

THANK YOU AND GOOD EVENING.

YOU HAVE COME TO THE VERY BEST PLACE YOU COULD POSSIBLY COME, UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES,  
UNDER YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES.

I AM GOING TO TALK ABOUT SURVIVING THE HOLIDAYS AND I'M GOING TO GIVE YOU TWO WAYS TO  
RECOGNIZE THE HEALING YOU ARE EXPERIENCING EVEN NOW, RIGHT THERE, IN YOUR CHAIR

WHILE I AM NOT AN EXPERT ON HOW YOU'RE FEELING AT THIS MINUTE, I AM AN EXPERT ON HOW IT  
FEELS TO LOSE DIANE.

SHE WAS MY WIFE FOR 27 YEARS

WE RAISED TWO SONS AND TWO COCKER SPANIELS

SHE HAD CANCER BUT WE HOPED SHE WOULD BE ON HAND FOR THE WEDDING AND FOR AT LEAST  
ONE GRANDCHILD.

SHE DIED MARCH 9, 2001. SHE MISSED EVERYTHING.

AND MY SONS AND I MISS ALL THE THINGS SHE ADDED TO OUR LIVES.

BUT WE'RE GETTING ALONG.

I HAVE 4 GRANDCHILDREN, AND TWO DAUGHTERS-IN-LAW

TURNS OUT, MRS. DRAKES ARE A RENEWABLE RESOURCE

IF YOUR LOSS IS VERY RECENT, YOU CAN IMAGINE HOW BADLY I DID IN THE BEGINNING.

I DID NOT KNOW WHICH END WAS UP AND I DID NOT CARE.  
I WAS NOT SURE I WANTED TO LIVE IN A WORLD WITHOUT A DIANE IN IT.  
I WAS AWFUL.

JUST WHEN MY SONS NEEDED ME TO BE STRONG, TO SET AN EXAMPLE, I WAS ACTING LIKE AN IDIOT,  
A SELF-CENTERED IDIOT, AT THAT.

BUT AS YOU MAY ALREADY HAVE LEARNED, A DEATH IN THE FAMILY CHANGES THE FAMILY AND EVERY  
ONE IN IT.

SO OFTEN, THE VERY PEOPLE WE'RE SURE WE CAN COUNT ON, AREN'T THERE FOR US.

I RECALL A WIDOWER, SHARING WITH A RELATIVE THE NEWS THAT HIS WIFE HAD DIED. THE

## 2

RESPONSE: "WELL I TOLD YOU NOT TO MARRY HER." THAT WAS NOT COMFORTING.

IN FAIRNESS, NONE OF US KNOW HOW TO TREAT THIS EVENT. THERE ARE NO WORDS.

ON CSI THE CRIME SCENE INVESTIGATORS MUMBLE A QUICK "SORRY FOR YOUR LOSS" AND MOVE ON TO ASKING THEIR CRIME SCENE QUESTIONS.

SO WHERE DO YOU TURN?

HERE IS GOOD. HERE WE KNOW THE TERRITORY. WE DON'T NEED A GPS GADGET, WE KNOW THIS TERRITORY BY HEART.

THIS IS A SAFE PLACE.

IF YOU KEEP COMING, THIS WILL BE THE PLACE WHERE YOU GET YOUR FIRST HINT THAT LIFE IS HEADING TOWARD NORMAL, ALBEIT A NEW KIND OF NORMAL.

THIS IS A SAFE PLACE.

I RECALL A WIDOW WHO WAS IN ONE OF OUR CLOSED GROUPS – THAT'S THE SAME TEN PEOPLE WHO SHARE THE SAME LOSS, WHO MEET EVERY WEEK FOR TEN WEEKS AND OFTEN BECOME LIFE LONG FRIENDS. SOME EVEN END UP MARRYING EACH OTHER.

SO THIS WIDOW SAT ON A COUCH AT THE MEETING AND BEGAN TO CRY. "I FEEL AS BAD HERE AS I DO AT HOME. WHAT'S THE POINT OF THESE MEETINGS?"

THEN SHE ANSWERED HER OWN QUESTION. "OH," SHE SAID, "I'M CRYING. I DON'T DO THAT AT HOME BECAUSE I DON'T WANT TO CRY IN FRONT OF THE CHILDREN. I CAN CRY HERE, CAN'T I?"

YES, YOU CAN CRY HERE. WE ENCOURAGE IT.

THERE WAS A TIME AFTER DIANE DIED WHEN I THOUGHT I HAD BEEN ASSIGNED A QUOTA OF TEARS TO BE CRIED. MAYBE 50,000, OR 100,000. I CALLED THEM MY "DIANE" TEARS. AND EVERY TIME I CRIED, I THOUGHT, WELL I'M WORKING ON MY QUOTA.

AND SO WE MAKE THESE LITTLE DISCOVERIES, THESE SMALL ADVANCES ON THIS JOURNEY NONE OF US WANTED TO TAKE.

OKAY, HOLIDAYS -- HERE COMES A FIRST CHRISTMAS WITHOUT HIM OR HER. AND AFTER THAT, THE FIRST NEW YEAR'S EVE, ALONE.

AND ALONG THE WAY THERE WILL BE BIRTHDAYS, HERS, HIS, THE CHILDREN'S, YOUR BIRTHDAY, OUR NATION'S BIRTHDAY.

### 3

I RECALL STANDING IN OUR LIVING ROOM, OUT IN RUSSELL, WATCHING THE FIREWORKS ON CANADA DAY.

ONE CANADA DAY, DIANE STOOD BESIDE ME. THE VERY NEXT CANADA DAY, SHE WAS GONE.

WHICH REMINDS ME THAT WE OFTEN TAKE THE CURRENT EVENTS OF OUR LIVES AND MAKE SIGN POSTS FROM THEM. FOR ME, EVERY CANADA DAY IS A SPECIAL REMINDER OF DIANE'S ABSENCE.

BACK TO CHRISTMAS - HOW IN THE WORLD WILL THE FAMILY SURVIVE THIS HAMMER-BLOW AND GET THROUGH IT ALL?

HERE'S A PIECE OF REALLY GOOD NEWS:

OUR ANTICIPATION IS ALMOST ALWAYS WORSE THAN THE ACTUAL EVENT.

MOST OF US WOULD BE VERY SURPRISED TO TOTE UP ALL THE THINGS WE WORRIED AND WORRIED OVER – THAT NEVER CAME TO PASS. DO YOU REMEMBER Y2K?

OKAY, YOU BEGIN BY FIGURING OUT HOW MUCH CHRISTMAS YOU CAN HANDLE.

WHAT ABOUT WRITING OUT ALL THOSE GREETING CARDS? MAYBE THIS IS TOO MUCH. MAYBE THIS YEAR YOU SHOULD EITHER (A) SKIP IT OR (B) DELEGATE IT.

DIANE ALWAYS HANDLED THE DECORATIONS INCLUDING THE TREE. I GOT MY SONS INVOLVED AFTER HER DEATH BECAUSE I COULDN'T DO IT ALONE.

AGAIN – FIGURE OUT HOW MUCH YOU CAN HANDLE, THEN JUST DO THAT. IF MORE IS NEEDED, GET HELP OR SCALE BACK TO SOMETHING MANAGEABLE.

A KEY TO THIS WHOLE ADVENTURE IS COMMUNICATION. THE FAMILY NEEDS TO TALK ABOUT THESE THINGS. IN SOME FAMILIES THIS WILL BE A TALL CHALLENGE.

BUT EVERYONE NEEDS TO KNOW WHAT YOU CAN AND CANNOT DO. TOGETHER THE FAMILY MUST DECIDE ON HOW MUCH CHRISTMAS IT WILL TAKE TO MEET EVERYONE'S EXPECTATIONS. IF THERE ARE YOUNG CHILDREN INVOLVED, EXPECTATIONS WILL BE HIGH AND THOSE CHILDREN MUST LEARN WHAT YOU ARE LEARNING – LIFE GOES ON.

WHAT ABOUT DOING SOMETHING COMPLETELY DIFFERENT THIS YEAR? EVER SPENT CHRISTMAS ON A CRUISE? OR CHRISTMAS IN THE CARIBBEAN?

IN A <sup>1</sup>BOOK ON GRIEF, THERE'S THE STORY OF A MOTHER WHO TOOK HER CHILDREN TO HER PARENT'S FARM SO THEY COULD EXPERIENCE THE KIND OF CHRISTMAS SHE HAD GROWING UP.

---

<sup>1</sup>The Mourning Handbook by Helen Fitzgerald

## 4

SOMETHING TO DO WITH SMALL CHILDREN IS TO MAKE A BASKET OF INEXPENSIVE GIFTS, ONE FOR EACH CHILD FOR EACH DAY LEADING UP TO CHRISTMAS. MAYBE YOU OPEN ONE GIFT EACH NIGHT AT BED TIME. IT IS SOMETHING TO LOOK FORWARD TO, SOMETHING TO DIVERT ATTENTION AWAY FROM THE PAIN.

A WORD ABOUT RELIGION - AS A BORN AGAIN CHRISTIAN I DEARLY LOVE MY CHURCH AND ALL THAT IT REPRESENTS BUT I KNOW THAT THIS DOES NOT LINE UP WITH EVERYONE'S EXPERIENCE. A CHURCH SERVICE AT THIS TIME CAN BE INCREDIBLY COMFORTING OR INCREDIBLY UPSETTING. YOU NEED TO EVALUATE THIS BEFORE YOU COMMIT TO ATTENDING.

JUST GENERALLY, YOU NEED TO BE CAREFUL WITH – YOU.

AGAIN – WHERE CHURCH SERVICES, SPECIAL MASSES AND THE LIKE ARE CONCERNED, IT'S A GOOD IDEA TO TALK IT OVER WITH FAMILY MEMBERS, NOT ONLY TO SEE WHAT THEY THINK AND HOW THEY FEEL, BUT ALSO TO COMMUNICATE HOW YOU ARE FEELING.

HINT – NEXT WEEK YOU WILL LIKELY FEEL AT LEAST A LITTLE DIFFERENT THAN YOU DO THIS WEEK. YOU ARE CHANGING, GROWING.

THIS LEAVES A HOST OF OTHER HOLIDAYS ON THE CALENDAR FROM MOTHER'S DAY AND FATHER'S DAY TO THANKSGIVING AND OOOPS! NOW WHAT?

IF YOU SEE A HOLIDAY COMING AND YOU SEE SOME TRAUMA ASSOCIATED WITH IT – FOR EXAMPLE, WHO WILL CARVE THE TURKEY, – PLAN AHEAD SO THESE THINGS DON'T SNEAK UP ON YOU. NOT A FOOL PROOF SOLUTION, BUT BETTER THAN NOTHING.

SOME FAMILIES START NEW TRADITIONS – WHAT ABOUT INVITING A DISADVANTAGED FAMILY TO SHARE THANKSGIVING DINNER? OR AGAIN, GOING AWAY TO SOME PLACE DIFFERENT?

YOU WILL QUICKLY DISCOVER THAT THE CALENDAR IS CLUTTERED WITH COMINGS AND GOINGS OF ALL KINDS. BIRTHS SIGNAL NEW FAMILY MEMBERS ARRIVING EVEN AS OTHER FAMILY MEMBERS DEPART. IN SHORT, LIFE GOES ON.

HERE'S WHAT I MEAN. ON DECEMBER 4TH I'LL GET SOME MINOR EYE SURGERY. MY YOUNGEST SON WILL TAKE ME. HE HAS THE CAR BECAUSE ON THAT DATE HIS WIFE WILL BE WITH ONE OF HER SISTERS, MARKING THE ANNIVERSARY OF THEIR FATHER'S DEATH.

THEY MARK THE DAY JUST BE BEING TOGETHER, BY PUTTING THEIR FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES ON HOLD. JOSH WATCHES THE KIDS TO HELP MAKE THIS HAPPEN.

I AM A JOURNAL-KEEPER, SO THAT FIRST YEAR, AFTER DIANE DIED, I KEPT TRACK OF THE DAYS – DAY 100, DAY 101, ETC. MY OLDER SON SAW THE JOURNAL OPEN ON MY DESK.

BFO Support/Share Night Nov 3, 2009

"STILL COUNTING THE DAYS?" HE SAID.

"YES," I SAID, "STILL COUNTING THE DAYS."

IT ISN'T ALWAYS NECESSARY FOR OTHERS TO UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU ARE DOING BUT RATHER TO RESPECT IT.

GRADUALLY YOU WILL ACQUIRE SOME EMOTIONAL ARMOR THAT WILL WORK MUCH OF THE TIME TO PROTECT YOU FROM UNEXPECTED REMINDERS.

THE ONLY THING TO WATCH OUT FOR IS THE FACT THAT YOU ARE CHANGING. THE YOU OF THIS WEEK IS NOT QUITE THE YOU OF LAST WEEK OR NEXT WEEK.

AN EXAMPLE: DIANE AND I AND ANOTHER COUPLE JOURNEYED TO MONTREAL TO HAVE DINNER AND SEE A PRODUCTION OF THE SHOW "CATS." WE ENJOYED IT THOROUGHLY. EVERYTHING ABOUT THE EVENING WAS PERFECT AND IT BECAME A GEM OF A MEMORY.

I LOVED THE MUSIC. PLAYING THE CD BROUGHT BACK WARM THOUGHTS ABOUT THE EVENING. UNTIL ONE NIGHT I PUT IT ON THE PLAYER AND EXPERIENCED A GUT-WRENCHING, HEART-BREAKING PAIN. I TOOK THE CD OFF THE STEREO BUT IT WAS TOO LATE. THE PAIN WAS ALREADY ESTABLISHED. I HAD CHANGED. I HAVEN'T PLAYED IT SINCE, THOUGH SURELY, ONE OF THESE DAYS...

MY FAMILY IS NOT BIG ON CEMETARY VISITS BUT SOME FOLKS FIND COMFORT IN THIS SIMPLE RITUAL.

I KNOW SEVERAL WIDOWERS WHO VISITED FRIENDS ALL OVER THE COUNTRY, SPRINKLING THEIR WIFE'S ASHES IN GARDENS FROM COAST TO COAST. IT WAS A WONDERFUL WAY, I THOUGHT, TO HONOR THE DEPARTED.

A VERY ATHLETIC YOUNG MAN CLIMBED A MOUNTAIN AND FROM IT, SCATTERED HIS WIFE'S ASHES.

DIANE EXPRESSED A WISH TO HAVE HER ASHES PUT IN THE NORTH UMBERLAND STRAIGHT, WHERE SHE ONCE TAUGHT SWIMMING TO CHILDREN. THAT'S STILL ON OUR LIST OF THINGS TO ACCOMPLISH. SHE IS PROBABLY NOT SURPRISED THAT WE HAVEN'T DONE IT YET.

IN SPITE OF YOUR BEST EFFORTS, THERE WILL BE SURPRISES. SMALL THINGS, USUALLY, THAT TRIGGER A MEMORY OR SOME DIFFICULT FEELINGS.

BUT OVERALL THE DAYS WILL BEGIN TO GO SMOOTHER. A LITTLE SMOOTHER. YOU MAY NOT EVEN NOTICE THIS AT FIRST.

OH – THE ON-LINE WORLD IF YOU ARE SO INCLINED. GRIEFNET WAS A BIG HELP.

I STILL HAVE A FRIEND I MET ON THAT SITE. HE LIVES IN EDMUNTON, A REALLY NICE GUY WHO HAS

## 6

STRUGGLED MIGHTILY WITH THE LOSS OF LOUISE BUT NOW – HE IS ENGAGED AND THINGS ARE FINALLY LOOKING UP.

I'LL BRIEFLY LIST SOME FACTORS THAT DIRECTLY AFFECT GRIEF AND GRIEVING. FACTORS SUCH AS THE AGE OF THE DISEASED, OR THE FACT THAT DEATH CAME AT THE END OF A LONG ILLNESS, INCLUDING THE ILLNESS CALLED AIDS.

SUDDEN DEATH IS LISTED BUT IN ALL THE DISCUSSIONS IN WHICH I HAVE PARTICIPATED, WHETHER SUDDEN OR LINGERING, THE DEATH OF A LOVED ONE IS JUST ENORMOUSLY PAINFUL.

SUICIDE IS A COMPLICATED MATTER WHOSE AFTER-EFFECTS CAN LINGER FOR DECADES. DEATH BY MURDER IS ANOTHER SET OF SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES. I RECALL A WOMAN IN ANOTHER PROVINCE WHO HAD SURVIVED THE TRIAL OF THE BAD GUY ONLY TO ENCOUNTER THE WHOLE BUSINESS OF VICTIM COMPENSATION WHICH – ON THE SURFACE – SOUNDS LIKE A GOOD THING BUT IN FACT, A COUPLE OF YEARS AFTER THE DEATH, SERVED TO DREDGE UP ALL THOSE MEMORIES, ALL THAT PAIN, AGAIN.

THERE ARE MORE, BUT THAT'S A START. BETWEEN BFO AND GOOGLE YOU SHOULD FIND ENOUGH INFORMATION TO BE HELPFUL AND MANY OF THESE TOPICS ARE COVERED IN THE HAND-OUTS OVER ON THE TABLES.

NOW HERE'S A BIG ADVANTAGE OF ATTENDING THESE SUPPORT AND SHARE NIGHTS ON A REGULAR BASIS.

IT IS VERY HARD, AS I SAID, TO DETECT OUR OWN PROGRESS. MOSTLY WE SEE NO CHANGE, NOTHING'S BETTER, THINGS ARE EVEN A LITTLE WORSE TODAY THAN THEY WERE YESTERDAY.

YOU FEEL LIKE YOU'RE NOT GETTING ANYWHERE, OR YOU ARE GOING BACKWARDS.

HERE'S HOW IT HAPPENS: YOU ARE HERE, IN A GROUP, AND SOMEBODY TALKS ABOUT HOW THEY FEEL OR ABOUT SOME TROUBLE THEY'RE HAVING AND YOU SUDDENLY REALIZE -- "I'M NOT LIKE THAT ANYMORE. I AM GETTING BETTER!"

SO HERE, AT SUPPORT AND SHARE NIGHT, IS WHERE YOU CAN BEGIN TO NOTICE THE CHANGES THAT ARE ALREADY BEFALLING YOU.

NOW HERE'S THE REAL KEY – OTHER PEOPLE.

WHEN YOU FIND YOURSELF, LISTENING TO SOMEONE ELSE'S PROBLEM AND INTERRUPTING THEM TO SAY, "EXCUSE ME, BUT I HAD THAT SAME PROBLEM AND HERE'S HOW I HANDLED IT. YOU NEED TO CALL..." AND THERE YOU ARE, SUDDENLY HELPING SOMEONE ELSE.

WHEN YOU CAN DO THAT, YOU ARE WELL-LAUNCHED INTO THE NEXT STAGE OF YOUR REMARKABLE

LIFE.

NOW –IF THERE ARE ANY QUESTIONS WE SURELY HAVE ENOUGH EXPERIENCE IN THIS ROOM TO PROVIDE SOME ANSWERS