

Sorrow Into Joy

By David Christel

Published in the Lincoln 55+ Seniors Paper, Lincoln, Nebraska - February, 2010

There is a time in a person's life in which very little joy is found: death.

Much has been written about death, the finality of it, the loss, the emptiness, the anguish. Most people find these attributes perfectly encapsulate its bleak terrain. Yet, there is another side to death.

Have you ever experienced a baby's birth? Smiles engulf people, husbands are flushed by the enormity of the event, we intrinsically exude tender nurturance. Birth, the beginning sojourn of a new being. So much life to discover, explore, comprehend. And one day, death. Who knows when or how or, sometimes, even why, but it surely arrives and we seem unprepared for it.

Death, I find, has an exquisite similarity to birth. With one, life is introduced. The other, life is extinguished. Amazingly, both can hold the same space of joy, can be the same elevating and expansive experience.

I had the great pleasure of delivering two babies in my youth. Circumstances with weather were such that I became the anointed one due to my background with first aid as a Boy Scout. Years later, AIDS arrived. Three of the first people ever diagnosed in 1981 just happened to live in my building in New York City. I began caring for them, somehow knowing I was safe from whatever it was they had. They passed on within a few months. I was there and witnessed something truly remarkable: I saw life take its leave of a human form—and I experienced elation.

How could this be? Family members were sobbing, angry, withdrawn, lost. I was beaming, having an epiphany. The energy and joy running through my being was exactly what I'd experienced when I'd delivered those babies almost two decades before. Was there something wrong with me?

Years went by and I found myself working with Persons With AIDS, their families, and death and dying issues. Over eighteen years, I held several hundred people in my arms as they transitioned. I literally saw the energetic forms of these individuals leave their corporeal form, and palpable joy fill the room as the family members and friends present witnessed one of the two most profound moments in life.

Though we were saying goodbye to a loved one, we were also able to celebrate. Yes, there were tears, yet peace, bittersweet joy, the sense of loss, yet immeasurable gain. Hearts opened wide to embrace this final act of life through death. With each person's passing, greater love and connection was established between those present and the departed on levels previously unknown. Each person's passing was a gift to those attending.

We go through life burdened with responsibilities, distracted by unending stimulation, engaged by passions and the beauty of life. And then one day, death shows up at our door, often unannounced, certainly unwelcome. But now, we need not run in fear, but take death in stride. There will be those times when death delivers a devastating blow, gruesome in its visage. Yet, we can still focus on those we've lost, review their life, find the moments of joy, and also say "thank you."

Scientifically, we are all pure energy and energy can never be destroyed, only change form. To me, our loved ones still exist, as Soul or Spirit, just in a form most of us can't detect. No matter what kind of person our departed ones were, their birth, life, and their passing are a gift. Experience being with someone in this final stage of life. Embrace the gift of their passing and discover a new level of deep peace, joy, expansiveness, and love.

