



# Chiropractic Newsletter

## Well-Being

### Navigating Love, Loss, and Graduation

**It's said that we never truly get over grief. We just learn how to go through it.**

Next month, it will be six years since we lost my mother-in-law, and I know this to be true. No matter how much time goes by, you never really get over the loss of someone you love. Grief, being the unrelenting little fellow that it is, enjoys rearing its ugly head at the most inopportune times. Very often it sneaks up on you like a thief in the night, out of the blue, when you least expect it. For example, I've been completely consumed with my oldest son's high school graduation at the end of this week. If you've already been there, then you know that you don't have much bandwidth to consider any thoughts or feelings other than those related to your baby closing a big chapter of their life. Like any other mom, I've had so many emotions. I've been happy, excited, tired, anxious, sad, and nostalgic. I've been so busy that I've barely had time to breathe let alone process all of it. Lately, I've been running on auto pilot. And then a bump in the road...that old familiar grief comes to call.

It makes sense if you think about it. It's just that I've been so busy, I haven't really had time to think. Maybe that's why it took me by surprise. But of course, this is a big life event. My son's graduation marks the closing of a chapter in our life, and it signifies the beginning of many new adventures for him. He's shaking childhood off like dust from his shoes and slowly wading into the waters of adulthood. And, my mother-in-law should be here. She just should. Don't get me wrong, I believe whole-heartedly that God works all things for our good, yes, even the hard things. And sure, I can say all the right words, like, "I'm so glad we had her here for as long as we did," and "she's never really gone, her memory lives on," and "she's here with us in spirit." I do believe all of this. Most days my belief in God and these words are comforting. But they

aren't now. Right now, I'm angry. I'm sad. And, I feel like my kids were cheated. Anthony should have his grandmother here to see him walk that stage. Karen should be here with me laughing, pacing the floors, and chewing on her fingernails like she always did when she was nervous before a big event. I can hear her voice so clearly, and I know just what she'd say: "Can you even imagine little Anthony Stillwell graduating from high school? Where did the time go?"

#### **Where did the time go?**

I pose that question to myself and others a lot these days. And I wrestle with the fact that Karen has been gone for six years. (If you're reading this and you're my age and in this season of life, I'm guessing you ask this same question. And, I'm guessing by this point, you're also dealing with the loss of someone you loved in one way or another.) Let's face it. The older we get, the more loss we will experience. Karen left us when Anthony was just 13-years-old, still in middle school. There are so many years, so many events she missed. She doted on her three grandchildren with ferocious love. They were everything to her, and she'd walk across hot coals to be there for them. In fact, the last thing she said to me through a grief-stricken voice as she sobbed was, "Are you sure the boys won't forget me? They're still so young." I responded with a steadfast, heartbroken promise, "Of course they won't, I will never let that happen." And I won't. I will never let my boys forget her. They have pictures. They have memories. And they have me reminding them at each life event, grandparents' day, the big game, prom, and yes even graduation, how proud their grandmother would be of them and how much she loved them. At the end of this week, when Anthony walks across that stage, I'll be reminding him again. I'll be speaking Karen's name. I'll hug him and I'll smile and pray he feels her loving presence,

even if for a fleeting moment.

Emotions and life events are peculiar things. They have the power to bring out the best and the worst in us, don't they? We feel the push and pull of our kids growing up and the shift of them starting to live their own independent lives. We grapple with what this next phase of life will be like for us now that the kids are growing up. And if that wasn't enough, time also feels like it's under a magnifying glass, like we're listening to a podcast or audio book and doubled the speed so we could get through it faster. We're constantly hit with the realization of how precious and fleeting life is. Throw in the loss of a loved one and you have a kaleidoscope view of the progression of life. You're basically hit over the head with the fact that time waits for nobody and change is constant. So, what do we do?

I'll tell you one thing we don't do, and that's roll over and let life get the best of us. We are not a punching bag. And, we will not get in bed, pull the covers over our head, and stay in a place where we can be safe and warm, free from harm and the trials of life. That, my friends, is no way to live what should actually be the best phase of our life. Instead, we will hold our head up high and walk through the fire. We will brave the storm. We will put on our rain coat, hold our umbrella, and wait for the storm to pass, because it always does. The clouds always part and the sun always shines again. And while we're waiting for the warmth of the sun on our face once more, if we do it right, we may just even dance and sing in the rain.

Listen, this is a hard season of life. If you have a child in high school prepping to launch or you have kids that have already launched, you know just what I mean. Everything we've done, all the rides, all the packed lunches, all the sports games, all the bandaged booboos, all the wiping away of tears, has led to the culmination of them leaving us. And if you have experienced the loss of a loved one in the midst of it, you may feel the emotions of them leaving

you even more acutely during this time. I know I sure do. And here's what I'm doing to keep myself balanced and in a healthy emotional state in the midst of midlife motherhood mayhem and grief...

**Don't hide your pain. Talk about it. Acknowledge it. If you don't have somebody to talk to, write it down.**

Engage with other people who were close to and important to your loved one and who can bridge the gap of your loss and stand in solidarity with you. For example, the other day, I wanted so badly to call my mother-in-law and talk to her about Anthony and graduation. The sense of loss was so raw and overwhelming in my heart. I mourned and grieved the magnitude of Karen's loss once again, but I didn't stay there, and I didn't do it alone. Instead, I texted Karen's cousin, Dometta, who was like a sister to her, and shared my news about Anthony. Together, Dometta and I reminisced and felt the sorrow of Karen not being with us.

Hold tightly to all the memories you do have and be grateful for all the time you spent together. Look back at pictures if you need to, and remember it's okay to cry, regardless of how much time has gone by.

Instead of allowing grief to give you a bitter heart, welcome it in and allow it to mold a tender heart, one that is open and loving and well aware of the importance of celebrating each moment, knowing full well that tomorrow isn't promised.

—Brooke Stillwell, DC

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