

UP

UP is an animated movie released in May, 2009, about a man who has lost his wife and decides to fulfill one last dream they shared since they were children.

There are a number of themes in the story which apply to our journey as widowed persons:

- For a time, our adventure is just to get out of bed and make it through the whole day.
 - There comes a time when change is needed in our life, for internal or external reasons.
 - The path ahead is not always clear, nor in a straight line.
 - There can be at least one more wonderful adventure ahead if we choose to follow it.
 - Sometimes, getting exactly what we want doesn't make us happy.
 - As always in life, priorities change and as a result, what we want, need, and do can change substantially.
 - Letting go of the past, at least partly, is the only way to move forward
 - What is always important at any time in our life are not "things", it is our experiences, our memories, and how we live each moment.
 - We are not any one description or label; we are at any moment the evolving product of a lifetime of choices and actions.
 - It's not over until it's over.
-
- Which one of these ideas best applies to where you are right now?
 - What comments would you have for the newly bereaved?

Changes Not Made

We've often talked about changes we've made in our lives since our partner or spouse has died.

But there are changes we also did not make, for all kinds of reasons.

- living in the same house
 - family traditions – dinners, holidays
 - hobbies – gardening, painting, reading,
 - activities – golf, walking, dancing, movies, travel
 - wearing your wedding ring
 - daily routines
 - food
-
- What are the changes you did not make, for better or worse, and why?
 - Alternately, what is the single biggest change you have made?
 - What advice would you give the newly bereaved about making changes?

When Good Things Happen

Finding the good things that have come out of tragedy and loss
When life gives you lemons, make lemonade

We come together at WICS meetings because of a loss which has a profound impact on our lives. We may view the death of our partner or spouse as tragic, deeply wounding, and life altering.

People respond in different ways, perceive the death differently, and adapt to the new situation differently.

Our actions can change over time, from one extreme to the other and everywhere in between. Some get trapped in an endless cycle of sorrow, some break out quickly to a whole new life.

Good things and bad things happen to us every day, and often it is our choice and our perception of what something is in our lives.

- What are the good things that are part of your life now that came about only because of the death of your spouse or partner?
 - New friends
 - New activities
 - New perspectives
 - New behavior
 - Trying something never done before
- Alternately, what are the good things you see in your life every day?
- What advice or comments would you make to the recently bereaved about the journey to that point?

Today is the Foundation for Tomorrow

After the death of a spouse or partner, many people in WICS change to live more in the moment, to make the most of today.

At first, some of us can only live, think and function in the single minute we are in. Over time that becomes 5 minutes, then 10 and 20. Eventually, we can handle a whole day at a time.

At some point, people are able to move forward and really plan for the future again, even if it is only a few days or a week forward.

- When did you first notice actively planning for the future?
 - Making a commitment to an activity
 - Planning a project
 - Vacation trips
 - Hobbies
 - Reading
 - Movies
- How do your actions of today build a foundation of actions for tomorrow?
- What advice or comments would you make to the recently bereaved about the journey to that point?

Operate Without a Safety Net

“The Buck Stops Here”

All of us came to our partnership and marriage under different circumstances – some lived at home right up until leaving to start a new life as a couple; some lived independently; some had large families, some had no family.

Once we became a couple and did things together, or at least had an agreed upon division of duties, it became easy to rely on each other – to be there, to be supportive, to be a sounding board, among other things. We were a safety net for each other, real or imagined.

Once our spouse or partner was gone, however, we had to do everything for ourselves and by ourselves. We had to operate without a safety net.

- How have you operated without a safety net?
- What are the things you’ve had to, or need to, face head on and work through on your own?
New tasks – repair work, taxes, cooking, laundry
Fears – socializing, being alone, further loss, driving
- What are the results?
New feelings – more confident, better self esteem, general attitude
New behavior – going out more/less, more/less patient,
- What advice or comments would you make to the recently bereaved about the journey to that point?

No Slave to Grief

Do you hear the people sing?
Singing a song of angry men?
It is the music of a people
Who will not be slaves again!
When the beating of your heart
Echoes the beating of the drums
There is a life about to start
When tomorrow comes!

Do You Hear the People Sing from *Les Miserables*

Grief is an initial response to our loss, and our response or reaction to handling that grief is different to every person. Generally, we find coping mechanisms which bring us comfort, that help us face the grief every day.

Sometimes, the grief, or even the coping mechanisms, can become a jailer or task master, dictating how we live our lives. Some people work through their grief, adapting to a new life doing new things. Other people feel buried by the grief and feel like they cannot dig their way out. Still others find their new coping behaviors can cause new issues if there isn't a balance.

- When did you rebel against being a slave to grief?
- When did you determine that the pain of making changes in your life outweighed the pain of staying the same?
- How did you know that it was time to make a change?
- What things contributed to reaching that stage?
- What advice or comments would you make to the recently bereaved about the journey to that point and avoid being a slave to grief?

Empty Chairs at Empty Tables

There's a grief that can't be spoken.
There's a pain goes on and on.
Empty chairs at empty tables
Now my friends are dead and gone.

That I live and you are gone.
There's a grief that can't be spoken.
There's a pain goes on and on.

Phantom faces at the window.
Phantom shadows on the floor.
Empty chairs at empty tables
Where my friends will meet no more.

Empty Chairs at Empty Tables from Les Miserables

Even though there might be an empty place at table now, there's never an empty place in our heart.

Every day we are reminded of our loss – an empty chair at the table and in the car, attending events as a single person, having to do all the work ourselves, having monologues instead of dialogs.

Some people still set a place at the table
Some carry on daily conversations
Some pretend that their spouse or partner is “just in the other room” or “away on a trip”

At some point, though, we acknowledge that the other person isn't coming back, and we move forward, acknowledging the past and looking towards the future.

- What was one of your first single-person situations to face?
- How did you deal with it?
- How did you move forward from that situation?
- What advice would you have for the newly bereaved?

Stronger Steps, Longer Steps

Every day
You walk with stronger step
You walk with longer step
The worst is over

Every Day, from the opera *Les Miserables*

learning to move toward our goals and desires
one step at a time,
and learning to love the doing,
learning to use the accumulation of time.
When we multiply tiny pieces of time
with small increments of daily effort,
we too will find
we can accomplish magnificent things.

Excerpt from *The Daffodil Principle*

Grief has a way of driving us into new behaviors and actions.

Sometimes, we act in the extremes, like doing nothing or keeping every minute filled with activity.

We may be more, or less, patient, courageous, sympathetic, or thoughtful.

We may find ourselves bouncing from one feeling to another, finding and dropping interests and activities as often as we change socks.

At some point, we settle into a new routine, with some sense of normalcy again, of comfort and security, of peace and happiness, or at least acceptance.

- When did you begin to walk with that stronger step, that longer step?
- When did you *really* settle comfortably into your new life?
- How did you recognize that moment?
- What things contributed to reaching that stage?
- What advice or comments would you make to the recently bereaved about the journey to that point?

Just For you

(Guilty) Pleasures and things we've done just for ourselves since our partner or spouse has died.

In our healing journey, we've done things we had to do for ourselves or for others, and things we've wanted to do out of tradition, or avoidance, or because it make would someone, or the memory of someone, happy.

What are the things you have done, or want to do, just for you?

Regardless of what others might have thought, or what might seem like "the right thing to do", what is a (guilty) pleasure that you've done just for yourself?

- Buying something
- Food
- Clothing
- Hobbies
- Remodeling
- Traveling

What suggestions would have to the newly bereaved about doing things just for themselves?

I Did It and Didn't Die

Dedicated and special thanks to my friend, Joan Ross

One of the most memorable quotes adopted by Bellevue WICS members has come from Joan Ross, and has given people support and courage when needed to overcome the fears and challenges of a difficult situation or task.

I did it and didn't die.

We've all faced difficult situations since the death of our partner or spouse, and resolved them in varying ways.

Some people didn't like being in an empty house and they filled their days with countless activities.

Some people lost interest in doing anything and hid at home.

Some people were invited to events and always politely declined.

Some people were invited to events and always said yes.

Some people were invited to events and sat in their car for hours before going in.

- What is one of those difficult moments and how did you overcome any obstacle to it?
 - Holiday or anniversary
 - Social group get together
 - One on one event.
 - Cleaning out boxes and closets
- What advice or comments would you make to the recently bereaved about the journey to that point?

The First Anniversaries

As the days progress one by one in our path of healing and transition, we come across many different kinds of first anniversaries which can be difficult to face alone:

- holidays
- birthdays
- vacations

There are other first anniversaries of a more positive nature which we might forget or downplay but which are equally important as milestones of our healing and coping.

What are your happier, more positive first anniversaries?

- first day without crying
- first time a memory made you laugh or smile
- first good night's sleep
- first comfortable meal alone
- first time feeling OK being home alone
- first time feeling OK going out to be social

What are your suggestions to the newly bereaved about the first anniversaries that they will face?

HAPPY NEW YEAR

A time to renew commitment to overcome problems and seek happiness

We have all faced the same problem, the loss of our loved one. Depending when, we all have had to cope with the loss and change our lives accordingly over a period of time.

As a new year looms, it's always a time to plan what we will do to see happiness.

- What makes you happy?
- What you planning for the new year to full your dreams?
- What are your suggestions for the newly bereaved?

First steps can lead to a long journey

COPING WITH LIFE'S CURVE BALLS

From a book by Ariane de Bonvoisin about change, people who navigate change successfully have these traits:

1. They have a positive outlook. They're confident they can change and optimistic that life is on their side
 2. They believe that whatever the change, something good will come from it.
 3. They believe they are resilient and strong and can get through anything
 4. They acknowledge that change will stir feelings of fear, doubt, impatience, blame, shame, and guilt, but they don't let that stop them.
 5. They let go of the idea of how life "should" be and cultivate acceptance
 6. When they feel stuck, they focus on empowering thoughts and look for the opportunities that change creates.
 7. They know they're connected to something bigger than themselves. They look within to find their calm unchanging center.
 8. They seek support from helpful, knowledgeable people who can reduce their sense of isolation.
 9. They take action. They have a plan, they move forward and they take care of their health during this stressful period.
-
- Which attitudes helped right after the death of your spouse or partner, and how did they help you?
 - Which attitudes did you need to develop and how did you do that?
 - What suggestions would you have for the newly bereaved?
 - Share any comments regarding grief issues or tell about the death of your spouse.

"The strongest principle of growth lies in human choice" George Eliot

CHALLENGES

- What has been your greatest challenge since your spouse or partner died?
- Do you have plans for your future?
- What would your spouse or partner want you to do?
- Are you positive toward the future?

CHANGE

Our world constantly changes the very instant our loved one dies. The life in which we were so comfortable is now surrounded by question marks. Things have changed. Things will change. Things **must** change.

Our role in life is no longer the same. Our future is irrevocably altered.

Yet, during the grief process change can become a source of strength. We notice how we approach a once familiar situation from a perspective different than when our spouse or partner was living. We realize we have to change our focus from being a couple to just ourselves.

Those who are further along in the grief journey can look back and see how change, once feared and intimidating, has nourished us, has revealed a previously untested resilience and has given our lives a quality of serenity and softness we never expected to attain.

- Have I faced change fearlessly?
- Have I changed the way I look at life?
- Am I comfortable with the changes I have made?
- What suggestions about change would you make to the newly bereaved?

“God, grant me the serenity
To accept the things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can
And the wisdom to know the difference.”
- Alcoholics Anonymous

LESSONS LEARNED

As all of us walk down the path of bereavement, we experience a certain sameness in many of our emotions and reactions. Yet, each of us travels at our own pace and deals with things in our own fashion.

Reflecting on my own thoughts and lessons learned after my spouse died, I learned:

- Death made me feel small and helpless
- In order to begin to heal, I had to let my spouse go
- How to cry
- I could make my own boundaries and limitations
- What I would never again have, and all the good new things I could have
- I wasn't going crazy, that feeling confused and frightened is a normal reaction to the death of a spouse or partner
- I needed to take care of myself
- I had to talk about my loss and share my feelings
- My faith was the strongest element of my healing process
- About a strength and courage I never knew I had
- I had to forgive my spouse and myself in order to begin healing
- I could make a new life and live and be happy again.

For yourself:

- What lessons have you learned?
- What suggestions would you give to the newly bereaved?

"I've learned that you can keep going long after you think you can't."

- Anonymous

NEW BEGINNINGS

As we confronted the loss of our loved one, we attempted to make sense of the
“weeks and then months that cut loose any fixed idea
we ever had about death, about illness...about
marriage and children and memory... about the
shallowness of sanity, about life itself.”

The Year of Magical Thinking by Joan
Didion

These words are so descriptive of the way we initially felt after our loved one died. The feelings were nothing like we could have ever imagined. Everything was magnified – every pain, every bittersweet event, every lonely moment. Any happiness was tempered by a deep sadness because our loved one wasn't there to share that joy, yet our lives had to take on a new meaning.

The time for new beginnings was forced upon us. Some of us found support from a group such as WICS. Some of us found support from family and friends. Some of us rejected support and focused on our grief. Eventually, each of us learned that living with grief was not healthy, either physically or mentally. We began to see the possibilities for a new life, one in which we could be fulfilled and comfortable.

- Are you contemplating new beginnings?
- Are you satisfied with the new beginnings you have made so far?
- Would you change the way you handled the new beginnings in your life?
- What suggestions do you have for the newly bereaved?

“Every day is a new beginning. Treat it that way.
Stay away from what might have been, and look at what can be.”
Marsha Petrie Sue

HOPE

What is hope?

The world problems seem overwhelming...

- Stock market problems
- Unemployment
- Home foreclosures
- Banks failing
- Company problems
- War

Plus – our own problems in our life and the loss of our spouse.

The human race is adaptable and we must look ahead.

- What hopes and dreams now and in the future will carry you forward?
- What words of hope do you have for the newly bereaved?

GAINING CONTROL OF YOUR LIFE

After the death of a spouse or partner, life feels out of control and overwhelming. The tasks at this time involve feeling your feelings, and making a new life. Some ideas for helping you do this are listed below.

- Please share how one of these, or others, have helped you regain control of your life.
 - Planning
 - Exercise
 - Finding people to talk to
 - Self care
 - Humor
 - Finding new interests
 - Making new friends
 - Reading journaling
 - Traveling

- What suggestions would you have for the newly bereaved?

“Life can be what you want it to be – take the days just one at a time.”
Catlin McCarty

PLANNING AHEAD FOR THE HOLIDAYS

For those of us who have lost our partner or spouse, the holidays can be very difficult to face. We know they will never be the same as they once were. It is helpful to identify the things that might bother you the most and make a plan as to how you can best cope with them.

- Please list three things that you think might be difficult for you to cope with during the holidays
- What steps you might take to make it easier for you.
- What suggestions would you make to the newly bereaved?

“Happy times and bygone days are never lost...
In truth, they grow more wonderful within the heart that keeps them.”
Kay Andrew

ATTITUDE

Following the loss of a spouse/partner, a person's attitude towards life usually changes. Even the most positive-thinking people tend to have a negative attitude towards life, with feelings of 'who cares', 'what's the use', 'why bother', 'my life is over.'

It is very difficult to have a positive attitude when your life has fallen apart.

Studies have proven that our attitude can affect both our emotional and physical condition. Therefore, turning our attitude around from a negative to a positive is one of the most important and difficult challenges during our grief journey.

- How would you describe your attitude at this point and time?
- Do you see your cup as half-full or half-empty?
- What are the positive things in your life today?
- Are you looking forward to the holidays or dreading them?
- What suggestions would you give to the new bereaved to regain a positive attitude?

"Life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it."
Author Unknown

THE GIFT OF THANKSGIVING

In grief, we sometimes think the worst and ask, 'Why me?'

However, there are always things we can be thankful for.

Friends and family are our biggest blessing.

Health, wealth and happiness are real and we just have to find the right path to realize them.

- How did you cope with grief in the beginning?
- What things did you do to overcome sadness and find joy in this time of Thanksgiving?
- What suggestions would you give the newly bereaved?

GATHERING THE POSITIVES AROUND YOU

We are all at various places in our grief journey.

Evaluation of how this process is going from time to time could be very helpful.

While evaluating, consider both positive areas, and those which need more attention.

- Social
- Emotional
- Physical
- Home
- Family
- Friends
- Hobbies
- Projects
- Behavior

Hopefully, the list of the other parts of your life that are going well will be longer than the areas that are not going as well as you would like. Knowing that there are many positive things happening in your life can lead to a feeling of greater happiness. Knowing this information could make it easier to strengthen the other areas.

In an article in Reader's Digest called "The Way to Happiness", Diane Hale writes that happy people thrive better, are more creative and productive, attract more friends, stay healthier and enjoy life more.

"Don't let yesterday use up too much of today."

AUTUMN

Image Triggers from Seasons of Goodbye – Working Your Way Through Loss
by Chris Ann Waters.

When we are going through change from a loss, we become very sensitive to images. Everything, it seems, is a reminder.

Image triggers are specific images that spur thoughts to be recalled, i.e. names of people, places, things, objects, and events which hold special meaning for you.

Remember: Every single occurrence in your life, however common, is an experience which you, and only you, can describe. Whatever images come to mind are reflections of the experience the way you perceived it.

Share: Look over the list of image triggers and add in your own items. Choose one or two images that share with the group.

Autumn Images

Pumpkin farms

Chrysanthemums

Halloween

Mothballs

Football

Music

Burning leaves

Hot cider

Apple strudel

First day of school

Turkey

Hayrides

Raking leaves

Thanksgiving

Squash

Flannel shirts

Stadium blankets

Wheelbarrows

“Let mourning stop when one’s grief is fully expressed.”

Confucious

GIVING THANKS

After the death of our spouse or partner, being thankful for anything is a difficult concept to grasp. The magnitude of our loss seldom allows gratitude to have a place in our emotions.

However, as time passes the wrenching pain begins to ease. When the hole in our heart begins to mend, that constant ache lessens and our grief softens. We become aware of the many things in our life for which we can be thankful. This can only open our hearts to acceptance and a happiness of our own choosing.

As we approach each day, can you:

- Truly give thanks for your life as it is now?
- Be thankful, rather than heavyhearted, as you remember your loved one?
- Be thankful in the knowledge you are gaining strength each day?

What suggestions would you offer to the newly bereaved?

“When I started counting my blessings,
My whole life turned around.”
Will Nelson

MAKING NEW CHOICES

“When we realize that there is nothing we can do to reverse the situation,
We have the choice
of spending the rest of our lives lamenting what we have lost,
Or spending the rest of our life giving thanks for what we have been given.”
John Claypool

We had no choice in the death of our partner or spouse. We have no choice in the fact that our lives will never be the same as they were before the loss of our loved one. At first, it may seem as though our choices for a happy life may have been wrenched from our hands forever.

Before our spouses died, so many of our activities were couple oriented. Perhaps our partner was really the one who initiated many of our activities. With their loss came the end of life as we knew it. Now we find ourselves having to reinvent our lives.

As the healing process begins, maybe it's time to try something new. Or perhaps it's time to resurrect old dreams. Reach out in areas you haven't thought of for years.

We can't change our current circumstances, but we can choose to be aware that our thoughts have an effect on our attitudes, our perspectives, and our ability to cope and respond effectively.

Unconscious
Habits
Often
Influence
Current
Experience

- What new things are you doing now that you didn't do before?
- Do you have a class you might like to take?
- Is there an interest you might want to try?
- Reaching out to others is healing, perhaps there's a volunteer position for you?
- What suggestions would you have for the newly bereaved?

“Shoot for the moon. Even if you miss, you'll land among the stars.”
Les Brown

LAUGHTER IS THE BEST MEDICINE

Laugh. Laugh often. Laugh out loud. Laughter is good for you. It heals your emotions and lifts your spirit.

Several years ago, Norman Cousins came down with cancer and decided that not allowing it to permeate his thoughts would be the best thing he could do to promote physical healing. He rented silly movies that contained mostly slap-stick comedy, and did indeed beat his illness.

About that same time, I had an aunt who had macular degeneration and had lost most of her eyesight. She chose not to let it get her down and since she had been an avid reader, she contacted Services for the Blind and ordered books on tape. She laughed and told me, "I love it!" Now I can get my ironing done and read my favorite books at the same time!"

One thin she subscribed to was Reader's Digest, and when the tapes begin to pile up, she asked me if I might know anyone who could use them. Since I was taking some classes at BCC, I contacted the Student Advisor for the disabled students, who was also blind, and asked if he knew of anyone who might enjoy them.

"I don't know," he said. "Are they arranged properly?"

Puzzled, I asked, "What do you mean?"

Then with a grin, he replied, "You know, the way we all read them. Laughter, the Best Medicine, then Life in These United States, and so on."

- What makes you laugh?
- What brightens your day?
- What brings joy into your life?
- Do you have a favorite movie that makes you laugh?
- Share your favorite joke.
- What suggestions about laughing would you have for the newly bereaved?

"Laughter is inner jogging."
Norman Cousins

HELPING YOURSELF

Mourning is comprised of more than the expression of grief. It is a time to reflect on our loss and to learn to become comfortable with the changes in our lives. It is a time to learn about our courage and to strengthen our weaknesses. Helping ourselves is paramount to our bereavement journey. The manner in which we handled other situations in our lives can be the foundation on which we can build our coping skills.

Which two thoughts below have helped you the most?

- Be patient with yourself
- Be gentle with yourself
- Allow pleasure in your life
- Develop a support system
- Allow time off from your grief
- Allow yourself some 'alone' time
- Don't compare your loss to others'

'You are not stuck where you are
... unless you decide to be!'
Author Unknown

RESILIENCY

There was a Reader's Digest Magazine article by Denise Foley called "The Power of Pluck." She writes that resilient people are people who develop coping skills that help them rebound from whatever difficulty life brings. She draws from the book, "The Power of Resilience" by Robert Brooks to discuss the traits resilient people share and can develop.

- They take control of their lives. They work with their strengths and recall those moments when they overcame some difficulty. Resilient people tend to focus on what they can influence and don't spend much time on things they can't change.
- They forge connections. Resilient people tend to find tie for what they value, like family, friends, and hobbies as these things sustain them in the long run.
- Resilient people tend to allow their pain to spur growth. During hard times they make plans for the future, develop their curiosity, are positive and express their gratitude which helps them to bounce back more quickly.
- Resilient people seem to insist on changing the world through helping others in some way. This sets the wheels in motion for a new purpose in life.

Most of us in WICS are probably doing some of these things in one form or another. Isn't it interesting to note that we seem to be on the right track with what research and psychologists say about bouncing back.

- At this time in your journey to healing, where do you see yourself in the list of common traits of resilient people?
- What suggestions would you have for the newly bereaved?

"Even if you are on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there."
Will Rogers

RESILIENCY

The ability to recover from illness, change, or great loss

The following are traits and habits of resilient people.

- Which of these best applies to your life at this moment?
- What advice do you have for the newly bereaved?

Resiliency Traits

- Insight
- Morality
- Independence
- Creativity
- Initiative
- Humor
- Relationships
- Emotional connections
- Adaptability
- Empathy
- Spirituality
- Let go / take control

Six ways to manage life by resilient people

- Face the truth and reality of any situation
- Feel the emotions that go with the situation
- Adjust to the environment as it changes
- Invest in yourself and others
- Remember as accurately as possible
- Have the courage to stand in the tension of your fears

Communication by resilient people

- Men and women communicate differently
- Being heard is not necessarily being understood
- Communicating my identity may be more difficult than communicating my thoughts
- Communication in traumatic situations is delayed and/or blocked

A LIFE CRISIS

When you lose a spouse or partner goes into crisis mode and you find yourself just trying to survive. Later you begin thinking and seeing things in terms of before and after.

The following five steps from Jerry White's book, *I Will Not Be Broken: 5 Steps to Overcoming a Life Crisis*, may be very helpful.

Which one of the following applies most to you and your life?

- **FACE FACTS** – One must first accept the harsh reality about suffering and loss, however brutal.
- **CHOOSE LIFE** – Seizing life, not surrendering to death or stagnation, requires letting go of resentments and looking forward, not back. It can be a daily decision.
- **REACH OUT** – One must find peers, friends, and family to break the isolations and loneliness. Seek empathy, not pity, from people who have been through something similar.
- **GET MOVING** – Sitting back gets you nowhere. One must get out of bed and out of the house to generate momentum. We have to take responsibility for our actions.
- **GIVE BACK** – Thriving, not just surviving, requires the capacity to give again, through service and acts of kindness.

These steps are not in any order and one may loop through them in various ways throughout the grief journey.

“Grief teaches the steadiest minds to waver.”
Samuel Johnson 1709 – 1784

A MOMENT OF TRUTH

In all of our lives, a moment in time gives us inspiration to appreciate our existence. It is usually a special event that we recall when we need a pick me up in life.

To each of us it can be different. It could be a religious event, special advice, inspiration from your parents, teacher or friend, or a physical occurrence which puts life in perspective.

In short, it is something which happened to you from which you draw strength and causes you to act. It influences your thoughts of how you adjust to problems and life.

- What is a key moment from which you now draw strength?

THE WELL OF REFRESHMENT

This title was the name of an article written by Ardith Rodale, chairman of the Board and CEO of Rodale Press, the publisher of Prevention Magazine. Ardith writes a monthly “Reflection” page for this magazine and is the author of a book called Gifts of the Spirit: True Stories to Renew Your Soul.

Ardith has lost a husband and a son and always seems to have the right thoughts to motivate her readers to move forward through the journey to healing.

Ardith feels that each of us has an inner well from which we can draw our reserves of strength when we need it. We must keep that “well” alive by swishing away negative thoughts and letting it “overflow with appreciation for moments of aliveness.”

Her analogy comes from her visits to her childhood home when she had the privilege of working the pump that brought the daily supply of water. To her, it seemed like a great miracle that the pump never ran dry but always brought forth water whenever it was needed. She says that she always pumped too fast, and her cup overflowed.

- What keeps your “well of refreshment” filled so that it doesn’t run dry?
- How did you fill this “well” when you first lost your spouse or partner?
- How are you filling this “well” now as time in the journey to healing is progressing?
- What suggestions do you have for the newly bereaved to keep their “well” filled?

“Don’t wait for your ship to come in ... row out to meet it!

ADJUSTING TO A NEW LIFE

Many of us had to adjust after we lost our spouse or partner. It can be a painful time of trial and error.

What would you suggest to a newly bereaved person to help them adjust to a new life?

- Activities
- Reaching out
- Battling loneliness
- Other Suggestions

SMILES

It goes without saying that walking through the grieving process is very painful. Initially, it seems like a journey without end.

However, during that long, often lonely journey, situations occur that make us smile, even when we were convinced we would never smile again. Those smiles are gifts that need to be nurtured like buds of a flower that have to be watered in order to bloom.

- What is one situation early in your bereavement that made you smile?
- Are you able to smile more easily now?
- Do memories, pictures, music, etc make you smile now?
- What comments would you offer to the newly bereaved about smiling?

“Smile, even if it’s a sad smile,
Because sadder than a sad smile
Is the sadness of not knowing how to smile.”
Author Unknown

LIFE'S TAPESTRY

Our life is a pattern of invisible threads. The instant we are born, those threads begin weaving into our own personal tapestry.

When we were small, the colors in our tapestry were the pastels of the innocence of a child. As we mature, the pattern in our life becomes more clear and involved and the colors more vivid and pronounced. As we approach our later years, our tapestry is almost complete, the patterns and colors are of a much softer hue.

Our life with our loved one is very similar in that when we were first married our life together was a blank canvas. As we grew in our marriage and our love, we pictured what we wanted our life together to be and we were careful in what we intended to do together to fill in that picture.

Then, the unthinkable happened. Our loved one died.

Our picture and our future were no longer clear. But our tapestry is not finished. The journey of grief must be incorporated into our canvas. Those patterns are muted and dark.

However, as we near the end of the grief journey and are filled with hope and strength, our colors are once again defined and softened by peace and loving memories. Our life's tapestry has taken on a new meaning.

We don't accomplish anything in this world alone. Whatever happens is the result of the whole tapestry of one's life and all the weavings of individual threads from one to another that creates something.

- Do you allow others to contribute to your life's tapestry?
- Is your life filled with hope and the softness of contentment?
- Can you smile as you view what you have completed of your life's tapestry?
- What suggestions do you have for the newly bereaved?

"As I see beyond the pain,
I sense how both joy and sadness
Are part of the tapestry of my life."
Martha Whitmore Hickman

SPRING IS ON THE WAY

Bringing Hopes of Sunnier Days Ahead

The loss of our spouse or partner can be likened to a cold, dark, harsh winter. The outlook can be bleak, with unrelenting pain and feelings of hopelessness.

Spring, on the hand, is a time of hope, as we see the trees, plants and flowers come alive, in spite of the long, cold winter they have had to endure.

- Are you able to look forward to springtime with hopes for brighter sunnier days ahead?
- What goals do you have for spring?
- What suggestions do you have for the newly bereaved?

“There are just a handful of springs that have been handed to each of us. Life is brief, even at its longest. Whatever you are gong to do with your life, get at it.

Don't just let the seasons pass by.”

Jim Rohn

HOLIDAYS

When a spouse or partner has died, these holidays can be a very challenging time of year for us and using all our coping skills will be necessary to get through them.

- If you have been through some holiday seasons since the death of your loved one, what was the best or worst experience you have had?
- How have you dealt with grief issues during the holidays?
- Looking back, how would you have handled the holiday seasons differently?
- Do you have any concerns about the coming holidays?
- How are you planning on celebrating this year?
- What advice would you offer to the newly bereaved regarding holidays?

“The road through grief is a rocky one. Traveling along it requires courage, patience, wisdom and hope.
Candy Lightner

LIVING LIFE TO THE FULLEST

Following the loss of our partner or spouse, our life suddenly changes. All of the plans and dreams we had with them have been taken away from us. We are faced with the realization that in order to move forward, we have to build a new and different life for ourselves.

Which of the following best describes you?

- I have moved forward and am living life to the fullest
- I am experiencing problems moving forward and building a new life
- What has helped you move forward?
- What are the obstacles you have faced in being able to do so?

Here are some suggestions to help move forward:

- **Make a list of things you want to do before a certain date.** Your list can be made up of places to visit, people to meet or befriend, skills to acquire, or just fun things to do. This way, you have some goals to aim for, and you can keep track of what you have done and what you still want to do.
- **Make a To-Do list or a schedule every day.** Don't just laze around all day. Take that walk, Have fun!
- **Remember "Carpe Diem" or "Seize the Day."** Live life in the moment. The only thing that is assured in life is this moment and death. So cherish every moment of life and make it worthwhile.
- **Try making life better for the less fortunate people in the world.** Make an impact on someone life. These are the deeds that make you happy in reality, knowing that you have made a positive difference.
- **Find a purpose or meaning to your life.** Determine what you really want to do with your life.
- **Accept the loss of your spouse or partner.** Let it echo through you, and you can begin to appreciate life. Trust you will be okay.
- **Keep a diary or journal.** Writing down your thoughts and feelings can be very helpful.

"Life is brief and very fragile, do that which makes you happy."

Flavia

PRACTICING 'POSTIVE'

Sometime, somehow, somewhere, in the days and weeks following the death of our spouse or partner, we find we are able to focus on a more positive approach in dealing with our loss. This can occur either on our own, or with the support of others, such as the WICS group.

Regardless of the source of validation, we begin to experience a more positive outlook for our future. We see the positive effects in our lives resulting from decisions and plans we have made, and accomplishments we have achieved. We begin to embrace a more positive attitude about ourselves – who we are now, what we can do on our own, what we want, and what we want our future to look like.

Positive thoughts are not enough, however. There have to be positive feeling and positive actions.

- Have you reached a point in your life where a positive outlook has become a habit?
- Describe something positive you have discovered about yourself during your bereavement journey.
- Do you see a change in your life and those around you when you begin to embrace a positive attitude?
- What positive elements do you need in your life to make you happy?
- What suggestions do you have for the newly bereaved to be positive?

“You are not your circumstances; you are your possibilities.”
Author Unknown

THE FUTURE

"Every flower and every tree and every root are annual prophets sent to affirm the future and cheer the way."

Henry Ward Beecher

Please think about the quote in the context of your life now.
What do you think of the future and what cheers you on?

Ideas:

Make plans

Plant

Make a schedule of "to do's"

Get a pet

Help someone out

Volunteer

MAKING PROGRESS

Sometimes it's hard to realize just how far you've come and the progress you've made in working through your grief.

Below is a list of circumstances that can indicate your progress, or help you realize what you need to work on, in moving forward in your new life.

- Which one of these best applies to you at this moment?
- What suggestions do you have for the newly bereaved?

- I want to do more with my life than just survive
- I can laugh without feeling guilty
- I'm not afraid of losing the memory of my loved one
- I realize it is okay to do things for me
- I'm not afraid of the future
- I'm not as sad and depressed as I used to be
- Holidays and anniversaries are easier to get through
- I can reach out to help others
- I can participate in activities I had given up doing
- I can talk to others about my loved one without getting upset
- The emotional roller coaster isn't as bad as it once was
- I can experience the reminders as more positive than negative
- The pain isn't as sharp as it once was

"Life is brief and very fragile – do that which makes you happy"
Flavia

RAINBOWS

After raining, sometimes we can see a rainbow.
Rain and the rainbow are apt analogies for our journey.

The rain is like our grief. Our tears flow and flow, our outlook feels dark with no sign of relief.

The rainbow is like our journey. It is a bridge to the future. The grief has caused us to change, it has brought out different emotions, different experiences, and has caused us to grow as a human being, just like the array of colors in the sky.

The pot of gold is our hope. We hope that with time we will find a new happiness, a new life. In reality, our life is new now because it has already changed. We start to cope with our grief when we realize there is no magic formula, there is no real pot of gold, there is an arc of pain that we need to go through to find the sunshine again.

Rainbows are a sign that there has been rain, but they are also a sign that the worst is over. Maybe we should put a picture of a rainbow in our home to remind ourselves that happiness is on its way.

- What part of the rainbow experience best describes you and your life now?
- What comments do you have for the newly bereaved?

“God asks no man whether he will accept life. That is not the choice. You must take it. The only question is how?”
Henry Ward Beecher

OPTIMISM

In the coming days, can you promise yourself:

- To be so strong that nothing can disturb your peace of mind?
- To make all your friends feel that there is something of value in them?
- To look at the sunny side of everything and make your optimism come true?
- To think only the best, to work only for the best, and to expect the best?
- To be just as enthusiastic about the success of others as you are about your own?
- To forget the mistakes of the past and press on to the greater achievements of the future?
- To wear a cheerful countenance at all times and give every living creature you meet a smile?
- To give so much time to the improvement of yourself that you have no time to criticize others?
- To be too large for worry, too noble for anger, too strong for fear and too happy to permit the presence of trouble?

“Always look at what you have left. Never look at what you have lost.”
Robert H. Schuller

ACHIEVING A NEW NORMAL

There are several synonyms for normal, among them are – typical, familiar, orderly.

The death of our spouse or partner and the days and weeks after certainly did not qualify us as living in the ‘normal’ we were used to. Our emotions were anything but typical. Circumstances demanded we adjust every aspect of our life. Living with and working through our grief required us to find a new order in our life.

We needed to absorb the anguish of the death of our loved one and steel ourselves against the constant waves of enormous pain that engulfed us. We needed to move through the grief. Time, family, friends, talk and doing – these all helped us create our new normal.

Whether we are newly widowed or we are nearing the end of our grief journey, the way we will live is determined by forging our new normal.

- Since the death of your spouse or partner, is your life following the path you thought it would?
- Have you achieved a new normalcy in your life?
- Are you comfortable with your new normal?
- What advice would you give the newly bereaved?

“To us, our way of life is normal until change takes place.
Then it is not normal to us but normal to life itself.”
Anonymous

LITTLE THINGS

Upon the death of our partner or spouse, the scale of our life changes. Everything becomes magnified. Dealing with legal and financial matters, making decisions about our home, our life and our future are all major issues. Adjusting to living alone is not easy. Facing social situations alone can be frightening and lonely.

Yet, as we go through this time of grief, there are many 'little things' that will jolt us, make us feel warm, make us feel sad, and make us smile. Memories, songs, pictures, thoughtless comments, words of encouragement from friends, will all impact us during our grief journey.

Facing the little things that make us sad builds courage; facing the little things that make us smile gives us strength.

- Are you able to deal with the 'little things' that you encounter?
- Are you able to talk to others about how 'little things' have affected you?
- What advice would you give the newly bereaved?

“In a world where big things have little difference –
It’s the little things that make a big difference.”
Peter Thompson

ACCEPTING VS GIVING

Upon the death of our loved one we receive sympathy, love, food, offers of assistance, etc. These are gestures from others to let us know they want to help, that they care about us. Knowing there is nothing they can do to ease the terrible pain we are experiencing, our friends express their concern about our loss by wanting to help us or do something for us.

Some of us are givers; we are not used to accepting. The death of our loved one changes that. During that initial numbness, letting others help is a precious gift they are offering. Graciously accepting their kindness is a challenge for some of us. Our acceptance is an acknowledgement of the feelings they have for our loved one and for us.

- Are you able to accept help from others?
- Do you know when you no longer need that help?
- Can you relay to others when you need to move forward on your own?
- What advice would you give to the newly bereaved?

“Who accepts nothing has nothing to return.”
German Proverb.

