

The Mirror of Death

Although it is inevitable, losing a loved one is never easy. Suddenly a part of your life is gone and there is a gaping hole that was once filled with love. I, like everyone else, have had to cope with this emptiness, but it took the death of my dear friend, Sarah, a border collie who was my faithful companion for almost 16 years, to come upon a discovery that changed my life.

Sarah was an abused puppy we rescued when we lived in England. When we went looking for a dog, I was keen on another one that was in the foster home we visited, but she chose me. Her abuser had been a man and she feared all men, but for some reason she saw something in me, very much a man, that was different and boldly approached me wagging her tail. In spite of my protests, it was a battle I could not win. She was the dog for me and that was it.

When we got home, we found that Sarah could not be left alone. She was completely terrified. We guessed that in her former life, she had been left alone, did something wrong, as puppies often do, and was beaten when the master returned. Not being a dog psychologist and living in a dog-friendly country, the easiest solution was to take her to work. Anyway, she responded well to the training. Most of the time, she hid quietly under my desk. The only hint of a dog in the office was a tail wagging when somebody walked by, especially a colleague, Ann, who doted on Sarah and often took her for walks in the park at noon.

In time, Sarah proved to be a wonderful friend. She led an interesting life. When we moved back to Canada, the option of leaving her in England, although there were a few offers to take her, was never considered. We had shared too many walks and talks to be separated. Anyway, she had chosen me. The choice was not mine.

After years of devotion on both of our parts, the time came when cancer took over and we had to put her down. In the cool shade of our front lawn, we stared into each other's eyes, trying to prolong the moment. Then it was over. She was gone.

Days of grief immediately followed. Friends tried to say the right words. Hugs were given generously. Everything helped, but they couldn't fill void in my soul. I tried pep talks to convince myself that it was all for the best and so on and so on. I missed my dog and that was it.

One noon, a few days after her death, I was walking on the streets of Tavistock.. I paused to look into a florist's window, then I saw it – my reflection. What followed though were the thoughts that turned my tears of sorrow into joy.

Like the reflection in a mirror or glass, death is the reflection of life. The greater the love you felt, the greater the grief. There are people who die every day that I feel no grief for. However, my dear Sarah's death created a deep and profound sorrow. However, it was only so deep and profound because our love for each other had been so deep and

profound, too. The sorrow was a mere reflection of the joy we shared. What a precious thought. It allowed me to cope with my emotions. Every time I experienced the pain, I remembered that it was a mere reflection of the love and a reminder that it still existed. Although no longer with me, Sarah's love was.

Then came the question. It changed the tears into sobs of joy.

The question? Would I take away any of the precious moments we shared to lessen the sorrow I was experiencing now? The answer was an emphatic NO! As much as I mourned the loss of a great friend, there is no way I would have taken anything away from our experience together. The result was that I embraced the emotions instead of trying to explain them away or rationalize them. Embracing them meant that I could deal with them effectively, since I wasn't trying to avoid them or push them away.

Many of you, I'm sure, are going through grief from the death of a loved one. No matter how great the pain may be, if you wouldn't change anything from your life with your loved one to lessen it, you know that you have had a very special relationship with somebody – something that many long for and never experience. When the sorrow comes, remember it as a mere reflection of the love you once shared, and a reminder that it has not gone away.

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