

Name

**Saying the Name, Sharing the Memories**

***by Suzanne Howell***

Have you learned how to "create silence" by saying the name of your recently deceased loved one? Have you found that your friends have a superior skill at changing the subject should you make reference to how much your miss \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_?  Sigmund Freud, in *Totem and Taboo,*reported that in some societies the taboo against saying the name of the deceased was so strong that others who had the same name were forced to pick a new name. Thank goodness we don't have to do that. I imagine we would soon run out of usable names.

Friends and family who are silent or who would change the subject are demonstrating discomfort with talking about the deceased. This reaction may come from a desire to help you. They think that by not talking about your deceased husband (sister, brother, father, mother, child or friend) they are keeping you from thinking about them. We have a very technical term to apply to that reasoning, "Hogwash"! Unfortunately it may be up to you, the griever, to inform your friends that you need to think, talk and share memories about the deceased.

One of the reasons it is important that you be able to say the name of the deceased, is so you can tell stories about your life and how your loved one was a part of it. Have you ever thought how you would tell your favorite family stories without mentioning a now deceased family member? Your story of a vacation that you enjoyed very much becomes strange if you cannot mention who drove the car or share how upon seeing the ocean for the first time your wife got caught in the undertow and fell in fully clothed.  Not telling those stories takes away a part of your own life.

I have a story that is not very complicated to me about our nephew, Rodney. It is evidence of telling stories so you can tell about your own life and also being able to deal with the emotions that are part of grief. In the year before he died, Rodney made his home with us. One evening we were at the home of friends, when he called to say water covered the kitchen floor. He was instructed to mop it up, look for the source, watch for a reoccurrence and call us if one occurred.  We discovered upon arriving that water from a broken dishwasher connection had seeped from cabinet to cabinet, and through the floor into an electrical light fixture below - without his having called us? I saw the damage that had been done and thought of the disaster that could have been. My anger was incredible. I remember catching a glimpse of my very angry, red face in the mirror. This story lives to my chagrin in our family annals as the time my family "saw red" on Mom's face. My family would not be able to retain the memory and tease me in the present about "seeing red", if we were unable to say the name and share the memories. But, equally important, I would not have expressed and healed from the guilt I felt when two months later on his 24thbirthday, Rodney suddenly died of an aneurysm.

Telling your stories during the early months helps in accepting the reality of the death. Making mention of how "Charlie loved seafood", confronts you with the fact that he no longer is here to enjoy it. It also helps you change your relationship with a dead loved one from one of daily interaction and contact to a relationship of memory.

The next time you mention the name of a loved person who is dead and are greeted with silence or a subject change; tell your good friends that they can help you by sharing your memories. And, because each of us wants to know that others remember someone who was so important to us, maybe you can get your friends to share some of their memories.