

Good grief and living with loss



Highland Views

Chris Highland
Guest columnist

Sitting in a relative's memorial service I was musing about grief and grieving.

Mulling over this deep human emotion I thought of all the years I've lived through personal losses and sat with those who lost someone near and dear. I recalled something I heard not long ago.

A farmer's widow spoke about her husband's suicide (U.S. farmers have one of the highest rates of suicide of any profession). Relatives of mine have been farmers with roots in rural country life.

The widow of this man in Iowa calmly related how her husband called to say he loved her before killing himself. Pensively she said, "Grief is love with no place to go."

There's truth and beauty in that. It speaks to the depth of emptiness we can feel when someone is gone from our lives.

When close friends in grade school, junior high and high school all died tragically my young mind couldn't wrap around that. When grandparents died, then both my parents and nearly all my uncles and aunts, I tried to handle it all with faith. It helped, but the hole was



Montana meadows and mountains. CHRIS HIGHLAND/COLUMNIST

still there. I still love them all very much, but there is "no place to go" with that love.

One place I went to through the years of loss was being a companion for many others experiencing grief. As a chaplain I was often at the epicenter of grief, walking with a woman whose mother had just died or hugging a father whose son drowned. Awful moments when the awesome pain of those left behind can be overwhelming.

To grieve is to carry a heavy burden (Latin: gravare, "heavy, grave"). But defining it is no better than cliches and platitudes—they don't do much to help. Quoting scripture can be particularly unhelpful at these times, as is leaping right into promises of a heaven without suffering. People reach for words, any words, to fill the silent suffering, but I've never felt that was helpful.

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