

## Marketplace Continued

"Just give me my sadness so I can go," she said uneasily. He nodded and pulled down a box.

"It's heavier than it seems," he said as he handed it over to her gently.

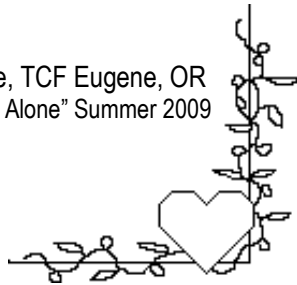
She tucked it under her arm without looking inside.

"Remember what you feel now," he said, pointing to her heart. "Keep a close watch on it. It's easy to forget."

She turned around without thanking him, opening the door. A blast of wind whipped around her.

"Watch your step," he called. The door closed and she stepped into the night.

By Karen Hazelwood-Dantone, TCF Eugene, OR  
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## Memories and the Passage of Time

"How long has it been? Bereaved parents are often asked this question. I ask it of you, "How long has it been?" Now answer this question: "How long does it feel like it's been?" A common answer is, "On one hand it feels like yesterday. On the other, it feels like a long time ago." Why do we experience our lives like this? How can something five or ten years ago feel recent and something that occurred last week feel forever ago? Let's look at the concept of time and try to make some sense of it, with the added bonus that we can gain some insight into our own bereavement process.

Scientists tell us that time can be measured in two ways. One is by a unit of measurement such as seconds, days, years. For example, how old are you? Virtually everybody answers this question in years. But, did you ever consider how many days old you are? Parents whose child died at less than one month focus on their child's age in terms of days or weeks of life. If you are near the age of 27 years you have lived approximately 10,000 days. If you just turned 41, you are nearing 15,000 days. How many of those days in your life do you remember? If you consider life in terms of seconds, the average American lives about two billion seconds (75 years). For many bereaved parents, one of the long term sources of grief is the fact that their child was cheated or deprived of years and decades of living.

Another way to measure time is by events. How many events of your child's life do you remember? How vivid are they? What are the triggers of these memories? As the months and years pass, many parents fear forgetting events in their child's life.

I have a suggestion to help you call up positive memories of your child whenever you wish. First, take out a pen and paper and write every memory that immediately comes to mind. Don't worry about details for now. Just write. Next, find a label for each of the memories. For example, a mother whose seven year old daughter died writes out on paper four memories that immediately come to mind: her daughter's first day of school; hunting for Easter eggs in her new dress; riding her bike on her sixth birthday; and sand castles they built on their trip to the ocean. She creates the following labels: First Day at School; Easter Dress; New Bike; Sand Castles. And then she writes them in any order she wishes. Next, go through each memory and create as much detail as possible for each memory. Describe the setting, what was said, colors, temperature, smells, sounds, touches. Make a story out of the event. Next, assign a number to each label. For the woman above, she would say, "1=First Day at school, 2=Easter Dress, and so on. Then she would practice saying a number and immediately bring up the full memory of the event. Practicing this for a few days can create a very powerful list of quite wonderful memories that you can access at will. The list can be carried on a 3"x5" card for easy referral.

Picture a father standing in line at the grocery store. His 15 year-old son died two years ago and he has recently put together a list of ten of his favorite memories, numbered 1-10. As he stands in line, he says to himself, "I'm going to think about number five for a few seconds." He has previously associated this number with the time he and his son took windsurfing lessons at the lake. He sees his son being shown the fundamentals by the instructor, practicing on land, bending his knees, shifting his weight, getting into the water, climbing on the board, and attempting to stand. He smiles as he sees both his son and himself fall off the board again and again. He nods as he next has a beautiful scene in his mind of his son proudly standing and gliding across the water with the sun and blue sky in the background. He reaches the check stand, pays his bill and walks out of the store somewhat comforted by a memory he knows he can bring up whenever he wants.

Give this technique a try, but be careful not to get upset if you don't have crystal clear memories. Think of a time in your child's life and use the steps above to create your story from the memories you have.

Our brain functions in such a way that we are aware of the passage of time and we understand that some memories are "older" and more distant than others. However, if we practice on bringing up memories from time to time, we can reinforce the images and transcend the time gap between then and now. Of course, focusing exclusively on the past and ignoring the present is not healthy. But, as you know, memories are all you have. Why not use them?

By Bob Baugher, PhD, a psychologist and certified death educator, a professional adviser for a TCFChapter.