

August 22, 2021

Helping Others Helps

Dear Friends,

As I sit down to write this morning's reflection, at least where I live, I am enormously grateful that Hurricane Henri has proven to be no big deal, and I pray for those in its path.

"We have been devastated by loss. We are tormented. Yet what happens if we surrender to the pain instead of resisting it? It softens. It downgrades from a Category 2 to a Category 1 hurricane. The central paradox of grief is that the very act of befriending our pain diminishes it. We hold the key to easing our own torment." (A. Wolfelt, PhD. *Grief One Day at a Time*- Aug. 25th)

My sister Kelly died in August 2000 followed by my nephew Jimmy in August 2004. They both took their own lives. It is hard for me to remember the dates and particularly the years; I literally have to look at their gravestones to remember sometimes. Both time and dates have a way of morphing in grief, becoming quite convoluted. It is a very strange experience. Let's face it, grief is a most unexpected, absolutely off-putting, rip the rug from under your feet, roller coaster ride into the unknown. "When someone we love dies traumatically, we feel frighteningly uprooted, markedly insecure, and our ability to trust the world feels gravely threatened- and indeed it is gravely threatened." (Joanne Cacciatore, PhD, *Bearing the Unbearable*)

I remember a knock on the door after Kelly died, standing in our threshold was a woman we never met named Peggy Farrell, who lost her son to suicide several years before. Whenever Peggy heard of a local suicide, she went right to the homes of those who suffered this particular loss to offer support and comfort. This was the most compassionate thing we could have experienced at this lowest point in our family life. I learned from Peggy how important and truly supportive such a visit could be. It is what helped me to be inspired to visit many families after they lost loved ones in the World Trade Center a year later. People like Peggy, and our beloved

Marian Fitzgerald, who died this past year, helped me to understand and put into practice compassion and empathy for all those suffering loss.

I'm often asked why I do what I do, and I try to explain what both Peggy and Marion taught me: that helping others helps us. And it does. When we are ready. First, we need to grieve and 'surrender' to the pain, the emotions, the roller coaster ride, and then begin to feel the healing and softening of grief before we can reach out to others.

It is out of similar experience that Stephy's Place was born. Out of the ashes a phoenix has risen, out of the pain and suffering of so many rose this 'place' of comfort and solace, of healing and help, of support and serenity.

I can't tell you how inspiring it is to see the power of love multiplying every day as more of our Stephy's Place family members begin to reach out of their own grief towards others who are hurting. People who just a few years ago were almost catatonic are now knocking on doors, making phone calls, facilitating support groups, reaching out to others they see in cemeteries, volunteering in our office, starting meet-up groups, going for grief support training, visiting neighbors, caring for the sick, caring for pets and animals, delivering meals to those in need, and so much more. This is how grief heals. This is what happens when love and compassion are real- they, by necessity, by their very nature, must be shared, must be given away, must be multiplied. This is what changes our world one person, one household, and one support group at a time. It was this kind of experience that changed and impacted my life and I now have the privilege to see it happening every day.

However the storm is raging for you right now, whatever its category, please try to hold onto the hope that is so beautifully and tangibly seen before us in those who are experiencing healing and new life as they venture a bit further down the foggy path. Let your now be your now, but please know it is not your forever. Be inspired by people like Peggy and Marion, like so many around us who have put their grief to work and who have allowed the power of love to move them forward.

Peace and Serenity, Kevin