- A cute and fast decorating idea...wrap the outside of the doors inside your home with strips of oversized ribbon to resemble presents, and call it done.
- Set boundaries! Attend gatherings only if you feel ready. Remember you can stay as little or as long as you wish.
- Ask for help. Seek help from friends, family, coworkers and professionals if needed.
- Volunteer. Helping others can help alleviate your sadness, while bringing joy to others.

