

Wishful Thinking

If I could tell you... to friends and family of grievers

Marilyn Nutter

When I was a teen, my Grandpa died. In those days, funerals and grief looked different from today. Wakes were held for three days, people sobbed openly, and mourners wore black. My grandma didn't just wear black for the funeral, but she wore a black dress, black stockings, and black shoes for two years. That was part of our Italian ethnicity. Black was a signal to anyone who saw her that she was in mourning.

Fast forward fifty plus years and practicing those customs are rare.



Now bereavement leave lasts three days (maybe) and society expects we get back to normal living--sooner rather than later. As one who has lost grandparents, parents, and a spouse, and as a facilitator for a grief support group, along with many good friends who are widows. I have learned each loss is different, as is each timetable for moving forward.

Grief is as unique as fingerprints. There is no one size fits all. We respond, move along, take steps forward and back, and no two people are alike in their journey. Even people who have the loss of the same person will grieve differently. This path is not linear with a designated end nor moves according to a calendar.

As I reflected on my personal experience and what others have shared with me, I summarized their thoughts of wishful thinking—what they have wished they could tell you. Please...

- Don't rush me. It may be six months, a year or two, but I am processing and progressing. My days are filled with double work, paperwork after death, adjustments, and a major learning curve. There are days I am tired—physically, emotionally, and mentally. There are days I feel great and others that are lonely. Like you, I have good days and hard days. Even years later a grief burst will occur. It may be due to a familiar aroma, a movie, or a sunrise.
- Refrain from suggesting an activity or event that will be “good for me”. It may be good for you, but not necessarily for me. Depending where I am in my mourning journey,

events may trigger sadness or an association that brings tears at this time. Perhaps later on I will accept that invitation when the pain is less intense.

- Do your best to understand, in the early holidays –when grief is fresh, without my spouse, I may smile and engage in conversation, but I don't feel merry. I may appreciate the spiritual aspects of Christmas and the smiles on children's faces, but the empty chair and the absent Christmas stocking does not arouse merriment for me. I am lonely even when surrounded by people.
- Know that I am different than I was before my loss. That person was a significant part of my life and helped shape me. I may have spent most of my years alive with my spouse and now I am in a new single season, still trying to find my way, figuring out what my life will look like, and who I am. Trying to meet your expectations adds a layer of stress for me.
- Avoid telling me I'll get over it and need to move on. I am not a sixteen-year-old girl after a breakup. I will get through this and move forward with God's grace. I do not want to forget my mate, nor should you expect me to.
- Know just because I mention the name of the person who has died, I am not stuck in grief. I want to remember him and share stories about him. Frankly, I think about him/her daily. I loved.
- Know tears are a natural part of grief. I'm sorry they may make you uncomfortable, but God wired us to cry. Even Jesus wept.
- Don't compare me with someone else who also has a loss—what their loss is, or how they are coping. Grief is unique.

Finally, please know I appreciate your love, kindness, and support. I am thankful for invitations, calls, gifts, and conversations and sometimes just your presence, but I need to grieve, mourn, and move forward as God leads and accompanies me. God has been profoundly generous to me in giving me His grace, love, and mercies. I do not discount any of it and trust Him to work in my life in His way, and in His timing.

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