

THE COURAGE TO GRIEVE A helpful book on grief is Judy Tatelbaum's *The Courage To Grieve*. It opens:

The death of a loved one is the most profound of all sorrows. The grief that comes with such a loss is intense and multifaceted, affecting our emotions, our bodies, and our lives. Grief is preoccupying and depleting. Emotionally, grief is a mixture of raw feelings such as sorrow, anguish, anger, regret, longing, fear, and deprivation. Grief may be experienced physically as exhaustion, emptiness, tension, sleeplessness, or loss of appetite. Grief invades our daily lives in many sudden gaps and changes, like that empty place at the dinner table, or the sudden loss of affection and companionship, as well as in many new apprehensions, adjustments, and uncertainties. The loss of a loved one throws every aspect of our lives out of balance. The closer we were to the person who died, the more havoc the loss creates. Love does not die quickly. Hence to grieve is also "to celebrate the depth of the union." Tears are then the jewels of remembrance, sad but glistening with beauty of the past. So grief in its bitterness marks the end...but it also is praise to the one who is gone.

During the months of mourning after a death, we learn to face the reality and the pain of our loss, to say good-bye to the dead loved one, to restore ourselves, and to reinvest in life once again. In a sense, mourning is a time of new mastery over ourselves and our lives. Recovery comes in the days ahead, when mourning is completed and a new balance is found. But before we recover we have many experiences that trigger our grief anew until those feelings truly dissipate. Finishing or completing grief comes when we are able to let go of our feelings of grief and our intense connection with the deceased. Although our love never dies, the pain of our loss can eventually dissolve.

Although we may feel ignorant about grief, grief is in fact like a neighbor who always lives next door, no matter where or how we live, no matter how we try to move away. Grief may result from any significant change or loss in our lives. Whether we want to or not, every one of us has to learn to let go, to move forward without someone or something we wanted very much.

Life is change. We undergo change, loss, and grief from birth onward. Every venture from home, every move, every job or status change, every loss of person, pet, belief, every illness, every shift in life such as marriage, divorce, or retirement, and every kind of personal growth and change may be cause for grief. These are what Elisabeth Kubler-Ross calls the "little deaths" of life.

Through the shady lane, ere the sun had set,
We strolled together, my boy and I;
Far above our heads, where the treetops met
And the blue sky shone through a lacy net,
The birds were singing a lullaby.

And my small boy chattered, as small boys can,
Of all that he meant to do and be;
How he'd grow and grow to be a great man;
And the short arms stretched to their utmost span;
And work his hardest, and all for me.

At the end of the lane he stayed his feet,
With wistful eyes on the way that led
From the sleepy calm of the village street
To the city's noise and the city's heat;
"Oh, why do we never go there?" he said.

So I answered again the old demand,
The road was dusty and hard and long;
And I gathered closer the little hand,
For I fain would keep him in childhood's land,
Untouched by sorrow and pain and wrong.

Now his words are echoing o'er and o'er,
Through my empty heart and the empty air:
"Mother dear, I'm beating you home once more.
I'll go ahead and open the door;
Just follow me slow and you'll find me there."

Oh, the home he has reached is safe and sweet,
And slow my walk through a long, long lane,
As I follow the prints of his flying feet,
And list' for his laughter my ears to greet,
Follow and listen, and not in vain.

I have done forever with all my fears;
No care shall sadden his joyous song.
And his eyes shall never be dimmed by tears,
For the child heart beats through the endless years
Untouched by sorrow and pain and wrong.

And I know, though the silence hurts me sore
And still to my longing his voice is dumb,
He has only "beaten me home" once more;
He has "gone ahead to open the door,"
And he's waiting there for me to come.

WHERE I'M NOT

Do not stand by my grave and weep.
I am not there. I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow.
I am a diamond glint on snow.
I am the sunlight on ripened grain.
I am the gentle autumn rain.
When you awake in the morning hush
I am the swift uplifting rush
Of quiet birds in circling flight
I am the soft starshine at night
Do not stand by my grave and cry
I am not there . . . I did not die.
Anonymous