**When Your Parent Dies**

*by John Kennedy Saynor*

Have you ever noticed that there is an unspoken hierarchy of loss in our society? By that I mean there are some deaths which generate more support than others.

My experience has been that people mourning the death of a parent receive very little support although it is a significant loss.

**Why is the death of a parent so difficult?**

1. If an elderly parent dies, her death may be dismissed by “Oh well, she had a good life, didn’t she?” It may make you feel you don’t have reason to grieve. This is not true.
2. It may be that your parent was the most influential and powerful person in your life.
3. When a parent dies, you may lose someone who loves you and cares for you in a way that nobody else does.
4. The death of a parent brings with it the loss of part of the story of your childhood and past.
5. When your parents have both died, a buffer between you and death is removed and you become more aware of your own mortality.
6. It may be that there are many things you wish you had said or done. You may be overcome with guilt. If this is the case, seek help from a professional.

**Tips for Coping with a Parent’s Death**

1. Resist the temptation to dismiss the death as “timely” or “inevitable”. While this is one way to rationalize the loss, it doesn’t touch your emotions. You have experienced a significant loss and you need to take time to grieve.
2. Find one or two close friends with whom you can talk. There are many professionals you may call on: your doctor, your clergy, a counsellor or your funeral director.
3. Do something to memorialize your parent. This could be a donation to a favourite charity or a memorial in your family church. Perhaps you would like to plant a tree in memory of your parent.
4. Draw on the resources of your faith to sustain you. How does your faith or spirituality address the issue of dying? How does it help you make sense of life?
5. Although your parent is physically dead, he or she will continue to live through you. The values you received will affect you for the rest of your life. Be thankful for what your parent gave you.