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Chapters

turning the pages through grief

Don't
feel bad
that you
don't feel
worse

by Paulette LeBlanc



There is no right or wrong way to feel about someone else, and this doesn't change in death. Even if everyone expects you to feel or behave a certain way in light of someone else's death, there is no rule that says you have to go along with it.

I know of an extreme case, where a person lost someone who was secretly abusing them, and much to everyone's surprise when they found out about it, the abuser died and the victim missed them very much. Sometimes the reaction, although surprising to everyone else, may just be the only true feelings one is able to muster.

Even sans abuse, the truth is, we don't all get along all the time. It is possible to lose someone close to us, who we were not particularly fond of. If your grief is combined with a certain degree of relief, that is no one's business, and there is nothing to feel guilty about.

That's not to say the funeral, or during another's grieving, is the time to share this, if ever. But you have no reason to feel bad that you don't feel worse.

Whether you didn't respect or appreciate the deceased for a very good reason, or they simply rubbed you the wrong way, it would be completely disingenuous to try to fabricate feelings that you simply don't have for the sake of how it looks. I'm



"Oddly enough I'm indifferent about the UPS guy."

certain many people have sat at funeral services, thinking the one who died was getting far more honor than they deserved. Still, as others are in mourning, there is something quite dignified about being empathetic to their needs. It is, after all, only a brief occasion on the whole.

Sometimes people die while they were in the midst of an argument with someone or even an impending divorce. None of us can live on pins and needles in case someone is about to die. We all reserve the right to be angry or upset with someone with whom we share a relationship. Imagine if you died, in the midst of your teenager's years of rebellion and angst. That kid might feel guilt for the rest of their life for being at a commonly smug, disrespectful age when you happened to die. Just as every teen deserves the luxury of an age-appropriate rebellious attitude, (after all, if they didn't have that, we'd never want them to move

continued...

OCTOBER
2021



May your choices reflect your hopes, not your fears.

~Nelson Mandela

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out) every spouse deserves the luxury of being upset at their partner, without the fear that it may be the last time. Even if you were in the midst of thinking about or talking about ending things with your spouse when they died, you have every right to feel or not feel appropriately about their death.

The truth is, you will not know how you're going to feel about someone having died, until they're gone, even if they have been sick for a long time. Death is one of those things that seems unexpected, even when we expect it, so if you don't feel the way everyone thinks you should, hold your head up high and don't feel bad that you don't feel worse.

Remember to be kind to yourself in this time of grieving, even if you find yourself grieving more for others and their loss, than your own.

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We suggest:
The Giving Tree
This moving parable for all ages offers a touching interpretation of the gift of giving and a serene acceptance of another's capacity to love in return.



thinkpiece

Spend a Day Like Your Loved One on Their Deathiversary

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The anniversary of my mother's death, or her "deathiversary," is closing in on me. I usually count on the foliage and cool fresh air to tip me off, but the beginning of fall was so unseasonably warm this year, I hardly noticed.

These last few days, though, they've played their part well, bringing a dark, wet, coldness that is unmistakably autumn. For me, they also bring pangs of grief as I'm transported back in time to October 2006 – the season in which my mother died, and when I learned what it is to grieve.

So much has happened these last 13 years, and yet, some days, it feels like my mother died just yesterday. I still miss her and the way life felt before she died; when living without her was merely a scenario I shuddered to consider.

It was hard to believe then that life could go on without her. She was the sun, and my siblings and I were planets in her orbit. Without her, we had no idea how to continue existing.

But somehow we did.

As her sun faded and became a star, we found comfort knowing that, even though she was more distant than we'd ever like, she would always be present in the night sky. And bit by bit, we moved forward, we realigned, and we learned to love her despite her physical absence.

I've been through my mother's deathiversary quite a few times now, and each year I've felt compelled to honor her memory differently. Maybe this is a reflection of where I am in life, or perhaps because my relationship with her memory changes as I grow older.

To be honest, this year I thought I'd probably just coast through October. I have a new baby at home, which makes me feel connected to my mother with every snuggle and lullaby-song. But then my sister mentioned the fall weather was making her sad, and I started thinking – if I were going to recognize her deathiversary, what would I do?

I started with the obvious by asking myself, what would I do if I spent the day

doing things that made me feel close to mom? Things she liked to do, things that were unique to her, things I remember about her – the big stuff and the smaller stuff. I started a mental list:

"Play the piano... watch old movies on TCM... go to Wegmans... fold laundry on the living room floor... take my kids to the mall for an Orange Julius."

I wondered if my siblings would have the same thoughts or if they would spend their hypothetical day doing different things, so I messaged them and asked. The conversation started out with some of the things I had already thought of, but then we got more and more specific as we went on...

"Pick kids up the kids just late enough that they end up having to wait with a teacher or coach... Get mad at my brother for interrupting the end of a movie... Ask someone to start a Word document and then call them back to save the document when finished... Get sucked into a good book... Do a child's homework for them... Fall asleep with one of the kids at night... Show a child, any child, unconditional patience and care..."

Remembering the little quirks and qualities that we loved about her gave me so much joy. By the end of the conversation, I was laughing through tears. We won't actually do all these things – maybe one or two – or maybe even none – but it was so comforting just to think about.

I was reminded that this is how we went on living after my mother died – we wove her memory in the fabric of our every day lives. We remember the little things that made her who she was and we repeat the things that help make us the people we are today.

So... I'm sharing this with you because I was thinking how nice it would be to learn what other people would do if they spent a day like their loved one – doing the things they loved, getting annoyed by the things they loathed, embracing their eccentricities, etc. You don't have to actually do any of it – just imagine it – and don't stop until you've remembered at least one thing that makes you smile.

