Stepping Stones™

NEWSLETTER

Did You Know?

Did you know that you can plan out all the details of your funeral ahead of time? This spares loved ones from unnecessary doubt and worry during their time of grief. It also brings comfort and peace of mind to friends and family to know that everything will be done according to your wishes. We can show you all your options, provide you with all the forms, and give you the information you need to make educated decisions. Funeral preplanning is a free service we offer the families of our community. Call us to schedule your appointment.

Sincerely,

Lunn Funeral Home

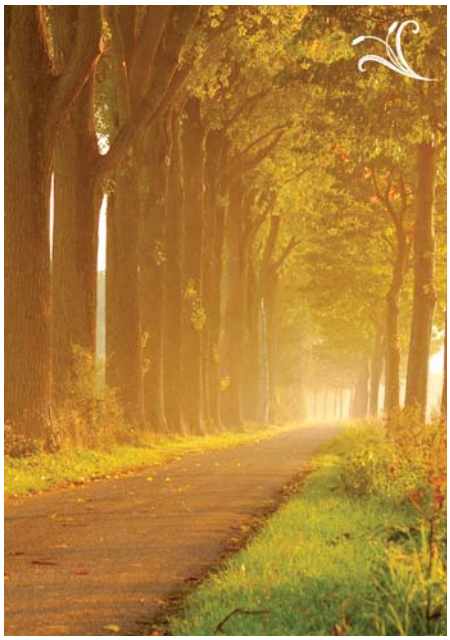
2 Are there Actual Stages of Grieving? *cont.*

2 A Rose for Mother

JUNE

ARE THERE ACTUAL STAGES OF GRIEVING?

BY RUSSELL P. FRIEDMAN & JOHN W. JAMES
Co-authors of The Grief Recovery Handbook *and* When Children Grieve



Many years ago Elizabeth Kubler-Ross wrote a book entitled *On Death and Dying*. The book identified five stages that a dying person goes through when they are told that they have a terminal illness. Those stages are: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. For many years, in the absence of any other helpful material, well-meaning people incorrectly assigned those same stages to the *grief* that follows a death or loss. Although a griever might experience some or all of those feeling stages, it is not a correct or helpful basis for dealing with the conflicting feelings caused by loss.

We hesitate to name stages for grief. It is our experience that given ideas on how to respond, grievers will cater their feelings to the ideas presented to them. After all, a griever is often in a very suggestible condition; dazed, numb, walking in quicksand. It is often suggested to grievers that they are in denial. In all of our years of experience, working with tens of thousands of grievers, we have rarely met anyone who is in denial that a loss has occurred. They say "since my mom died, I have had a hard time." There is no denial in that comment. There is a very clear acknowledgment that there has been a death. If we start with an incorrect premise, we are probably going to wind up very far away from the truth.

What about anger? Often when a death has occurred there is no anger at all. For example, my aged grandmother with whom I had a wonderful relationship got ill and died. Blessedly, it happened pretty quickly, so she did not suffer very much. I am pleased about that. Fortunately, I had just

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spent some time with her and we had reminisced and had told each other how much we cared about each other. I am very happy about that. There was a funeral ceremony that created a truly accurate memory picture of her, and many people came and talked about her. I loved that. At the funeral a helpful friend reminded me to say any last things to her and then say goodbye, and I did, and I'm glad. I notice from time to time that I am sad when I think of her or when I am reminded of her. And I notice, particularly around the holidays, that I miss her. And I am aware that I have this wonderful memory of my relationship with this incredible woman who was my grandma, and I miss her. And, I am not angry.

Although that is a true story about grandma, it could be a different story and create different feelings. If I had not been able to get to see her and talk to her before she died, I might have been angry at the circumstances that prevented that. If she and I had not gotten along so well, I might have been angry that she died before we had a chance to repair any damage. If those things were true, I would definitely need to include the sense of anger that would attend the communication of any unfinished emotional business, so I could say goodbye.

Unresolved grief is almost always about undelivered communications of an emotional nature. There are a whole host of feelings that may be attached to those unsaid things. Happiness, sadness, love, fear, anger, relief, compassion, are just some of the feelings that a griever might experience. We do not need to categorize, analyze, or explain those feelings. We do need to learn how to communicate them and then say goodbye to the relationship that has ended.

It is most important to understand that there are no absolutes. There are no definitive stages or time zones for grieving. It is usually helpful to attach feeling value to the undelivered communications that keep you incomplete. Attaching feelings does not have to be histrionic or dramatic, it does not even require tears. It merely needs to be heartfelt, sincere and honest.

Grief is the normal and natural reaction to loss. Grief is emotional, not intellectual. Rather than defining stages of grief which could easily confuse a griever, we prefer to help each griever find their own truthful expression of the thoughts and feelings that may be keeping them from participating in their own lives. We all bring different and varying beliefs to the losses that occur in our lives, therefore we will each perceive and feel differently about each loss.

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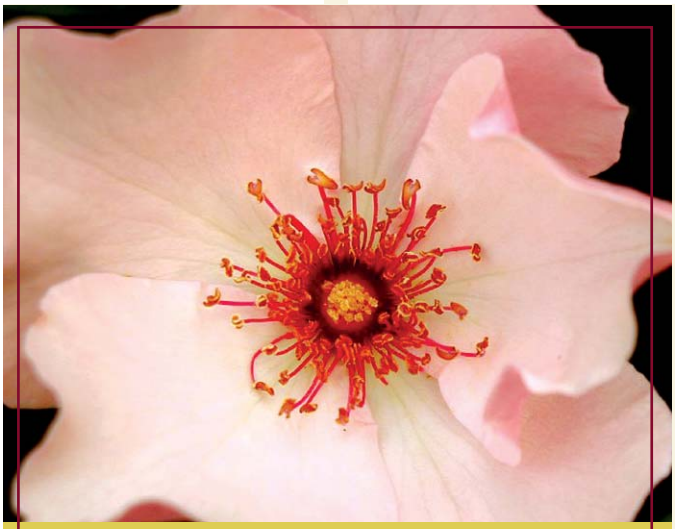

A ROSE FOR MOTHER

Maria E. Sears

From Chicken Soup for the Grieving Soul.
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With garden resurrections every year,
Life after death is not so queer.
-- Agnes Ryan

Sometimes, when sorrow is deep and the healing balm of time moves too slowly, a grieving heart may look for consolation in something more tangible. When I lost my mother, the comfort I sought depended on the survival of a single rose. Nothing could have prepared me for the answer I received.

My husband and I are avid rose growers. When we joined a local rose society, we became involved in rose competitions where hundreds of blooms of every color and variety are judged for trophies. Growing show roses takes a great deal of time and energy, but the garden was our haven where we gladly retreated into a world of sunshine and beauty.

My mother also loved our yard, and each time she came to our home, she would soon disappear into the garden. I often teased her about wanting to visit with the roses more than with us. She had

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been struggling with progressive kidney failure, and the garden was where she went to recover after her exhausting dialysis treatments. When she was strong enough, she would roam through the pathways inspecting and clipping her way around the bushes, since it was her self-appointed mission to fill the house with beautiful bouquets. Eventually, when she became too ill to walk through the garden, she was content to sit in the shade surrounded by the flowers and birds. By the end of summer she had grown very frail, and with a heavy heart I knew this would be her last summer in the garden.

An unpredictable complication sent her into a coma, and she suddenly passed away two days before Christmas. After the funeral, I went into the garden hoping to find some comfort in the place she had loved so much. I was searching for a sense of her spirit among the roses, but the garden was in its dormant stage and the barrenness matched the emptiness I felt in my heart.

The following day, some friends from church brought us a new rosebush in her memory. They had selected one called Dainty Bess, a beautiful five-petal rose in cotton-candy pink with dark red stamens and a soft, sweet smell. It would be a lovely reminder of Mother. We planted the rosebush near the place where she had spent so many peaceful hours, and for me the bush became a symbol of her ongoing spirit. I spent the winter months pampering the little plant, urging it to survive and grow strong.

The cold rains finally stopped, and an early spring transformed our yard into a riot of fragrant color. Mother would have loved it, and I missed sharing her joy and enthusiasm for the garden.

Dainty Bess was thriving, covered with bright green leaves and, to our surprise, five long-stemmed buds. When the first delicate bloom opened, my spirits soared for the first time in months.

Our first rose show was five days away, and I became determined to enter a Dainty Bess bloom in memory of my mother's life, believing this would finally put an end to my grieving. Unusually warm weather had quickly opened three of the five buds, so I cut the last two and placed them in the refrigerator to slow the blooming process. The day before the show, I tried to force them open by putting them in warm water. The first bud refused to open and simply bowed its head, but the last one was perfect. I placed it back in the refrigerator and prayed it would survive. Later that day, a nagging fear of losing the rose sent me out to the garden hoping to find another Dainty Bess hiding among the leaves, but there was no sign of a bud anywhere.

The next morning, I opened up the refrigerator to find a bare stem in the vase and five pink petals lying on the shelf! I burst into tears. Losing the rose suddenly brought back all the memories of losing my mother. My husband gave me a comforting hug. "We'll enter a Dainty Bess at the next show," he said soothingly. But I could hear the disappointment in his voice.

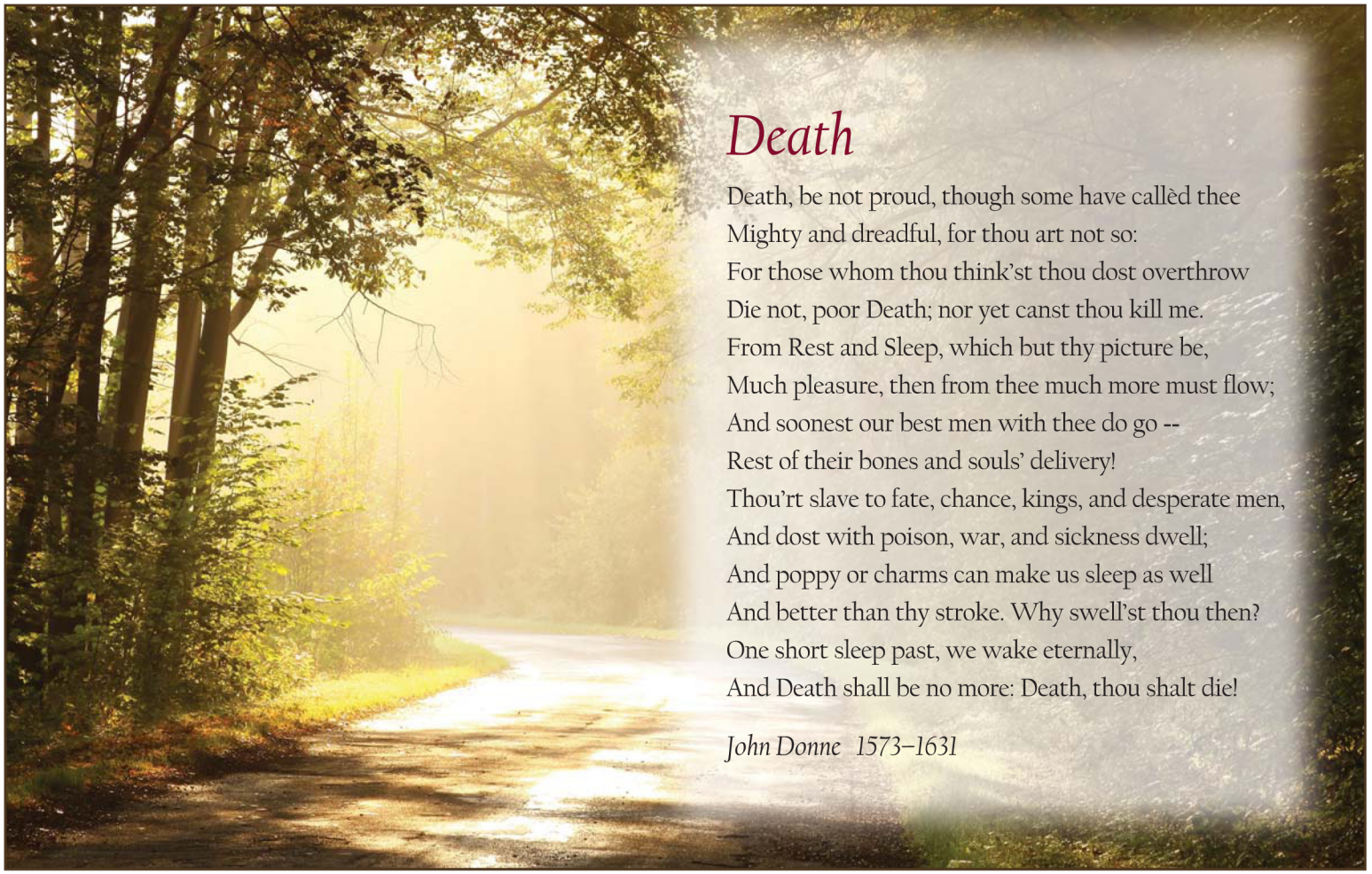
With heavy hearts, we went into the garden to check the rest of the rosebushes for last-minute blooms before leaving for the show. Barely glancing at the Dainty Bess bush as I walked by, a small splash of color caught my eye. My gasp of surprise brought Rich rushing over to see what was wrong, and together we stared in disbelief at a single long-stemmed, tightly folded bud in the center of the bush. Faith had taught me to believe in miracles, but this was beyond all understanding. Almost afraid to touch it, I finally cut the stem. In stunned silence, we drove to the show.

When we arrived at the exhibit hall, the bud had barely begun to unfurl. I polished the leaves, then cupped my hands over the bloom and gave it several warm puffs of my breath to encourage it to open. I knew the rose would be disqualified if the petals weren't fully opened by the time it was judged.

After I had done all I could, I stood back and looked at the little rose. Its beauty was breathtaking. Its half-opened petals reaching upward reminded me that I had been blessed with an extraordinary act of compassion. Then I realized that my competitive spirit had momentarily blinded me to the real reason for showing this rose--not the prize or the glory of winning, but to honor my mother's life. The rose was perfect just the way it was, and the judge's opinion was no longer relevant. With a grateful heart and sense of reverence, I placed the rose on the display table and walked away, free at last from sorrow's grip.

When the judging was completed, we rushed over to retrieve our special rose. It had disappeared from the table! Seeing our confusion, a friend came over and asked if we had looked on the trophy table. There it was--opened to perfection, draped with a blue ribbon and standing next to a large silver trophy that said "Best Single-Petal Rose in Show." It was a beautiful and unexpected tribute to my mother.

A few days later, I pressed the rose, hoping to keep it forever as proof that miracles do happen. But when I checked it just one week later, it had disintegrated into a fine powder that scattered into the air as I unfolded the paper around it. The rose had come into my life to console my aching heart, then vanished as mysteriously as it had appeared once its work was done.



Death

Death, be not proud, though some have callèd thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so:
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow
Die not, poor Death; nor yet canst thou kill me.
From Rest and Sleep, which but thy picture be,
Much pleasure, then from thee much more must flow;
And soonest our best men with thee do go --
Rest of their bones and souls' delivery!
Thou'rt slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell;
And poppy or charms can make us sleep as well
And better than thy stroke. Why swell'st thou then?
One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
And Death shall be no more: Death, thou shalt die!

John Donne 1573–1631

We are pleased to continue our tradition of caring through these complimentary issues of *Stepping Stones Newsletter* and our professional staff.

Seymour Memorial
FUNERAL HOME
200 South Cedar Street | Seymour, TX 76380 | (940) 888-3124

If you have enjoyed this reading, please let us know! We'd love to provide you with additional grief materials and resources to help you cope during this difficult time. If you would like more information, or if you would like to speak to someone who can assist you with filing for veterans' benefits, Social Security and insurance benefits, or who can help you prepare your own or a loved one's funeral plans in advance, please reply to this email, and a funeral home representative will contact you shortly. We sincerely hope that we have been able to brighten your day with this edition of *Stepping Stones*. Please don't hesitate to let us know if there is anything we can do to assist you.

For more information regarding prepaid funerals and consumer rights and protections under Texas state law, visit www.prepaidfunerals.state.tx.us.

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