



Family and Caregiver Education

BEREAVEMENT

Grief, An Unpaid Bill

I have become more familiar with death now.
I know what it is to grieve, to feel loss,
to remember my dead child with flesh and bones.
In the beginning, I was numb.
Nature is kind;
we can't feel more pain than we can endure,
but the pain waits.
Like an unpaid bill, it remains until it is opened.
We may bury our feelings, but they are buried alive,
and the time of payment always comes.
I find myself crying at unexpected times.
In my car on the way to work,
I see a young man riding a bicycle near the side of the road.
Suddenly, I remember that Ken bought one
just a few years ago when he was already ill.
"It makes me feel young again," he told me.
As we looked at each other then, we both understood
the wish to go back to an earlier time,
when the future still seemed certain.
My tears come, and I make another small payment
on this outstanding bill of pain.
Today is July eleventh,
the birthday of my friend's dead son.
"Steven would have been forty today,"
she tells me on the telephone.
"Don't add to your anguish," I warn,
not being afraid to enter the fray.
We are both part of this community of bereaved parents,
and we know how to speak the forbidden words about death—
something the rest of the world avoids.

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“I can’t help it,” my friend says. “The thoughts just come.”

Time passes

and I continue to learn the lessons

that death and life teach.

They are patient teachers,

so if I don’t learn, they will teach me again.

I have learned that death is as much a part of life

as the air that I breathe.

It will not stay away because I avoid speaking its name.

The grief that I feel, I must feel.

I have loved; now I must grieve.

It is the homage the heart pays.

—Anita Kirschner, in Bereavement Magazine, July/August 2000, bereavementmag.com