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**The Comfort of Grief:
When there are no tears –
There are memories
By James L. Holly, MD
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I can't cry any more; I want to. Occasionally, I even try, but the tears are not there. There is something comforting about tears. They prove to us that we care and **they prove** to us that we are real. In other ways, tears are the only way we can release the internal pressure which is sometimes so great that we feel that we will burst. **However**, when the tears dry up, there are the memories.

So it is that on this the first anniversary of my father's death, the tears which came so easily are now rare. Nonetheless, there are exceptions. Recently, as I stood over the grave of my grandchildren's great, great, great grandfather, I spoke to my wife by cell phone. As I related to her the date of his death, my voice cracked and then broke. I was unable to continue. I was surprised by those brief tears.

I had driven to Alexandria to visit my cousin whose husband had died. Having arrived early in the day, I visited my father's grave. No tears; but there were memories. Viewing the grave marker with my father's birth date, I realized how young my father was when my older brother was born. I walked through his life and gave thanks to God for that life **but** felt no sadness **only** an overwhelming sense of gratitude for whom and for what **my father** was.

As I walked up the hill to the mausoleum where my father's parents are interred, I turned to see if my father's grave is visible from that vantage point. It is. As I **listened** to the sounds in this sacred place, I heard only the sounds of life. I heard the wind blowing through the tall pines. There is no sound which is more pleasant than the melody created by this, nature's wind chime. The near silence was broken by church bells pealing their song as they **marked** the passing of time.

The inevitability of every man and woman's arrival in a place such as this seemed more personal that day. **As the bells tolled, it was obvious that they tolled for every man.** **There** was the distant laughter of children racing from the class room to the liberty of the playground. **Like** those children, we all are racing from the confines of our life to the liberty and freedom which my father now enjoys. Each of these sounds became a metaphor for the life of my father and for the memories which now bathed my wounded soul with their warmth, replacing the salty tears which had flowed so often and so easily.

When I drove from the place of rest of my father's mortal remains, I passed many memories which remain as touchstones to connect me to this man who still defines so much of who and what I am. As I passed the Kingsville Baptist Church, I remembered that this is where my father and mother had their first date. I remembered that **this is**

where I learned the song, “Deep and Wide.” Its words filled my consciousness with a reality that is over sixty years old but which is as vivid as the day of the event itself: “Deep and wide, deep and wide, there’s a fountain flowing deep and wide.”

Another melody intruded upon these thoughts; its message rang as true:

“Come to the church by the wildwood
Oh, come to the church in the vale
No spot is so dear to my childhood
As the little brown church in the vale

“There, close by the church in the valley
Lies one that I loved so well
He sleeps, sweetly sleeps ‘neath the willow
Disturb not his rest in the vale.”

It is good that these memories of my father are tied to “church,” not to a building but to a community of faith which is not dissolved by death. Quickly, new memories flooded in, washing away the memories of a physical church I knew, and replacing them with the lyrics of another song which chronicles the life of “everyman” who in the song is named “little Jimmy Brown.” Can you play this melody in your mind? I can. Its message is like sweet nectar which I can almost taste.

“There's a village hidden deep in the valley among the pine trees half forlorn
And there on a sunny morning little Jimmy Brown was born
All the chapel bells were ringing in the little valley town
And the song that they were singing was for baby Jimmy Brown
And the little congregation prayed for guidance from above
‘Lead us not into temptation; bless this hour of meditation; guide him with eternal love’

“There's a village hidden deep in the valley beneath the mountains high above
And there twenty years thereafter Jimmy was to meet his love
All the chapel bells were ringing twas a great day in his life
For the song that they were singing was for Jimmy and his wife
And the little congregation prayed for guidance from above
‘Lead us not into temptation; bless, oh Lord, this celebration; May their lives be filled with love.’

“From the village hidden deep in the valley one rainy morning dark and grey
A soul winged its way to heaven, Jimmy Brown had passed away
Just the lonely bell was ringing in the little valley town
Twas farewell it was singing to our good old Jimmy Brown
And the little congregation prayed for guidance from above
‘Lead us not into temptation; may his soul find this salvation of Thy great eternal love.’”

Birth, marriage, death – sentinel events in life; and now a [cycle](#) completed in my father's. As these words echo and re-echo in my mind, I recall story after story surrounding the birth, youth, young manhood, marriage, life and death of my father. Now, rather than sadness and tears, these memories form the dimensions of my celebration of his life. They bring a smile to my face, peace to my heart and warmth to my soul.

As I [drove](#) on, I [turned](#) down Wonder Lane. This is a small, winding, hilly road between Kingsville and Pineville, Louisiana. Even though I have traveled that road hundreds of times, it occurs to me that I don't really know whether it is in Kingsville or Pineville, but [it](#) is a magical road. I would not want to live on Wonder Lane because my imaginations of it far exceed any possible reality. It has always been the avenue which took me to all three homes in which I knew my [father's parents](#). There are eight homes which defined my childhood. Three were occupied by my father's parents; one was occupied by my mother's parents and five were occupied by my mother and father. Each home was unique; all were humble but were filled with treasures [unobtainable](#) by riches and wealth. All of this entered [my mind](#) as I [drove](#) down this magical road.

Everyone's life is made up of memories and also of myths – those experiences which are veiled in time and youth which may or may not have been real, but which contribute to our memories of life. As I [left](#) Wonder Lane and entered [Donahue Ferry Road](#), I [drove](#) to Holly-Moore Road, which was built by my father with a horse and plow.

In the myths of my mind, there is a way from there to Camp Livingston where my parents' third house stood. I wondered [if I could](#) find this "back way" to [that house place](#)? I [twisted](#) and [turned](#) to the end of Donahue Ferry and [turned](#) right.. I think there was a road to the left which passes the Nugent's house and leads deep into the woods to Camp Livingston; and, there it [is](#).

Alas, this road was supposed to take me to Camp Livingston [but](#) just after crossing the highline right-of-way, which led through the woods to the power substation at Beaver Creek where my father worked in 1948, the road ended. I turned around. I knew Camp Livingston was just ahead but had to go another way to find it. Of course, men don't ask directions, so I made several turns which seemed logical and found myself on a hard, dirt road, which looked all the world to me like the road leading into Camp Livingston.

Realizing that I have a navigation system in my vehicle, I turned it [on](#). In a moment, the GPS map appeared with the name of the road on which I was driving. Although it was deep in the woods and only a narrow, dirt road, the GPA identified it: Camp Livingston Road. It was like I was home. I drove straight to Beaver Creek where the electrical substation was at which my father worked. The barrier which blocks access to Beaver Creek was down so I drove up to the substation. It was farther than I remembered. The house was no longer there and the substation had been enlarged, but I saw the field where my father had planted water melons and the road where he had pulled our wagon behind

his company truck. I remembered the year that it snowed and we tracked rabbits in the woods. I remembered...

I then drove past Clear Creek and down May Haw Road to May Haw Creek. These are just names to you but they are my father to me. Soon my time was up. I drove to the funeral home and visited with my cousin. As I drove to Beaumont, I knew that my grief was morphing into memories and that is good.

Tears are real and they help heal, but memories are the residual as the heat of grief and of time evaporates the tears. What is left after the tears are gone is like the rich roux with which the gumbo is made. The roux structures, spices and flavors every experience of the future. Without the exercise of grief, the roux is not so thick; with it, the life of the one lost continues as real as if they are a phone call away.

I walked into our home in Beaumont late that night where from the kitchen, I can see into the dining room. In the window is my 2005 Christmas gift which is my favorite picture of my father transferred to glass. It sits in the window where it sat the day my wife gave it to me. As I look at the creases in my father's sun burnt, furrowed brow, I give thanks.

It is hard to consider that he is dead for he lives in my heart and in the heart of God. The process of grief has brought me full circle. Life is created out of death and that life prepares me for the next cycle which will occur when my son's grief begins to turn to memories.