

## Small Remembrances and Expressions of Love

When it comes to expressions of love the largest common denominator is the act of loving, the rest is just a matter of person and preference. Love comes wrapped up in little boxes or giant packages; tenderly whispered or declared from the rooftops; eloquently written or in fumbling awkward utterances. The prose of love may be spoken in any language and its rituals transform as you spin the globe.

When it comes to love, I've always had a preference for the micro-expression. The small but thoughtful gesture that shows someone cares and the momentary impulse one simply couldn't contain. These thoughtful and personal acts – a note from your mother telling you she's proud of you; a hug from your daughter who's no longer *into* hugs; a small gift from a friend, bought simply because it reminded her of you; being allowed to sleep in because your husband thought you deserved it – have no pretense and nothing to prove. They exist because you are loved and because you love in return.

I had a completely different post written for today on loneliness and social isolation. It's an important topic, one that's felt pretty personal to me lately, but I got distracted as I am often wont to do. When I started writing this post this morning I felt as though I had gone from one extreme to another – loneliness to love –



and it seemed those two things couldn't be any further apart. But after thinking about it for a moment I realized that, when it comes to grief, these things aren't opposites but corollaries.

Loneliness, after all, is relative. Even when surrounded by family and friends one can feel lonely because they lack the love and connection they feel they desire. One of the reasons we feel so lonely after someone dies is because we yearn and ache for their love, however it may have been felt and expressed. When someone dies we initially feel as though their love has been stripped from our lives.

I was struck last night while reading through a string of comments on our Facebook page left in response to a post we wrote about how [grief makes you feel like you're going crazy](#). One reader wrote about how her late husband's flip flops have been by the back door for two years and

every time she passes them they makes her smile. Another reader wrote in response that she wears her deceased father's pajama bottoms to bed every night because she thinks they make her sleep better. These little things may seem crazy to everyone else, but to the griever they are small and tender expressions of love.

When we think of honoring and remembering deceased loved ones I think we often jump to vigils, roadside altars and Facebook memorial pages. These are '*shout it from the rooftop*' type of expressions, the gestures that let the world know your loved one was here and he or she was loved. But for so many of us the more common and most meaningful tributes come in packages so small and commonplace that most people would never even notice them.

If I invited you in for a cup of tea I imagine you would stand for a moment before deciding my little red armchair is a good place to sit and chat. As you look around the room you would observe a few family photos and beyond that assume you were surrounded by everyday home furnishings. You would never guess that when I sit across from you in the very same room I am surrounded by the objects of three generations of women and a lifetime full of memories and love.

The shelf next to the piano holds my mother's old sheet music, some of it so torn and tattered that it can no longer be played, but I can't throw it away knowing that at one point my mother found herself lost among its notes. You'd never know that the chair you're sitting in has been getting in our way for years, but my mother bought it and so I'm sure it will never find its way to the dump. And you'd never know that the linen chest sitting in the corner also sat in my grandmother's living room for decades housing antique treasures and propping up family photos.

A photo in your wallet, a trinket in your pocket, words you speak in the morning, a song you listen to every night, a shirt hanging in your closet, a message on the answering machine – if you think these things make you crazy, think again. These aren't the pathetic acts of someone who can't let go and they're not the symptoms of a person gone mad; these simple objects, small gestures and every day routines are how we continue to live life surrounded by our loved ones and how we continue to say *I love you* long after a person has gone.