

## What Is So Special About the Twelfth Year Death Anniversary?

Numerous articles (including my own) have been written about death anniversaries. Many address the dreaded first year death anniversary that once past, denotes a whole year of first time anniversaries, the anticipated and forewarned second year anniversary possibly being worse than the first, the remembrance of five years “down the road” and the ten year, one decade milestone. But,

- has anyone written about the twelfth year anniversary and...
- what is so special about it and...
- how can it be viewed differently from the rest?

Before answering the above question, a little about the grief journey of our past must be addressed. Grieving the death of a loved one can leave us full of questions about how one learns to live differently. What do you do on the anniversary? Do I celebrate or do I mourn? How will I face that date? Will I be able to survive the day? Will I confront the day alone or make plans with others?

In the earlier grief years, it is best to prepare for these previously mentioned occasions. Although ruminating about and preoccupation with the anniversary is not helpful, planning can be quite beneficial. Because expecting others to remember the date can leave you disappointed, (because others do not remember our loved one’s death anniversary) it is a time to plan for what might help you whether that includes others or remembering alone.

Although many grieving parents hear “**it will get better**” while they are *in* their grief process, nothing seems possible at that time. When we lack control in every area of our lives and when despair reigns, it is not possible to imagine life in any different form than what currently exists. But, the pain of grief and these anniversaries subsides with time, by embracing the feelings, releasing anger, overcoming fears, addressing the changes in your life, giving yourself permission to move through your grief process and making the conscious decision to change your life.

When the bereaved holds the physical child (or loved one) so tightly in their mind, their memory cannot move into their heart. Choosing to allow the ego (the mind) to let go (believed by some to be a disgusting term in the grief world) and accepting the death (another despicable term to some) and acknowledging the missing they feel for their child in their life, allows the individual to make the decision to move on with their life in a different way.

Living and choosing one’s new and different life allows for those changes to occur in time. So, whatever you choose, make a *conscious* decision to do so.

Which now returns to the twelfth death anniversary? Yes, after a conscious decision to live differently and a resultant perspective change, death anniversaries are also viewed differently. The narrow focus of being out of control, living pain and missing the loved one can expand to greater possibilities and can open to gratitude. A new world view develops. Therefore...

Recognizing that silk and linen are the traditional gifts for the twelfth *wedding* anniversary, I favor the modern listing of twelfth anniversary gift of pearls. While the vision of silk monogrammed pajamas or a silk scarf would be a difficult comparison to the grief journey, I prefer to consider this anniversary from the modern view where the pearl is the gift of choice.

The *pearl*, long known to symbolize purity and wisdom could also be a fitting symbol for the twelve year death anniversary. I discovered this metaphor, ***pearls of wisdom: something precious or choice*** as appropriate for this benchmark based on current life situations and choices.

Moving through grief and choosing to live differently does not create a “new normal” life because one never returns to the pre-grief normal. But a new life can develop as the result of one’s choices.

**The first pearl of wisdom I learned** from my grief was that I did have control in my life and I could change not only the death anniversaries but I could change every day of my life by changing my decisions.

My son’s twelfth death anniversary is special because of the awareness and noticing of the choices I have made to live differently and how that has translated into a new life perspective.

On this twelfth death anniversary, I am grateful for many things in my life including choices, a new life perspective, and new life opportunities and for my new relationship with my son. And I am so grateful for his help...

But this achievement in the world of grief has no benchmarks, no achievement levels and nothing to denote an accomplishment. Reaching the milestones in one’s grief journey is rooted in personal accomplishment not meant to be an outward demonstration of one’s gratitude of love and support