

SHARING THE MEMORIES

By Ryan Helfenbein

The other day my son and I went on a fishing trip. On the way back home I pointed at an old dock. With a bit of emotion in my voice, I shared with him that it was a place where my grandfather always took me to fish when I was a young boy. Without a skip of a beat, my 11-year-old son began to ask questions: "How often did you and he fish together dad?" "What kind of fish did you catch there?" "How often did you get out fishing with him and what kind of boat did he have?"

The questions kept coming and it only opened up more memories to share about the times with my grandfather. For 20 minutes I answered his open-ended questions with funny stories to scary moments and the times I'll never forget with my grandfather on the waters of the Chesapeake.

The holiday season can be a very emotional time, especially for those who have recently lost a loved one. It can be hard to know how to offer comfort to someone who is grieving through what is usually a joyful time. Just think back to the last time you had a close friend or relative who lost a loved one. When that person mentioned the one who had died, how did you respond? If the answer is awkwardly, you're not alone. When we find ourselves in a stressful situation, it's natural to want to find an exit strategy, but when it comes to a grieving friend, we must realize that the friend may simply be trying to reach out.

So how do we help someone to cope with a loss during the holiday season? Take it from an 11-year-old, use open-ended questions to generate memories. Memories are the key to helping someone through their emotional grief. Through memories, we find ourselves right back at that moment in time reliving every moment. Some say that they can even smell the air of where they were, sense the touch of their recently departed next to them, and most importantly, feel the emotion they felt during that time in personal history. There is a saying in the funeral industry that holds true – every visitor to a funeral home should leave laughing

and crying within seconds of each other when coping with a loss. This is done through the power of sharing memories and providing opportunities to share stories.

So you ask, when I use this tactic of open-ended questions, my friend seems to fall apart even more emotionally. What should I do? Yes, loss can create deep emotion and therefore you might find your friend almost falling to their knees in what appears to be pain when the departed is mentioned. Dare I say it? Don't stop. Tears are good. They show we are progressing through our grief and not bottling it up or sweeping it under a rug. Now don't keep

throwing questions at the person as they continue to fall apart. Perhaps break up your sharing of memories with a hug, or even a simple pat on the shoulder, letting them know you are there for them. You could also share a memory you had with the recently departed and the emotion you felt during that time. All in all, don't be shy to continue to open time up for the sharing of memories with your friend. Remember, it's not just the memories, but your willingness to talk about the recently departed,

that can provide comfort to someone who is grieving, especially during the holiday season.

It was enjoyable talking to my son about the fishing days with my grandfather. Without knowing it, he opened up so many old memories that I continue to think of while writing this article. As a matter of fact, I had to pause halfway through to laugh about the fact that my grandfather went less than a one-third of a mile to reach the fishing grounds every time we went out. But as a young boy, it felt like we were on the open waters of the ocean, fishing with the greatest fisherman around.

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