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Finding Peace and Happiness

I have written before about a women's grief group that I co-lead for Pathways Hospice located in Lakewood, CA. I find it a very satisfying and uplifting activity, as I watch members go from tears to laughter as they describe their lives now so different since the loss of their husbands. And I've learned a great deal about grief through the training and experience with these women.

Just recently a member shared, almost sheepishly, that she now wakes up happy! A startling revelation from someone who had been so heartbroken and sad. She knew this was a breakthrough for her and was hoping her announcement would not cause disbelief or derision! The group seemed startled yet envious of her current state of mind. She had revealed at the last meeting that she had gone on line to a dating site and had met a nice fellow with whom she has spent some time. She said it was not a love affair but a friendship that she was happy with. The group was curious about the experience of going on line and a good discussion ensued with lots of laughter and fun!

At our next meeting, I asked what she thought was the reason for her change of mood. She revealed that she had been thinking about all the things she was grateful for and it convinced her that although she was sad about her loss, she also had many things to be happy about. It reminded me of The Book of Joy that I had recently read authored by The Dalai Lama and Desmond Tutu. Their main premise was that you find joy in giving to others. As you think of others your attention turns from you to them and how you might contribute positively to their lives. As you do this thoughts about your own sadness fade as you think of how to help others.

As you might imagine we had changed the subject and began to think about the pleasures in our own lives that we had put in the background. Mother Nature provides lots of distractions and we began noting what some of those things were—the birds, the flowering plants, a much enjoyed walk in the park, and other such things. While the sadness was still there, it was not so front and center as before.

In subsequent meetings the subject often turned to the more pleasant things that occur. A member had just become a grandmother for the first time and her sharing was about that miracle. Others shared of trips they were planning with friends, or gatherings of relatives for special occasions.

During each meeting we have a round of “highs and lows” of the week which each member recalls. It’s notable that there are more highs and sometimes no lows reported, indicating progress in the grief process. But it is also of note to remind members that sadness often roars back when you least expect it and that it resolves more quickly than before. These lows are given attention to remind members that grief has its own timetable and is peppered with mood swings and that this is normal. Members are relieved to know that their grieving is normal and that the highs become more and more frequent as the lows slip quietly away. And as life resumes almost normally, each member considers it may be time to leave the group or “graduate” as we call it. And that is why we encourage members to meet each other outside the group for lunch and dinners, which are planned while the group is “young”. A means of getting together is already in place and leaving is less painful.