

Grace Grief Notes

The Visitor and the Visited

When the visitor and the visited are together, we meet exactly where we need to be. Growing up, my grandparents lived nearby, as well as other extended family. We'd drive through town to go visiting and we'd be greeted by welcoming relatives, and offered a cold

drink. Moments of teen angst had me resenting visiting at times, but I wouldn't trade those visits for anything now.

When my last re-

maining and dearest grandparent was dying last fall, I drove to my hometown to be with her. The time spent was full, rich, difficult—a slow and holy space. By this time, I had been a hospice volunteer for a year and had learned from the experience. I didn't meet my grandma with a bunch of my own expectations. I hope I met her exactly where she was.

Grandma was in the hospital for a few days prior to spending the last week of her life in a nursing home. I experienced gratitude for the care team when a chaplain came to check on us. Several family members were gathered and in the larger group; it was difficult to talk honestly with her. The chaplain's presence was like water in the desert to me. I asked to talk with her and we found a quiet spot away for prayer and reflection. How precious was the chaplain's visit for me.

As a hospice volunteer, one of the first patients I visited was someone I'll call "Jenny." She was in her 90's and living in a memory care apartment. I hadn't been with someone experiencing memory loss for some time, so I needed to re-learn what that was like. Jenny was a tough person; she had experienced rough times in her life. I learned that Jenny did not like to be touched. Sometimes I have an instinct to reach out and touch someone's arm or hand, so I had to actively remind myself not to do this with Jenny.

She was talkative, in a way that was mostly sentence frag-

ments, but it was clear that her relationship with her father was very much a part of memories that lingered. Somehow, I listened, and we managed to connect. She would express herself with exasperated grunts or growls when talking about her father. I would echo her, and we would get to laughing. It was a real gift to be together in that space. One time she said to me, "We should have gone into business together. We would have done it right!" Her humor delighted me and we laughed.

The last time I visited Jenny while she was awake, I took a little chance. About to leave, I stood at the foot of her bed and blew her a kiss. I was astonished when she blew a kiss back to me. In the space between us, she gave me the gift of affection and love. We were the visitor and the visited, and I am so grateful to have that opportunity through Grace Hospice.

Lisa Lukis, Grace Hospice Volunteer

Special points of interest:

- **Summertime and Grief**
- **Book Review: *A Grace Disguised***
- **Volunteering Opportunities**

Summertime and Grief

Summertime in the Midwest is something many of us wait all year for. The snow has melted, the bitter cold has gone away, and the blooming flowers, lake swims, and festivals are upon us. As we delve deeper into the warmth and sunshine of summer, we sometimes notice our grief may shift in an unexpected way. The change in seasons tends to not only alter our temperatures, but also our feelings of grief. If you have recently lost a loved one, the way that you experience summer and the excitement it once brought you may be different this time around. Seeing consistent joy on others faces can make it hard to cope with our feelings of sadness and loss. For many, summer brings an assortment of special occasions, such as cookouts, family



vacations, and weekend camping. All of these experiences may feel different now that your loved one is not physically here with you.

Losing someone we love can flip our world upside down, and our hearts inside out. It is a pain that only time can begin to heal. Even though time is needed for us to adjust to our new normal, there are some things that can assist us in coping along the way throughout these summer months. When going through a time as difficult as this, the following suggestions may assist you in managing your feelings of grief.

- **Keep Your Family Traditions**

Perhaps you've always gone to the cabin or had a special annual vacation planned with family. Continuing to do these events or activities can help to keep your loved one's memory alive and create a time for sharing

cherished stories. However, be aware of your emotions and feelings, and recognize it is also okay to take a break from commitments when needed.

- **Do a Memorial Activity**

There are numerous memorial activities you can do in the summer such as: writing messages and releasing them in balloons, planting a memorial garden/flower, or taking a trip to your loved one's favorite spot. All of these activities can help us to feel a connection to our person who has passed away.

- **Get Outside**

This season brings us an abundance of warm days and sunshine. Getting some Vitamin D can help to boost your mood, and getting outside on these days can encourage a connection with nature and the world around you.

- **Talk About Your Grief**

When we're grieving, and others appear to be joyous, it can be difficult to want to share about what we are feeling. However, sharing our feelings of grief with someone, whether that be a friend, a family member, or a professional, can assist us in feeling more supported during this time and not alone in our grief.

- **Recognize Your Feelings Are Valid**

Even when the sun is shining and people around you are filled with laughter, it is okay to feel sad and to miss your loved one. When you are grieving, you will at times experience bursts of emotion that are unforeseen. We grieve because we love, and when you are experiencing feelings of sadness and grief, know these feelings are completely normal and valid.

If you would prefer to receive this newsletter electronically, please contact Jessica Steele at jgsteel@gracecaring.org.

Grace Hospice Book Review

By: Jolene Baker RN, BSN, Hospice Supervisor

A Grace Disguised: how the soul grows through loss.

Copyright 2004 by Jerry Sittser, PhD, MDiv

With vulnerability and honesty, Jerry Sittser walks through his own grief and loss to show that new life is possible - one marked by spiritual depth, joy, compassion, and a deeper appreciation of simple blessings. Loss came suddenly for Jerry Sittser. In an instant, a tragic car accident claimed three generations of his family: his mother, his wife, and his young daughter.

While most of us will not experience such a catastrophic loss in our lifetime, all of us will taste it. As Sittser writes in his preface:

“Sooner or later all people suffer loss, in little doses or big ones, suddenly or over time, privately or in public settings. Loss is as much a part of normal life as birth, for as surely as we are born into this world we suffer loss before we leave it.”

The magnitude of Sittser’s sudden loss is jarring and could easily seem to minimize a single loss that someone experiences. But Sittser addresses this

tendency to compare in his second chapter, with the statement: “Loss is loss, whatever the circumstances. All losses are bad, only bad in different ways. No two losses are ever the same. Each loss stands on its own and inflicts a unique kind of pain.” This straightforward recognition of the use-

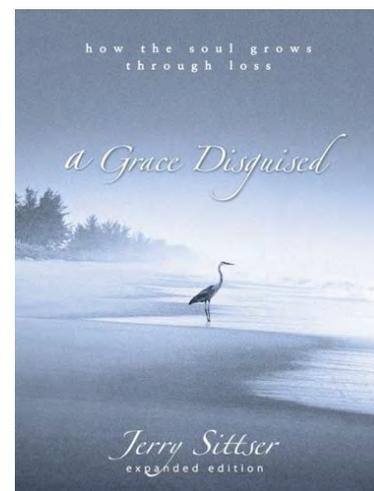
“No two losses are ever the same. Each loss stands on its own and inflicts a unique kind of pain.”

lessness of comparison, made early in the book, was pivotal for me to decide to continue reading. Here was a man who had in one instant lost so much yet he could affirm that all loss, regardless of what it is, inflicts pain.

This book affected me deeply. I have read it through twice and parts of it multiple times. It isn’t a technical or theological treatise on pain and suffering. It is a personal lived experience rooted in a daily, average life that was, before the accident, not so different from my own family life, professional life, and social life. It is a book that reflects on the questions that surround suffering, loss and sorrow while proposing that it is how we respond to the loss

that ultimately matters. It is what happens to the inside of us that matters, more than what happens to us. My perspective and understanding of suffering and loss has been transformed by what Sittser has written in this small yet profound book. My views of living and dying have been reinforced through the stories shared and the transparency of thought offered in the pages of *A Grace Disguised*.

I cannot recommend this book highly enough! I have given this book away to friends and urged colleagues to read it. My copy is well-worn and marked between the covers; a testimony to its effect on my life. You will not regret adding this to your bookshelf.



Grace Hospice

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The mission of Grace Hospice is to serve God by recognizing that every person deserves to live out his or her life with respect and dignity, free of pain, and in an environment that promotes quality of life.

Interested in Volunteering?

As you may be aware, we offer volunteer services to our patients and their families. Most of our volunteers come to us because they know first-hand about the comfort and support these volunteers provide to others. If you or someone you know would like an opportunity to give back to the hospice program, we encourage you to consider volunteering for Grace Hospice.

Our volunteers can visit patients and families, offer short respite for families needing to attend appointments, bake cookies or special treats, make phone calls, read mail or books

to those who can no longer make out the fine print, watch movies, play games,



or simply be a comforting presence. We invite you to consider putting your talents to use by helping those that need a little extra support.

Please feel free to contact Sarah Matthews, the volunteer coordinator for Grace Hospice, if you are interested in becoming a hospice volunteer, or learning more about our Hospice Volunteer Program. You can reach Sarah by phone at 612-843-6816 or by email at smmatthews@gracecaring.org.