

For Her

By Nicholas Zanow



After the death of my wife Eva, I attended a meeting of recently bereaved spouses sponsored by HospiceCare. This organization took care of my wife during the last phase of her illness. Before I continue, I owe this organization a few words of gratitude. Devoted to the care of terminally ill patients, its members are untiring in helping, alleviating, and making things possible. They were of great help to us.

We were seven men and two women present. The purpose of the meeting was to provide a forum for the mourners to speak out, to voice their grief freely among likeminded people and to hopefully unload the pain of their suffering. I joined the group because of my need to find ways to better cope with the loss of my wife.

The experiences of the group were helpful, but the last man who spoke revealed to me a truth about love which I had been practicing, but of which I had not been yet aware. This truth is the message of my story.

We were sitting around a cocktail table with a box of facial tissues in the center. I did not think anything about this box, but soon I saw it used. The moderator asked us to introduce ourselves, adding that he, too, had lost his wife some time ago and that he was now volunteering for the meeting.

He asked that somebody start telling their story. I started first. Very factually, I spoke for only a few minutes telling the group of the illness and passing of my wife, and how I was trying to cope with my grief — how I was meditating, exercising, walking, etc. I managed to hold back my tears. And yes, some relief visited me, perhaps because I had opened up to complete strangers.

Next, two men spoke. They were dressed in business suits, evidently having come straight from their offices. The sight soon became tragic. The first of them spoke how, returning back home from work, he had found his wife dead. She had committed suicide. Tears were rolling down his face and he kept helping himself to the facial tissues from the box on the table. Everybody was deeply affected. Finally, his grief somewhat spent, he calmed down and finished his story. He looked relieved.

Then, the other man started talking — going through the minute details, again through tears. He, too, kept pulling tissues out of the box to wipe off his face. It was distressing to watch him lamenting the loss of his wife. Finally, he, too, calmed down and stopped. I thought that shedding tears, especially in public, must have a cathartic effect. I, too, would cry but I did it in private. It seems that shedding tears leaches out some of the torment that engulfs you. It is part of the coping process.

The rest of the group took turns to relate their stories. At the end, one man had the final say. He did not cry. His wife had been instantly killed in a car accident two years ago. He kept living alone in their house. His life had lost its verve. He and his wife had done some remodeling of their newly bought house and there were still things left to be finished. But he had no desire to continue. Her gone, everything had stopped dead. He commented, "Now I realize that I had loved my wife so very much that whatever I did, I did it to make her happy."

This is the message of my story: In true love your spouse becomes your life.

Your life becomes truncated, it loses its salt. And then, gradually your suffering becomes a memory. Out of the ashes your life emerges anew, purified by the flame that has consumed you. You become ready for new experiences. As your spouse had been your life, likewise you had been her life. You begin living to the fullest for yourself and for her. She loved life and this is how she would have wanted you to live it.

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