

A Year like no Other

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My wife Shelly, the love of my life, to whom I was married for 51 years, died on the afternoon of July 19, 2015 at the age of 71. One year ago today, the unimaginable happened. Shelly and I had been together since she was 15 and I was 16. On the dreadful day of her death, I knew of no life without her as my constant companion. It defied belief that day that our long and fruitful partnership was no more. It defies belief today that one year has passed since the earthly bond between us was ruptured forever.

At those moments in which I allow myself to contemplate the actuality of Shelly's death, a vice grips my heart, tremors convulse my body, tears well up in my eyes, a hollowness envelopes my soul and the feeling of sorrow is overwhelming. Furthermore, even at times when I am busy with a household chore, or in conversation with a relative or friend, or driving or walking from one place to another – even at those moments, some known or unknown trigger can thrust my mind back to the precious partner that I have lost. Having the shakes while driving, or crying into one's swim goggles are – shall we say – inconvenient. They bring home with awful clarity the magnitude of the loss and the ongoing pain of one's world blown apart.

I spent the better part of the past year constructing memorials to my beloved Shelly. These include, but are not limited to: an elaborate and comprehensive memorial web site (containing photos, exhibits of Shelly's creative arts, testimonials, poems and the history of her exemplary life); a lovely garden at our vacation home in Deep Creek Lake dedicated to Shelly's memory; several exhibits at a regional library of Shelly's magnificent quilts; a few stories and interviews in local newspapers; and of course a monument (containing words that capture Shelly's indispensable role in our family's life) at her gravesite.

I believe these efforts could be interpreted as my forlorn way of trying to keep her alive. I cannot accept that she is gone – forever. She lives on in my heart and in my head. I think about her constantly, every day. I am grateful to the dear family and friends who are comfortable reminiscing about her with me. It disturbs me to think that some people – including people who were close to Shelly – are thinking about her less and less. I hoped my efforts over the last year might forestall that eventuality.

But life goes on. I think of all the people I've known over the years who have passed on – many of whom when they died caused me to rue it, but whose memory and influence on my life quickly and inevitably ebbed. And as I say, it pains me to think that Shelly's passing is having the same diminishing effect on people who cared about and for her.

Not for me. Everything in my homes, all my activities, and almost everything that I say or do or see or hear evokes the memory of my loving and wonderful wife. We were together from our mid-teens until our early 70s. All the events of our lives were planned and experienced jointly, in partnership. It was the natural order of things. We found each other at a young age and we travelled through life as the closest companions. Her departure, the sundering of our relationship is unnatural, unimaginable, unacceptable, unanticipated, cruel and WRONG. It is a violation of how the universe is arranged. It leaves me in a state of despair and confusion.

Where I have been for a whole year now. Throwing myself into these attempts to memorialize Shelly is how I've reacted. It probably helped me to cope. But now these activities are completed. What comes next?

Well, Shelly is not coming back. Unexpectedly and without any preparation for the journey, I must live the remaining years of my life without her physical presence. I don't have her body, but I do have her spirit – in my mind and in my heart. It will have to be enough.