

We Remember Them  
Sunday, May 26, 2024  
Tri-County Unitarian Universalists  
Summerfield, FL  
Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Lake County  
Eustis, FL  
Rev. Cynthia A. Snavely

Tomorrow is Memorial Day. Officially it is a time to remember military dead, but for many it has become a day to remember all our dead. In my childhood my father would be out in the yard early on Memorial Day cutting peonies from around the house and placing them in vases before he made the rounds of the cemeteries where family were buried, placing the flowers on the graves.

Most Unitarian Universalists are not buried in a cemetery, but many of our congregations have memorial gardens and/or items within our buildings given in memory of someone with names engraved on plaques or in some other way marked. It seems to be a human need to have some tangible place or thing to record our remembrance.

Driving down the highway you are likely to see roadside memorials where someone died in a car crash. Walking through a parking lot you may see a memorial to a family member displayed on someone's rear car window. If a young person is shot to death their friends may create T-shirts in their memory. Some families leave up the deceased person's social media sites making them into memorials. We have a need to create something or some place that says this person was important to us. We have not forgotten/ will not forget them.

It may be many years since you lost your parents, but, perhaps, you still have something of theirs you keep. If you have lost a child, even if it was many years ago, I expect you still keep something of theirs; a college sweatshirt, a favorite toy, a hospital picture. There is even a word for these things, keepsake; according to the Oxford dictionary; a small item kept in memory of the person who gave it or originally owned it." A thing, a place, something that holds our memories.

Marisa Renee Lee begins her book, Grief is Love this way,  
"My mother lives in the water.

"In the fluidity, the comfort, and the power of water is where I find her. I run to the water when things get hard. I can find her in a warm bath, in the fresh scent that emerges after a light spring rain, in the vastness and overwhelming power of the ocean. And just as I need water to live, I stubbornly refuse to live without the love of my mother. And you don't need to live without the love of your person either.

"We are taught that grief is something that arrives in the immediate aftermath of death, and while that is certainly true, it's not the whole story. Grief is the experience of navigating your loss, figuring out how to deal with the absence of your loved one forever. It's understanding that the

pain you feel because of their absence is because you've experienced a great love. That love doesn't end when they die, and you don't have to get over it."

As Lee says later in the book, "Healing is not done in stages, it's done over a lifetime."

Lee notes in her book that when she had a pregnancy loss part of her grief at that loss was also that her mother who had died was not there to comfort her. Years after we have lost someone something may happen to us - another sorrow or a great joy and we will be reminded that that loved one is not there to celebrate with us or to comfort us.

One of you recently gave me this poem to use at a memorial gathering.

Tea For Two by Preston L. Taplin, Ocala

"It's time for our afternoon tea  
When the warming rays reach deep.  
I pour one for her and for me  
As we our rendezvous keep

"We sit and talk ... so much to say  
Our neighbor's cat, things like that;  
About the small things of our day,  
The times we've shared both lean and fat.

"As shadows grow, this time must end.  
I've talked too much, I'll tire her sure.  
But it's so good our thoughts to blend  
Tomorrow we'll plan a travel tour!

"My chore today is to mow the lawn ...  
I pick up her cup and brush a tear.  
Her cup is full, not a drop is gone.  
It's been that way for almost a year."

And a more well-known poem from the Lebanese American poet Kahlil Gibran.

"Then a woman said, Speak to us of Joy and Sorrow.  
And he answered:  
Your joy is your sorrow unmasked.  
And the selfsame well from which your laughter rises was oftentimes filled with your tears.  
And how else can it be?  
The deeper that sorrow carves into your being, the more joy you can contain.  
Is not the cup that holds your wine the very cup that was burned in the potter's oven?  
And is not the lute that soothes your spirit, the very wood that was hollowed with knives?  
When you are joyous, look deep into your heart and you shall find it is only that which has given you sorrow that is giving you joy.

When you are sorrowful look again in your heart, and you shall see that in truth you are weeping for that which has been your delight.

“Some of you say, ‘Joy is greater than sorrow,’ and others say, ‘Nay, sorrow is the greater.’

But I say unto you, they are inseparable.

Together they come, and when one sits alone with you at your board, remember that the other is asleep upon your bed.

“Verily you are suspended like scales between your sorrow and your joy.

Only when you are empty are you at standstill and balanced.

When the treasure-keeper lifts you to weigh his gold and his silver, needs must your joy or your sorrow rise or fall.”

In her book Grief is Love in a chapter on caring for yourself after a loss Marisa Renee Lee writes, “Self-care can be a blurry place to navigate under normal circumstances, and it is especially tricky when you’re grieving. It may look fun to people on Instagram with #SelfcareSunday, but self-care in the context of grief requires a serious deep dive that goes beyond a day at the spa. You have to stop reaching for distractions and listen to your heart, and there is a deep need that sits beneath all the pain, longing, and sadness. What is that *you* really need? What does your grief require? There is something specific and internal that your heart is calling for that only you can answer. Do you need to forgive that sibling for abandoning you when your mom was sick? Do you need to forgive yourself for not being there when your dad died? Do you need to give yourself permission to envision a new future without your spouse of twenty years? Do you need to do the work to accept that your stepfather has started dating just months after your mother’s death? Do you think your miscarriage was your fault? There is always something internal that you must resolve in order to access the strength that living with loss requires. You can’t turn away from it or ignore it. It will follow you, and only you can determine that deep need and the healing it requires.” Lee writes, “Many people, myself included, find it helpful to journal, exercise, or meditate, but it’s really whatever helps you quiet the inner voice that is running through your to-do list from work and create space for your soul to speak. Life isn’t about your to-do list or achievements; it’s about caring for those unseen parts of you. When you take the time to know those aspects of your heart and spirit, when you determine what it is you truly need, you can live a full life in the midst of your grief. It’s where healing can be most active and the well from which joy and love can flow.”

Lee notes that we have an interesting resource within ourselves to help us in this self-care, what the person we have lost has taught us. Lee writes, “No one can replace your person, no one can be your mother, father, brother, child, or friend again after their death, and that absence will be there forever, so you have to ask what that pillar of support provided for you. If your dad was your biggest cheerleader, get cheering. If your wife was the one who provided positive words of comfort during difficult times, start writing out some affirmations for when things get hard. Your person was in your life to teach you these things. The love and support they provided you with their smiles, the comfort you received when they held your hand, their encouraging words, or just being themselves in the world with you – we cannot replace that with new people, but we’ve learned what it’s like. We can access what they provided by going deep within ourselves to find what they taught us.”

We remember them means more than that we know their names, birth and death dates. We remember who they were in deep and personal ways. We remember them and access in that memory all that they gave to us and taught us.

A final poem by Conrad Aiken.

“Music I heard with you was more than music,  
And bread I broke with you was more than bread;  
Now that I am without you, all is desolate;  
All that was once so beautiful is dead.

“Your hands once touched this table and this silver,  
And I have seen your fingers hold this glass.  
These things do not remember you, beloved,  
And yet your touch upon them will not pass.

“For it was in my heart that you moved among them,  
And blessed them with your hands and with your eyes;  
And in my heart they will remember always,  
—They knew you once, O beautiful and wise.”