



Connecting

Part 2 October, 2020

I Am Overwhelmed

It is interesting that sometimes our biggest inspirations come from little people around us. . .

Let's take a moment to consider how children respond when they are confronted with a significant loss. They might feel as though they are watching a scary video of a drama playing out around them....with sadness, fear, uncertainty and chaos. Some may act out, return to bedwetting, have nightmares, or have speech or learning difficulties, and other significant reactions to their overwhelming feelings. Yet, many children manage remarkably well, and adapt to their grief and the situation around them with grace, simplicity, and wonderment. Sometimes they are even more able than adults to simplify and organize their priorities to a manageable level. Kids seem to subconsciously look to what makes them feel good in the moment (instant gratification, if you will). They seek out that which is familiar, soothing, uncomplicated and real. They have no inclination to pretend that things are not what they seem....they simply accept what is. Some years ago, we arrived at the Sacred Heart Catholic Church of First Peoples for a funeral mass to honour the life of an Indigenous elder, grandfather of a dear family friend, Dana. As we all filed into the church, we were immediately struck by the beautiful artifacts and artwork adorning the church walls and the unmistakable smell of sweetgrass.

Along with the family, friends, and regular parishioners, there appeared to be several locals, strangers who frequented the area and had no particular place to go, that also came to humbly pay

their respects because that is what you do when somebody dies....a quiet, but visual affirmation that "every life matters". At the back of the church was a coffin and private viewing was encouraged prior to the service. I noticed little Kaiden, about 7 years old at the time, sitting near a stack of children's books, "reading" to his great-grandfather. Every few

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Looking for gratitude
slows us down.*

minutes he would pop up off the chair and lift the little book up over the coffin to let him see the pictures. As he "read" the story out loud, he gave me permission to "read him a story, too-- if you want to." He obviously had been taught well that death was not the end of a relationship, only the "changing" of what that relationship would look like going forward. So after he explained that "Grandpa was dead," (whatever that meant to him), Kaiden was perfectly comfortable doing what he thought was right and good in that moment. After tributes, and eulogy, the congregation was invited to share any story or memory they had. Before Dana could intercept his escape from the pew, Kaiden headed for the altar and grabbed the mic from the priest. He walked casually from side to side in front of the crowd, obviously loving the effect the microphone had on his voice, sharing a precious memory of a family celebration that followed the traditional



annual hunt. The excitement mounted as the family awaited the return of the hunters and the sacrificial moose that would be memorialized through a spiritual ritual that thanked the Creator for their bounty. Kaiden must have been impressed watching the family patriarch play a major role in the ceremony and/or subsequent preparation of the animal. He smiled broadly as he recited the events of that day, describing the moose “with his big tongue hanging out” breaking out into child’s laughter remembering how grampa said, “There’s gonna be a big feast tonite!”

From the mouths of babes, we learn how important it is to simply be yourself, be honest, and be grateful. Kaiden did not appear overwhelmed by his loss that day...his innocence invoked Harry’s spirit to comfort the mourners, simply by sharing his unique bond with a special man who was revered in his lifetime and celebrated for his gentle demeanor and wise counsel. He seemed to know that it felt good to sit quietly with some favourite books. Another thing that brought him comfort was to sit close to somebody he loved and trusted, even one that was deceased. Self-expression was another way he

shared, with a captive audience—(which is something every child loves) his favourite adventures with his “Nimosom” (Cree for grandfather). I would be surprised if folks did not ask him to tell them more stories about things they did together, opening up a dialogue even further. It was easy to see how children innately understand the need for inclusion, communication, self-care and yes, even humour to process the transition of a loved one from being around at arms length to being with us in spirit. It is always important in times of sorrow to not overlook the little people around us who are also trying to make sense of their loss.

We can make things seem less overwhelming by simply slowing down, modifying our schedule, calming our minds with a late night “time out” watching the stars, dividing our “Must Do Today” list into more reasonable sections like “Maybe Tomorrow” and “When Pigs Fly.” Simplify! Identify what is really urgent, or even relevant. Communicate your needs with others who can offer solace, counsel, a helping hand, or set boundaries for you that you are unable to do for yourself. They can be the posse who screen your calls, decide who will descend upon you today, and for how long. Do not over-extend yourself



when grieving. Your job is not to make everyone else feel better. You cannot give others what you do not have yourself....so unless and until you are rested, hydrated, able to focus and function in some meaningful way, there should be no unreasonable expectations put upon you to entertain out of town house guests arriving to pay their respects. You will not be in any frame of mind to babysit, or to personally prepare "all you can eat" food trays for the service luncheon, or to remember the names (and faces) of every one of your husband's co-workers dating back to 1969. To do so would indeed be overwhelming. If it takes you two or three years to send thank you cards that have a short, handwritten note rather than a simple "Melissa", then so be it. There are no time lines or best-before dates for acknowledging those who helped you through your grief journey.

A Dying Candle

by Meghan K.

*The way a candle dies amazes me
A strong tier of wax
Simple
With only a string within it
Dies slowly
As it gives off light.
Melting wax...
Drips and drips
Until all that's left is a puddle.*

*It amazes me how
Something that gives off so much light
In times of darkness
Ended up finding itself
Sitting in the same darkness
It had tried so hard to enlighten.*

During these last days of Autumn, allow yourself to look forward to cooler nights, changing colours of our landscape, shorter days, dumping flower pots and putting away lawn furniture. Seasons change, and so do we. Each day after a loss is an opportunity to start anew. A reset. Take a moment each morning to point your way to one objective that you prioritize for that day. See if you can accomplish one thing, no matter how trivial or insignificant it might seem in the grand scheme of things. Little successes breed bigger ones.

In closing, I would like to leave you with this little poem that caught my eye. So many of us light a candle at memorial services, funerals, or in the privacy of our own homes....to help us relax in the bathtub, or perhaps to glow gently while we meditate or remember our loved ones. It just tells us in simple words that no matter how illuminating one may be in their lifetime, there comes a time when their light is physically diminished in the real world and darkness overtakes us with the loss we feel. It is then that we must rely on our heart's memories to rekindle the spark of light that was and carry it forth.

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As autumn days lead us towards Thanksgiving Day....

"We should at least try to adjust our frame of mind by looking for some good. Thanksgiving grief can color the lens through which we see things, keeping us fixated on loss and pain. I am looking through a gray, dingy lens these days, and I have a strong feeling that I am not alone. So today, the plan is simple, find gratitude. Looking for gratitude slows us down. Instead of rushing past the little things, it encourages us to take the time to appreciate and savor them. It helps us re-frame things for ourselves—looking at the positive instead of the negative."

-- Litsa Williams



"Highroads" Dictionary by Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd.

B. Miller - Calgary, AB

D. Gray – Edmonton, AB

Holidays and Special Days "Thanksgiving Grief" by Litsa Williams (November 13, 2013)

Meghan H. "A Dying Candle"

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