

September 2001



THE SOURCE LINE WELLNESS NEWSLETTER

Source Lines

September 11, 2001

“To wake up and be able to go to sleep are the most beautiful things in life. Some people say, ‘I woke up on the wrong side of the bed.’ In this day and time, if you got a bed, there ain’t no wrong side.”

from Jonathan Slocumb, Emerge (April 1998) - UTNE READER JULY - AUGUST 98

Let’s face it, on most days we all take most of the important things in our life for granted. Most of our time and energy is usually spent on the “urgent/unimportant” tasks in our lives. That is until someone close to us dies. Only then do we stop briefly and think about death, loss, grief and the meaning of life. Life is the one thing we have. Death is the one sure thing we will have. It is also the one thing we are most uncertain about. And what is it? The timeless question: What is it, really?

“Only the people who avoid love can avoid grief. The point is to learn from it, and remain vulnerable to love.”

John Brantner

In some ways the task of writing about death has been chosen for me. A few years ago I met a woman who had recently lost her husband of many years. Over the course of several months she and I had a conversation. We exchanged books and articles about death and grieving, loss and life. To this day I’m not sure who gained more from our conversations, her or me? Our talks helped me appreciate how important it is to have some personal view of ‘the bigger picture’...some ‘personal philosophy’ about the meaning of life. (“What’s it all about, Alfie?”) Some time later a man whose wife had recently died gave me a small book about losing a loved one and suggested that I write about death in a future newsletter.

Since then, I’ve been asked more than once to write a newsletter about death and grief. The trouble is, to be honest, I’ve never known what to say to someone who has just lost a loved one. What can you say? What does someone want to hear? Oh, I know what we’re sup-

posed to say. But, I have always felt awkward, and like my words were so inadequate. Maybe most of us feel like this. I have come to understand for myself that the desire for the “right” words is not only out of concern to make others feel better, at a time when no “right” words can compensate for the loss. It is also a way of trying to make ourselves feel better in the face of our own mortality. And, if we could just say the “right” thing then we wouldn’t have to feel so powerless, so useless. Maybe we could make the other person feel better. But the fact is there are no absolute “right” words. And silence can also convey our concern. To say, “I’m sorry for your pain”, and to just sit with people in mourning is, often, the best we can “give”. And often all they can “take”.

Some time ago while leaving church after a funeral I met a man I knew from one of the companies I regularly visit. We spoke briefly. He had been at the service too. He said: “We were cousins. We saw one another at weddings and funerals.” I thought from his tone that he’d wished they had been closer. Once more I went away and again read about death, hoping this would help me write something that might be intelligent and useful.

For sure, a lot of what is written about death is helpful. It can be very good to know that there is no one right or healthy way to respond to death and loss. All of us have our individual ideas about death based on who we are, where we are from, what beliefs we have about life and afterlife, the ways our family taught us and our life experience. It

can be helpful to know that it’s normal to go numb - have no feelings - in the face of death. It’s also normal to feel anger. It’s normal to try and put it out of your mind. It’s normal to think about it over and over. It’s normal to want to just go to sleep all the time. It’s normal to stay awake, though exhausted. It’s normal to want to be alone. It’s normal to be afraid of being alone. It’s normal to feel hopeless about everything. It’s normal to try to soldier on through the sadness. It’s normal to be entirely immobilized and not care to move another step. It’s normal to have many of these feelings even though they make no sense.

It can be good to know that grieving is a process that you can’t set a time limit to. Denial and Anger, Sadness and Acceptance are all steps along the way to coming to terms with the loss of a loved one. There is no way to speed the process up. Emotional healing doesn’t happen when you want it to. And very often there is more going on for a person than we think. From the outside it may look like a person is grieving the loss of a child or spouse or parent. And if you asked, “What is causing you pain?” they might tell you that they lost someone special. But often, when they tell their story more completely there are many other losses and disappointments and discouragement that all seem to be swirling inside of them - some they are aware of, some they hadn’t realized were affecting them so much. So, the timing is different for everyone. Some losses are more complicated.

And then there is September 11, 2001. A Tuesday when everything went out the win-

dow. In the morning I watched, riveted, in shock, as death flew through the World Trade Center and into the lives of everyone, everywhere. Every century in history has been marked with mankind's atrocity toward mankind. And once again, it's our, and our children's turn. We have all had different thoughts and feelings during the days following this terrible day. For some the worst has happened. For others the worst is not knowing what tomorrow will bring. Terrible things affect us all. I've been affected, lost sleep, cried, been numb and been close to people who have lost someone to the destruction. During this time the simple has seemed so precious. "To wake up and be able to go to sleep are the most beautiful things in life. Some people say, 'I woke up on the wrong side of the bed.' In this day and time, if you got a bed, there ain't no wrong side." I understand better what death means. It means being careful and grateful for every-

thing you have! It means holding those you love closer! It means searching inside yourself for patience. It means looking carefully for something of beauty everyday, until you find it.

Tuesday, September 11, 2001 means to Stop. Remember... Move on. Stop. Remember... Move on.

"Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath away." e-mail @ work

Take time to notice the world around you today. Call someone you haven't talked to in a while. Do something out of the ordinary. Most of the regrets people have are about things they didn't do.

Random Thought

"Although the world is full of suffering, it is full also of the overcoming of it."

—Helen Keller

SOURCE LINE, INC.
94 CUMBERLAND STREET, SUITE 604, TORONTO, ONTARIO, M5R 1A3
416-923-0868 / 1-800-394-8015
Email: reachus@sourceline.net Web Site: www.sourceline.net
Offices in Toronto, Mississauga, Woodbridge and Newmarket
With EAP Associates Across Canada