

Single Steps

Category: Letting Go

written by Mary Kay Jordan Fleming | December 8, 2018

Sometimes, the answer is so small and simple it goes unnoticed at the time.

I had barely entered my twenties when my parents died, within two years of one another. Well-wishers inundated me with questions about whether I would keep the family homestead, continue my education or change jobs. Should I donate my parents' clothing and furniture and start a new life in a smaller place? After all, the old status quo was gone, never to return.

Over time, I learned what every heartbroken person learns. The hardest part of grieving isn't the material remnants of lives past: it's the void. The empty space in your heart lasts for the rest of your life. A new way of being must be created one small step at a time. Memoirist Helen McDonald writes, "There is a time in life when you expect the world to be always full of new things. And then comes a day when you realize that is not how it will be at all.... Life will become a thing made of holes. Absences. Losses. Things that were there and are no longer. And you realize, too, that you have to grow around and between the gaps."

My journey toward wholeness began with deciding to wake up the day after the second funeral. After conquering that hurdle, I returned to school. Over the next days, I concentrated long enough to complete my assignments. I shopped for groceries, did the laundry and paid the mortgage. Baby steps.

In time, I moved into a different bedroom without feeling disloyal or destructive. I adopted a puppy and hosted family and friends for dinner. When the house needed maintenance, I called a repairperson and identified myself as the homeowner. Years later, I trusted my judgment enough to risk a new relationship with someone my parents would never meet. One more step in healing and rebuilding.

For me, life after grief – life with grief – consisted of a thousand tiny steps to create a new way of being. No grand redesign, no sudden moves. Just putting one foot in front of the other and continuing to live.

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