

HOSPICE *of the* VALLEY
Bereavement Literature

IT'S NOT FAIR

"It's not fair!" How many of us have heard that and said that? When said by a young child, it is usually accompanied by tears, foot stomping and anger. What is really being said is, "Something in my world is not as I would like it to be. Something in my world is not as I expected and hoped it would be. Something in my world is wrong. Something in my world needs to be fixed, and I want it fixed now."

Sound vaguely familiar? It's not fair. When a young child cries in frustration about the unfairness of his world, we can take it as an opportunity to offer a lesson in life. We can help, fix, negotiate, investigate, manipulate and try our best to restore "fairness." Or, when all else fails, as it often will, we can use the opportunity to instruct in the unfairness of the world and teach a lesson in coping and understanding. Some *do* have more toys than others, some *are* allowed to cross streets and others are not. Some *are* able to ride bicycles and others must walk.

Some *can* go to the park and others must play in the yard. Small issues that are big problems to a youngster, but usually "workable" to an outcome that at least brings some satisfaction.

Life doesn't always stay quite so simple, though. We get older, our issues get bigger, harder to deal with, have a greater impact on our lives. It's not fair! Again, what is being said is, "Something in my world is not as I would like it to be. Something in my world is not as I expected and hoped it would be. Something in my world is wrong. Something in my world needs to be fixed, and I want it fixed now."

But there are events that occur in our lives that are beyond our control. Indeed, at times they are beyond our imagining. They are un-solvable and finite. There isn't a lot of room for negotiation or manipulation, and things sometimes can't be "fixed" to our satisfaction. There are things that are beyond our ability to restore to an acceptable level of fairness. "It's not fair." Everyone who utters that phrase is totally, completely, one hundred percent correct. It's not fair. The world is not a fair place.

So, we cry out in frustration and fear. We lash out in anger and hurt. We unleash emotions that are alive with a power we never knew we possessed. We will search incessantly, desperately hoping that we will find a way to make everything right. We rage against all who try to tell us that we "just have to understand." There is no understanding that will bring us the peace we long for and restore our world to what it once was. Now, the lesson we really learn is that "it's not fair."

Life is full of experiences that we will never fully understand, and yet we are charged with the awesome challenge of creating within ourselves an understanding of how to make these experiences a part of our lives. How does the parent of a child with crippling disabilities come to believe that the world can be a safe place? How does the parent of a dying child come to an understanding of the meaning of life? How does the parent of a child who has died come to learn how to keep on living? How does the spouse who is now "single" after fifty years of marriage, come to gain comfort in the knowledge of love everlasting? How does a young child understand that Mom or Dad will not be there to answer questions or hold a grandchild? How can a brother or sister reconcile within themselves the knowledge that the only other person who shared their unique relationship, with whom the growing years were truly the beginning of growth, will not share any more memories?

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It's not fair, and yet we must find the strength to bring balance and trust back into our world – a world resonating with lost innocence – pulsing with the tremendous knowledge of pain unimaginable. No, it's not fair, and we must all readily admit this fact. To offer platitudes of comfort, to try to create fairness where none exists, is only denying the reality of the situation.

The first step in understanding will come from the true acknowledgment that fairness is a code that we create in our minds, not the law of nature we think we know. There is fairness in the destruction of the pine cone by the heat of a raging fire that destroys the growth of trees and allows the sun to shine on the earth so the seed that was released can create new growth. Yes, there is fairness there, but what we see is total, complete, overwhelming destruction. We are not capable, in the moment, of seeing the final outcome.

There are events in our own lives, and in those whom we love, that are those times of destruction. We cannot know what is to come of this. Actually, we are trying so hard initially just to survive that looking at a final outcome, looking at the future, is not even within our capabilities. What we see looming in our future is more of what we have now – darkness, emptiness and despair. Gradually, though, the darkness is pierced by slivers of light; the emptiness begins to hold wisps of peace, and the despair gives way to the tiniest fragments of hope.

There is always the dawn, but it should be remembered that not every night is bound by the same hours, and not every dawn comes to us in identical intensity. There are blazes of glory that spring quickly through the darkness, illuminating the land with perfect clarity, offering warmth that spreads readily through the cold. But there is also the dawn that breaks slowly with vague penetrations of light, barely burning the morning (mourning) tears of dew from a land that is struggling to bring forth life.

This is the world in which we live and the life that we share. We are all connected in this life that is filled with the unfairness of pain, grief, loneliness and hardships. But also a life that is filled with the caring of strangers, the love of friendships, the joys that spring unbidden when we are again able to see the triumphs that result from the struggles. It's not fair, but it is what we have.

Always remember that when the journey is calm on your side, it might be turmoil on another's side. Therein lies the opportunity to bring some balance by offering our peace to another, to help another in their struggle of life. Fair enough?

– Cecilia Clayton, in *It's Not Fair*