

Memorial Day is a great time to remember those that have passed on before us. Visiting the gravesite of a loved one to pay your respects can also help with the grieving process. Many find it helpful to clean the headstone, pull weeds around the plot, and perhaps even bring some fresh flowers.

Finding Peace with the Loss of a Loved One



It's been seven years since the death of my sister. Yet, it feels in many ways like it was yesterday. Time has a peculiar way of sneaking up on us.

Even today, one of the most difficult issues in dealing with her death is talking to others about it.

My experience was by no means the most difficult situation a person has had to deal with, but the circumstances of my loss have given me valuable insight into the grieving process.

It was May 7, 1999. I was out with college friends and my girlfriend celebrating my completion of my Bachelors degree. Commencement ceremonies were scheduled for the next morning. In the middle of our friends' band's set, my dad called my pager and left the numbers 911. I was suspended in a mixed feeling of confusion and urgency. I called him back and learned that my sister Heather had been in an automobile collision and was being flown by MedEvac to the University Medical Center in Fresno, CA. I turned to my girlfriend, Jessi and told her what my father had said. We rushed to her truck and told our friends we had to go.

Immediately, there was a very surreal feeling to the entire situation. I found myself talking to myself, reassuring myself that everything was going to be alright. Jessi kept ringing in my ears messages of "emergency" and "helicopter," fading in and out as my senses scrambled to understand the seriousness of the matter. The basic message I got from Jessi was "grave danger."

When we arrived at the hospital, my senses continued to decline. Shock set in. I ran into the entrance. I was informed I had to go through a metal detector, a rather simple procedure which I do quite regularly. This evening, the simple request pushed a button in me. I broke into



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Still, online retail sales figures add up to only a fraction of figures for offline sales. This year, analysts expect online figures to reach just 3 percent of the \$217.4 billion seen in offline sales, according to the National Retail Federation. Online figures are up about 1 percentage point from last year, compared with an expected increase of about 5.7 percent in offline sales, according to the NRF.

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tears and shouts informing the woman of my situation and how my sister was in there. Her logical mind informed me that if she was in there it was likely I couldn't do anything to help her. She told me that Heather was in the best possible care. She continued to inform me that if I would just calm down and go through the metal detector I can get into the building.

Although I consider myself a logical person, this had no bearing. It took the stern, but gentle guidance of my girlfriend to take me towards the metal detectors, assist me in emptying my pockets, and walk me through to the other side.

Shortly after arriving in the general waiting area, the rest of my close family and friends arrived. We were then escorted through the hospital up to the Intensive Care Unit and to a waiting room. We were met by a lovely woman who was a volunteer with the organization known as TIP (Trauma Intervention Program). She immediately took us into her care. She informed us of the current status of my sister, and told us that she would communicate between our family and the hospital staff. Anything that she could provide for us she would, she assured us.

Unfortunately many of the details of this experience are a blur. The ones that remain played a tremendous role in assisting me through my entire grieving process.

First, I was surrounded by family and loved ones. My parents and grandparents were all there. This was by no mistake. They had traveled to be with me and my family for my graduation. My aunt was there. So was our good friend. While waiting in limbo for some understanding of what Heather's condition was, we passed the time trying to comfort and encourage one another. We recalled stories together. We cried together. We prayed together. It was the most emotionally, physically, and spiritually exhausting experience of my life. I kept hanging on to the hope that she would pull through.

I wanted to believe that God would make her well again, that she'd come out of it okay. Despite the knowledge I had of the injuries she had sustained, I wanted her to remain with us.

After hours of tears, laughter, prayers, and even a little sleep, I was awoken by the TIP counselor. She told me that my parents wanted to talk to me out in the lobby. I was still groggy with prayers on my lips and sleep in my eyes. I just barely remember being taken out to my parents holding one another in the hall. They looked at me. My mother called me to her. With tears streaming down her face, she told me that they had decided to tell

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the doctors to stop. They had done all they could do for her. We had to let her go.

After that, tears. Yelling. No, this isn't happening! I recall an "I hate you for this!" To whom that was directed

exactly, your guess is as good as mine. They walked me towards the door of the operating room. My mom wanted me to have the opportunity to see her.

As difficult as that was, what I saw has forever transformed my life. I saw something that resembled my sister, but had nothing of her spirit. I saw an operating room, a table, medical staff exhausted and grief stricken. I don't think I completely realized it at the time, but this gave me a type of closure, something very important for one who is grieving.

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I still had many stages in the grieving process to experience, but for the moment at least, I was experiencing a level of acceptance. It was still so immediate and surreal that I don't think I comprehended what was happening. I knew that I was extremely sad, and that I felt extremely robbed. I understood, however, that what I saw on that operating table was not my sister. There was no life there, and she was full of life. This made things easier, somehow, and I managed to get the strength to make it to my apartment to lie down for about an hour. I woke up, showered, and got dressed for my graduation. When people ask me how I managed to attend a graduation in the midst of such an emotional time of my life, my response is "how could I not?" My choices were clear. I could admit total defeat and quit, or I could do what I knew my sister would want me to do and graduate.

For me, more than anything else, understanding that Heather was a spirit has been the most helpful thing in finding peace. That spirit was what I had come to know and love. I even admired her. I still do. As often as possible, I let the spirit move me and do things that she and I would have done: midnight runs to Taco

Bell, dancing in front of a video camera, or eating graham crackers with chocolate frosting. I say things that I could imagine her saying. I was fortunate enough to receive some of her possessions. These things are all important for allowing her spirit to live on.