

March 3, 2022

Stephy's Place Reflection by Kevin Keelen

To Honor Them

Over the years, I have been inspired and deeply moved by how so many grieving people often eventually find different ways to honor their beloved who died. Like many who lost loved ones on September 11, 2001, Sheila, our Founding Director, started a foundation in her husband Jimmy's memory. Each time she was able to help a family in need or a family who had experienced hardship or loss, she honored Jimmy in remarkable and beautiful ways. Stephy, who our center is named after, was one of the recipients of the foundation. Stephy was diagnosed with stage four cancer and Sheila's foundation sent her and her family on their last vacation to Disney World. After getting to know and love Stephy, Sheila shared her dream of opening a grief center one day and promised Stephy she would name it after her. And here we are six years later providing support for over 500 people each week. If that doesn't honor Jimmy....

So, so many people out of their brokenness and loss have started scholarships, foundations, sponsored walks and events, made donations, begun charities, or have found other creative and meaningful ways to honor those we have loved and lost. This is never an easy thing to do, especially in early grief when everything and every memory can be excruciating. Quite often we can become almost paralyzed by the pain, and on a subconscious level we may even feel that our pain is what honors them. The pain can, in a way, become them, as we may feel it is all we have left. This is the 'stinkin thinkin' that grief may whisper in our ears- that we have no right to feel anything but the pain. Hopefully, and eventually, this can change for us as we can possibly begin to separate our memories from the pain, to realize that the pain is not them and remaining in acute pain does not honor them. I believe that the opposite is true, -when we can begin to chose to live, to move forward, and begin to embrace our grief and our life at the same time, when we allow ourselves to feel both happiness and sadness simultaneously, this I believe honors them more than anything else. It doesn't seem possible at first, as the experience of feeling polar opposite emotions is something quite off-putting and unique to grief, it's unlike anything we have ever experienced in life. It takes a lot of getting used to. But it is absolutely

possible. We do not need to do anything big, dramatic, or public to honor those we love, sometimes just getting out of bed can honor them more than anything else.

I truly believe that if those who died truly loved us, and still love us, then they would want us to heal and find new ways of living and surviving, and perhaps eventually even thriving. But in order to get anywhere in grief, we need to grieve and mourn. Honoring those we love doesn't take grief away, but it provides us opportunities to mourn and heal.

This past week, someone from one of our groups shared an anonymous quote about honoring and I felt it was extremely moving and inspiring, so I'd like to share it with you. Keep in mind the number one rule in grief is that everybody grieves differently. With that said, the person who wrote this found an amazing way to cope, to navigate, and to honor their loved one, but we all have to find our own ways, and hopefully we will with love and support.

“To honor you, I get up every day, take a breath, and start another day without you in it.

To honor you, I laugh and love with those who knew your smile, and the way your eyes twinkled with mischief and secret knowledge.

To honor you, I take the time to appreciate everyone I love. I know now there is no guarantee of the days or hours spent in their presence.

To honor you, I listen to music you would have liked, and sing at the top of my lungs with windows rolled down.

To honor you, I take chances, say what I feel, hold nothing back, risk making a fool of myself, dance every dance.

You were my light, my heart, my gift of love, from the very highest source.

So every day I vow to make a difference, share a smile, live, laugh, and love.

Now I live for us both, so all I do, I do to honor you.”

----- Author unknown

Many people ask me why I do what I do, and my response is that I walk with people through loss to honor those I have lost. It helps me to help others. It keeps me going. It is fulfilling. It's not easy, but very few things worthwhile are. Right now, we all need to take very good care of ourselves and in doing so we surely honor them.

Peace and Serenity, Kevin