

February 3, 2022

Stephy's Place Reflection by Kevin Keelen

### ***Grief & Groceries***

I have rarely facilitated a support group in which the subject of grief and groceries has not come up. Grocery shopping is a huge issue for many, especially those in early grief, and yet each of us may feel very much alone and utterly unique in our experiences there. So many with whom I have walked have shared about the pangs of sadness and the reminders of loss which may begin long before they even leave the house to go to the local store. It may begin with just the thought of going there, then getting the list ready knowing that there will be things no longer on that list. We may cringe at the thought of who we may run into, or who will run away from us down the next aisle, or simply of being in such a familiar place without our loved one. We dread the tilt of the head from a concerned neighbor who we haven't seen since their passing, the invasive questions of 'how are you really doing' while looking blankly at cereal boxes in aisle five, hearing an unwanted and unwelcomed love song on the store stereo system prompting sobs and tears in front of perfect strangers and customer assistants, sobbing while we pass by their favorite foods on shelf after shelf, or suddenly being stung with the reminder that they are not here as we reach for their brand of tooth paste. To put it bluntly, it sucks.

Grief and groceries has come up quite a bit lately in our groups as one after another will say, 'I thought I was the only one!' Well now you know, you certainly are not. It is normal, it is expected, it is certainly understandable, and it's okay. The grocery stores are full of grieving people, yet when we lose our shit there, we can get embarrassed thinking everyone notices. Usually nobody notices, and if they do, they usually move away pretty quickly.

I remember being in a store shortly after my father died and someone was wearing his cologne, English Leather. The familiar smell prompted me to look through the shelves and down the aisles for the person wearing it, who so happened to look a lot like my dad, especially from behind. So, what did I do? What most of us would do... I followed him around the store sniffing him each time we got close. He must have thought I was an absolute nutjob! I'm lucky he didn't punch me out!

Go easy on yourself when you go grocery shopping. People have shared that wearing a mask helps to be less obvious and more anonymous, so there's one plus for the mask wearing! Many have decided to shop elsewhere, in a store that is unfamiliar and less triggering. Some go shopping late at night. One person has recently shared with me that she has found it enormously helpful to go shopping for someone else, a single dad who works and has little time to shop. She shared that this helps her to have a reason to go shopping and to fill the sadly empty cart with items that were not familiar or triggering. She said it makes her feel good to go there knowing it's helping someone else, and it really helps with lessening the triggers. I thought this was so brilliant, healing, and healthy on so many levels. But no matter what you do, expect to be triggered in some way, and if you can, let it be okay. These emotions, as difficult and sucky as they are, need to come out, they need to be felt. They don't usually come when it's convenient either - such is the insidiousness of grief.

I know we can't help but to be embarrassed or ashamed, but there is absolutely nothing wrong with crying and emoting. It's necessary and actually good for us. It just sucks when it happens in a public place. We need to remember that those public places are full of human beings like ourselves, and if they have not had loss in their lives, they are lucky, but most likely they will at some point, or they have already. We are not alone, but we live in an increasingly individualistic and ideological world flanked by 'fakebook' images of supposedly happy people doing fabulous things. But every person and every family has their struggles, their losses, and unfortunately their tragedies to contend with at some point. This is something that comes with being human. It is not an ideological world in which we live, it is a real world.

Part of living in the real world means we need to eat and be nourished; we need to shop and do many other things that used to be easy or 'normal' and now are tedious or almost insurmountable. Try to be patient with this struggle as we begin to break the seal and take those few first steps and do these difficult things for the first few times, knowing it will not be easy and it will hurt.

We need to try to protect ourselves from triggers, but we can't avoid them all. So do what you need to do out of self-care and give yourself permission to mourn wherever you may be -whether it be at home, in church, the mall, the mausoleum, or the grocery store.

Peace and Serenity, Kevin