

Anticipatory Grief *Today I Said Goodbye To Mom*

There was no funeral—there were no flowers and no visitors. There was a frightening silence in the air as I slumped in the recliner, exhausted. It must have been happening for days, weeks, months, yet I was just now noticing it. My “Mom” was gone, yet there was a body and a voice demanding my attention. “How did this happen?” I asked myself. Wasn’t it just yesterday Mom was giving me advice, whisking dutifully around the meticulously clean house, and arranging Dad’s schedule—all before she left for work? Of course, this was years ago, yet just yesterday.

I realize that many things happen to a primary caregiver—lack of sleep, new priorities, new scheduling, dependence on outside assistance, rearranging of financial considerations...etc., etc. The issue I was not prepared to deal with, was grieving the loss of Mom before she died. It seemed so strange to think of “goodbye” to her when I was caring for her every day—yet the days did have a heavy toll on Mom as something was stealing away bits of her mind. It became apparent that the “Mom” I knew was gone and I needed to find a way to grieve.

It was helpful to read about “anticipatory grief”—to discover that one is not crazy for having a range of emotions such as anger, guilt, sadness, fear, and even rage. It is beneficial to admit these feelings, and to find someone who will listen to you sort through these emotions. Anticipatory grief is the process of grieving before the person’s physical death. Many people are able to reach a level of acceptance and hope for their future more quickly after the actual death, if they have allowed themselves to go through the stages of grief before saying the final goodbye.

Along the understanding of emotions and stages of grief, it is helpful to plan for the anticipated events surrounding a person’s death. Planning the funeral, obtaining a durable power of attorney or guardianship, and making financial arrangements are ways to anticipate the future. Grieving is never easy, but anticipatory grief may lighten the burden.

If you are experiencing this type of grief, you may benefit from a contact with a professional to discuss the grief stages.

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