



*The best way out is through.*

*Robert Frost*

## I Just Can't Believe He's Never Coming Back

One of the most overwhelming feelings following the death of a loved one is trying to take in the fact that they are no longer alive and that they won't be coming back. If our loved one shared the same home with us, their sudden absence is nearly impossible to take in—the hole they leave behind physically and in our hearts is unimaginable until it happens. Everywhere we look, we see them. For the first time, we truly understand what is meant by **the silence is deafening**. We are left alone with our thoughts, our disbelief, and a disorienting sense of helplessness and confusion.

If our loved one's work life caused them to travel a lot, or if they lived somewhere else in town, or in another state or country, it is natural for us to imagine that they are simply away right now, and that they will return at some point. It is natural that our brains try to protect us from the unimaginable.

It is not uncommon during these early days and weeks of grief that we might have dreams or visions of our loved one, or unmistakably feel their comforting arm around us as we sit crying on the

side of the bed. It is at this point that people often say, "I don't know what's wrong with me. I must be going crazy."

Dreams, visions, and a strong sense of physical presence of our loved one are normal experiences of grief, and occur for many people, especially in the early days and weeks. More often than not, clients report feeling comforted by these experiences, and a sense that their loved one is at peace and with them. These experiences do not happen for everyone, leaving some feeling a sense of disappointment or questioning whether or not they loved enough. Just as it is normal to have these experiences, it is also normal not to have them. Experiencing them or not is not a measure of the love we shared together.

Little by little, over time, we begin to take in more and more the reality of what has happened to us, and we begin to incorporate the loss into our lives. The death becomes a part of our story, of who we are becoming as we relearn the world without our loved one in it. We can only do this as we are ready, not on anyone else's schedule. This is as it should be.

## Embracing the Pain of the Loss

Embracing the pain of our loss is not something we naturally want to do. It hurts so much to allow ourselves to fully feel the weight of what we are experiencing—to embrace it rather than push it away—but this is a critical part of the path toward healing. Grief leaves us feeling vulnerable and uncertain, and it takes an extraordinary amount of courage to let it lead us where we need to go.

You will encounter people who disagree with this, who might say things like “Don’t dwell on it,” or “Just keep yourself busy and you won’t have to hurt as much.” While this advice is well-intended, it is not helpful. Allowing ourselves to be with our grief does not mean we are dwelling on it. Crying does not mean we are **wallowing** in it, or **feeling sorry for ourselves**. If ever there was a time for us to have sorrow for ourselves, it is now. It may seem that

embracing our grief will only push us into a deeper state of sadness, but doing so actually creates the space we need to begin the healing process.

When our feelings are not allowed expression, healing becomes delayed, and ultimately even more painful and debilitating. We can choose the people we want to share our loss with, and when we want to talk about it. Some people find it helpful and healing to keep a grief journal in which they can write what they are experiencing and feeling. The journal might include letters to your loved one to say the things you may not have been able to say before death came. Even though we might have moments of despair, grieving doesn’t have to be a process that keeps us forever tethered to our grief. The more we are able to face our grief head-on, the more we will begin to understand—little by little—what has happened to us and begin to heal in the process.

*Hospice of Southern Maine is grateful to have been able to provide care to your loved one and your family. As your healing journey continues, we hope you won’t hesitate to contact us if you would like further information or support.*

**(207) 289-3640**

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