

Choosing Life

"It will never be the same. Never." As a bereaved parent, you have often heard or said these words to express grief's profound feelings of sorrow and disorientation. Your life has suddenly taken an unexpected course that appears both uncharted and endless. Bewildered, you vainly search for pathways back to your former life, until you confront the reality that there is no way back. Your child is dead forever. It is then that you may say, "...never the same."

This is the aspect of grief that Simon Stephens calls "The Valley of the Shadow." It is that very long time between the death of your child and your reinvestment in life. Between. It is not supposed to be a permanent resting place. Although some people do take up residence in the valley, it is a transition from the death of your child to life with renewed purpose.

The key to this transition is yourself. You must choose between life and the valley. You and only you can decide. And you must make that decision again and again, each day.

Giving in to the hopelessness of the valley is tempting. Choosing to move on toward life requires a great deal of work. You must struggle with the pain of grief in order to resolve it. It is a daily struggle full of tears, anger, guilt and self-doubt, but it is the only alternative to surrendering yourself to the valley.

Little by little you choose to move on. Little by little you progress toward the other side of the valley. It takes a very long time, far longer than your friends or relatives suspected. Far longer than you had believed – even prayed – that it would be. When one day you find yourself able to do more than choose merely to live but also how to live, you will know you are leaving the valley of the shadow. There will still be more work to do, more struggle and choosing. The valley, however, stretches behind rather than in front of you.

When you have resolved your grief by reinvesting in life, you will be able to realize that nothing is ever "the same." Life is change. We would not have it be otherwise, for that is the valley of the shadow. Change has the promise of beginning and the excitement of discovery.

Life is never the same. Life is change. Choose life!

By Marcia F. Alig

TCF, Mercer Area Chapter, New Jersey
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Pictures

I set them out. I put them away. I get them out and start to go through them. I am filled with bleak Wonder that the daughter pictured there is no longer going to call, or walk in the door, or send a card filled with love and humor. Cards that brightened my day, made me laugh, and always prompted me to call her and give her a big hug when she walked in the door.



Pictures. I get them out. I run my hand over her face, lingering on her lips, remembering. And suddenly, overcome with grief, I pull that picture to me and kiss her and tell her how much I miss her. Then I look again and see her eyes that sparkled and twinkled with mischief.

Pictures. At times I hate them. They show me what I don't have. They bring back memories of a time when she was healthy and happy, a time when life with her was a joy. I am not yet at a place in my healing where I can remember those times very well. I am filled with memories of her pain, illness and death. I am still at a place that I want all of those horrible memories to be a bad dream, a dream from which I will awake and hear her voice calling me to come outside to take some pictures.

By Pam Fallon, TCF Central Oregon
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Do You Have Children?

How do I answer such a painful question?
Could they possibly understand my feelings for you?
I have no one to hold, no one to call me Mommy.
In their eyes, I am childless;
I am not the same as before I had you.
I love you, think of you, just as a mother would.
If they could only see into my heart,
They would know you are with me always.
Yes, I do have children...

By Joni Cross, TCF DeSoto TX