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Stephy's Place Reflection

by Kevin Keelen

A Gift from Mom

Last week as I was driving home from a support group meeting at Stephy's Place, one of my favorite songs came on the radio: Billy Joel's, ***Say Goodbye to Hollywood***. The lyrics have always touched my heart with a wave of remembrance:

***“So many faces in and out of my life,
some will last, some will just be now and then
Life is a series of hellos and goodbyes,
I'm afraid it's time for goodbye again...”***

Singing along with Billy, I pulled into my parking spot, which is ironically where I do a lot of connecting, thinking, crying, singing, and pondering, and my mother's face came clearly and directly into my vision. I often think of different loved ones who have passed away during this song, but this time it was my mom who has been gone since 2010.

You may find it ironic that I, who walk with grieving people every day, have carried guilt about my mom's passing these past twelve years. It hasn't been debilitating guilt, nor the kind of guilt I needed therapy for, but a guilt that simply comes to so many of us when we feel utterly powerless over our loved one's death. (Keep in mind I'm Irish and was raised Catholic, so there's that. LOL)

My mother died of COPD and as many of you painfully know so well, this is a slow and torturous way to leave the world. My mom was my best friend and I tried so many things to help her, but in the end nothing worked. Sometimes I would get frustrated and feel guilty about that as well. So, all these years I've had

a very personal understanding of guilt because I also carried it in the recesses of my heart. And it sucks. In some ways this guilt prevented me to truly cherish the multitude of happy, beautiful memories that we shared. As my mind would go to these wonderful memories, the guilt of her passing would cloud the moment and tinge the memory with some pain. It's so unfair.

I have always said that everyone deserves to be remembered for their life, not their death. I don't know how I'm going to die, but I sincerely hope people remember me for my life more than the way it ends. Unfortunately, in grief it's often unavoidable for an undetermined amount of time to be unable to access the happy memories as the loss takes up so much room in our psyches. Over time, and doing the hard work of grieving and mourning, we usually can access these memories which are our greatest treasures. Guilt has an insidious way of clouding these treasures.

So, as I listened to the song and saw my mother's beautiful face, I heard words clearly being spoken to me, words that came from my mother, words from the other side, words which would change my grief completely, and words I strongly feel that I need to share with everyone I possibly can. I firmly believe that these words are for all of us, not just me, so I wrote them down and memorized them.

This is a Mother's Day gift from the other side, and I'd like to share that gift with you...

My mother said:

“Don't let the end of my life define my entire life

Or our entire relationship.

You provided me with some of my most precious memories.

Let the guilt go.”

When I got out of my car, I felt like I was walking on air; it felt so ethereal. The guilt was gone. I smiled and laughed and remembered in a flash all the wonderful cruises and trips, holidays and meals, plays and concerts, and I felt the sheer joy of a life of memories and love. What a Mother’s Day gift my mother gave to me!

Hellen Keller once said, “What we have once enjoyed deeply we can never lose. All that we love deeply becomes part of us.”

I hope and pray that these words may in some way give you some consolation wherever you may be in your grief journey. Yes, for some of us it may take twelve years, for others twelve minutes; it will be different for us all. But knowing that healing is real and possible can certainly put some fuel into our tank to move forward one step, one day at a time.

Don’t let the end of their life define their entire life, nor your entire relationship.

God bless you and all our moms both here and on the other side.

Peace and Serenity, Kevin