

Endings Give Way to New Beginnings

LIVING ABUNDANTLY FROM THE INSIDE OUT

By Kate Mrgudic, M.A.

I have been musing about completions as I watch the leaves fall and dig up the remainder of my summer garden. The one thing you can count on in life is endings and with that a sense of loss. Some losses are mostly annoying like losing your keys or your credit card or a house offer and are quickly resolved. Some losses are deeply mournful like the unexpected death of my friend's 22 year old son. Some completions are planned and embraced like retirement or a move. Some circumstances are so painful that the ending is a relief.

In *Necessary Losses*, Judith Viorst said that endings are a *necessary* part of life. Babies must leave the breast or bottle for more autonomy as a toddler, children must leave the security of home for school, teenagers leave family for more independence and so it goes throughout life, leaving singlehood for marriage and parenthood, leaving parenthood for an "empty nest," leaving youth for aging. Each ending can provide opportunities for both reflection and new beginnings.

The *grief process* is how we get from loss, to healing the loss, to reestablishing a life with the loss integrated. It's a healing process and takes time, like untangling the cords behind your computer. You can yank and swear at them as you tug and pull, but ultimately you must methodically deal with one cord at a time until all clear.

Grief is like that too – messy, frustrating, requiring patience, and at times, overwhelming. When it's embraced fully through its various stages, we are healed. There are no magic formulas to navigating grief and healing. Each one of us is unique and so is our grief process.

A great guide is William Bridges' *Transitions*. I have read and reread that book over the years, given copies to clients and friends, and highly recommend it as a companion through endings and new beginnings. Knowledge is power. Knowing what is happening will not necessarily diminish the intensity of the grief experiences but will provide a framework that allows embracing and understanding the experience. It can help you "go with the flow" of what is happening each day.

I cannot emphasize enough the power of grieving. When fully embraced, our grief can take us to new meanings in our lives. It allows us to let go of what was and create a space in our lives for what is coming.

Stephen Levine, teacher and author, shared that underneath our anger and despair during grief is a pool of unconditional love that is the source of our healing. It is true. I've experienced it and I have observed others uncovering that reservoir of love. But it takes work and it takes time. And it's difficult to do alone. We need others to share in some of our pain as we go through it. We need people who can listen to our story over and over again, who can go for a walk with us, who can bring us a meal, or send us a funny card. We need friends who can bear witness to our anguish and despair, who can offer us compassion without advice. Doing the work within a supportive environment gives us courage to continue.

Endings give way to new beginnings. "One value is replaced by another. One discovers that life is meaningful nevertheless." (C. Saussy)