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1411 Vintage Lane
Rochester, NY 14626
585-720-6000

{**chapters** turning the pages through grief}

About as far back as anyone can remember, February has been the month most of us turn our attention to the people we love most. Sending flowers and candy for Valentine's Day. Recalling the days our children made paper hearts at school and brought them home for us. As the cold of winter settles in, it's nice to remember that we are loved.

What's Love Got to Do with it?



But that same love is also the occasion of great pain. In this season of love, we are also forced to realize how much we have lost. That's one of the problems with grief—we tend to most grieve those people we love most. If you are reeling from the death of your "sweetheart" or are working through some other kind of loss this month, the decorative hearts might make this an extra difficult time. So what can you do?

Celebrate the relationship you enjoyed.

In the midst of deep grief, it's pretty hard to think about celebrating much of anything. Your life was turned upside down and now you are left alone. But in spite of the pain, you can celebrate the relationship that was a real part your experience. Think about the three or four character virtues that most described your loved one—generosity, integrity, faithfulness, diligence, trustworthiness and patience are just a few possibilities.

You can write in your journal about some of the ways you saw that virtue lived out in his or her life. Share your thoughts with a friend, family member or support group with words like, "During Valentine's month, I've been thinking about Bob's patience..." You might even want to celebrate the relationship by seeking one way this month to "pass along" the character virtue you experienced with your loved one.

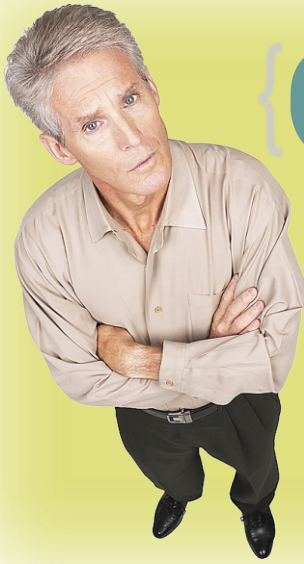
Invest time in a "senior sweetheart."

Skilled nursing facilities, retirement homes and assisted living centers have many residents who have been seemingly forgotten by family. Talk to the social worker or activities director at one of these facilities and learn how you can "adopt" one or more seniors. Perhaps you could spend a little time on Valentine's Day enjoying lunch in the dining room with one—or several—"senior sweethearts." In any case, your life will be enriched, even as you become the means to enriching others.

Continued...

February 2012

"I love you, not only for what you are, But for what I am when I am with you."
{Roy Croft}



{ Q & A }

How do I control my grief or is that even possible?

No, grief does not work that way. You cannot determine exactly what you will feel and when you will feel it. But you can take an active role in how your grief unfolds. You can be intentional about taking good care of yourself, by eating and sleeping well, getting plenty of exercise, and doing things that you enjoy. You can treat yourself from time to time to something special —an evening out, a favorite treat, or maybe just a vase of fresh flowers to enjoy. You can choose to be among people you enjoy and avoid those who do not understand your loss. You can do things for others and realize that you can still make a difference in others' lives, even while you are mourning the loss of a loved one.

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Express gratitude for the love you shared.

If you are a person of faith, you might want to take some extra time this month to thank God for the love you experienced from your loved one. Perhaps you want to write a letter to your person who died to express your gratitude in words on paper. When it is hard to be thankful

for anything, "forcing" yourself to say thank you to others is a sure way to begin feeling more grateful.

Resolve to say thank you every day—to store clerks, banker tellers, physician's staff and the special friends who have been particularly supportive. Mail an old-fashioned, handwritten thank you note every week to someone and express your gratitude for specific ways he or she has touched your life.

The "Love Month" can be extra painful because of the reminders of all we have lost. And while these strategies do not make your grief go away or even diminish your sense of loss, they can be powerful ways to help you transform your loss into something beautiful.

* footnotes

Every time I think of something sad,
I replace the thought—with you!
My mind is instantly changed
And my heart is filled with gladness.

—Kate Reneigh Woodruff



{ bookmarks

The Heart of Grief: Death and the Search for Lasting Love by Thomas Attig (Oxford University Press, 2002, \$ 21.95) is a wonderful book for February.

This stirring volume recounts dozens of stories of real people who have struggled with the loss experienced in death. But through those stories, Attig quietly explains how we make the transition from "loving in presence" to "loving in separation." Instead of forgetting our loved ones, he argues, our grief becomes the means to sustain memories, embrace our loved ones' legacies, and allow their contributions to our lives to play an active role in our future.

Robert Neimeyer, one of the world's leading voices in bereavement today says this book is "an invaluable guide to all bereaved persons who strive to restore wholeness to a love strained by loss, and who seek practical and spiritual counsel on how to find hope and even growth in the wake of desolation."

William G. Hoy is a counselor and educator with more than 25 years experience working with people in grief and the professionals who care for them. In addition to his oversight of a large hospice bereavement program, Dr. Hoy teaches on the faculties of Baylor University and Marian University.

