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Chapters

turning the pages through grief

TRANSFORMATION

...in grief

By
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Madsen

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Chapters Newsletter

A while back I got together with my good friend Shawn whose spouse died about a year ago. It was totally unexpected, and naturally he was beyond devastated and lost, wondering what to do next, and how he would even go on.

But little by little, he did. And as we text or email nearly daily, I was able to witness his transition from someone who didn't know how to pay bills, or know the passwords to any of their personal accounts, and was clueless as to how to order items on Amazon, to a self-reliant, stronger, more confident man.

When his spouse was living they were happy homebodies and content, for the most part, to hang out together, meet up with friends and do home projects.

Shawn, however, is a life-of-the-party kind of guy who loves people, craves social activities, and

enjoys many hobbies and interests. But he accommodated his partner's more introverted ways, and accepted his other half's lack of interest in hobbies or outside activities. **Now, over the last 6 months or so I notice Shawn coming into his own, becoming more... well, him.**

When he came back to our mutual home town for a visit, I asked him what might seem to be an inappropriate question to some, but we'd always been able to ask to talk about anything, and given the fact that I publish this newsletter it was something I really wanted to know from someone grieving. That is: **Are there upsides to your situation of being a widower?** Not to imply on any level that he doesn't miss his partner greatly, or that there was any problems with the marriage. Quite the opposite. But, given one can't change the situation, what had he noticed new, or positive about his life now?

He looked at me and said it was a valid, and great

continued...

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The most authentic thing about us is our capacity to create, to overcome, to endure, to transform, to love and to be greater than our suffering.

—Ben Okri

...continued from front

question, and that yes, there are things he enjoys about this life more now than when his partner was living. Having to rely on himself, and only consider himself made him realize a certain freedom and self-reliance. **A powerful freedom, not away from his partner, but a knowing that he can make choices based on his own needs than can be fulfilled fully, with no compromise. That changes a person.**

I am pretty certain that everyone, at some point in their lives, wondered what they would do if their partner died. Of course it's different for each of us, depending on age, children, and financial situation. Aside from the larger considerations, there are many subtle things we may not think about. Such as would we participate more in things we enjoy that our partner didn't, such as music or performance events? Would we take more risks, buy that car, run a marathon, learn a new language, sing karaoke? How might we change?

Not long after that conversation, I came across an article online about a woman who lost her husband at a relatively young age. **She admits that now she is a different person who, while she misses him, she has changed to the point that, could she go back she would no longer fit that life.**

"I think for me it's that I didn't realize until recently that I had all of these unmet needs that were unconscious inside of my marriage," she said. "I didn't realize in my old life how much I had abandoned myself to fit a mold for what he and that life needed. I was waiting for my turn I suppose."

She said that she always figured, given the opportunity, she would sign up for life all over again with him. But admits that she now looks at her marriage with such a different perspective.

"I know that life was what it needed to be. For who we both were," she reveals. "But it's hard realizing that the man I loved so deeply also wasn't perfect, and didn't show up for me in many ways. It's uncomfortable taking the halo off of our beloved dead people."

It's more of the "two conflicting things being true" moments. To commit to marriage is to commit to compromise. When you are no longer doing that, the life possibilities seem overwhelming, as well as full of potential, eventually.

One takeaway from this might be to consider not waiting to be in a position of grief to make changes. Matters of life, and death, are ever evolving, and transformational. Changes for worse—and for better—are pretty much guaranteed. Learn, and live.

* * *

The Lessons of Grief

Readers share in their own words

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First, I learned that attending a grief support group helped because others shared in what you're experiencing.

Second, in the group, I learned others were experiencing more intense grief, which helped lessen mine. Two young mothers just lost their husbands, one had a special needs child and her husband was not only her financial support, but helped with physical support of children.

Third, I learned through the very experienced facilitator, that if your grief suddenly feels so overwhelming than any other grief you've experienced, it's probably because of other life's experiences have emotionally all accumulated with the current loss (such as first losing a parent/child/spouse prior, a divorce, job loss/change, your own illness, spouse illness, prior/current financial issues). All these prior emotional challenges need to be let go to deal with the present loss.

The facilitator had a pile of rocks. We each had to grab a rock for each emotional past thing we had to deal with. We then threw that rock as hard as we could as we mentally let go of that past emotional/grief attachment of that rock weighing us down.

I left that group feeling so much better, new friends made and a feeling of moving on.

—Rhonda W.

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"So, you used to be a caterpillar?"