

Words When It Matters

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Taken from: R. Bowers in "Leadership Today"

Robert Bowers wrote: "When my sister Margie was murdered in 1977, our family received more than 600 letters of love and concern...a warm, gentle shower of all sizes, shapes and colors...What made those letters so special to me? Here's what I discovered: It takes only a few words. No matter how eloquent or simplistic, communicating (with words) is an expression of love..."

Even years after a difficult loss, the memory of an expression from someone, a feeling shared, or a special meaningful moment recalled may be re-experienced as the healing hands of God.

Helpful things when expressing yourself to someone who has experienced the loss of a loved one:

1. A few lines or words are sufficient. Someone who takes the time to express themselves is appreciated. The expression does not need to be long or perfectly written.
2. Mention a special memory if it seems right to you. Such memories are precious. "He taught me to change a tire when I was sixteen and didn't know how." "She brought me cookies when I was in a melt-down." "She told me stories when I was little." It doesn't matter what happened or what point in time, if it was special to you, it will be to the loved one as well.
3. Shared experience of what one was doing when first hearing of the loss is often healing if the telling of it is not too long: "I was shocked and overwhelmed when while I was gardening my neighbor walked over to tell me of the accident..." "What deep sorrow I felt as I read in the evening paper of (your loss)..."
4. Commenting on a special character trait or detail of the person: "I remember when I first saw him/her, we sang in freshman choir during fourth hour and were friends from that moment on..." Or: "I'll never forget when we went fishing together and she taught me how to cast..." "His smile was always so special as we worked together, it lit up the place and made things fun..."
5. Do not mix your personal news with your expression of comfort. Share those things in a separate note or letter. Though you may have had many experiences since you last touched the life of the one who is sorrowing, more than a brief reference to your personal news communicates that you are sorry for the loss but life goes on.

Finally, belated is OK. Late notes may even be especially comforting in that weeks or months after a loss, people may have dropped off in communication. It is then a touch from a friend will very often welcome.

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