



As We Grieve

Our society is obsessed with the search for youth, and so unhinged by the notion of death that we take Herculean steps to keep people alive, sometimes using methods that defy logic. Not so many generations ago, people died at home, surrounded by their loved ones who nursed and fed and cared for them during their last days. Today people die in the hospital, surrounded by the whirl and hum of high tech gadgetry and if they're lucky, the occasional relative. Death is no longer the spiritual experience it once was.

Lucky for us there are people like Jan Groft who, through her writing and example, help us to bridge the ever-widening gap between life and death. Prior to writing *As We Grieve, Discoveries of Grace in Sorrow*, Groft conducted half a year of research, reaching out to friends and loved ones with a single question: what is your most poignant memory of the death of a loved one? In

doing so, she created a sacred space for dozens and dozens of people to chronicle one of the most significant events of their lives. Even now that the book is published, Groft is still collecting anecdotes, listening with an almost preternatural ability to people describe the pain and the process.

While the research took six months, the real work for *As We Grieve* began earlier and was rooted in Groft's own pain. She cared for her father, or as she says, "it felt more like accompanying him on a journey, a very bumpy one" as he lay dying. "He found ways to make everything — even struggles, even dying — worthwhile and rewarding, as weird as that may sound." He was gone in a season, and as part of her grieving process, she wrote her first book, *Riding the Dog, My Father's Journey Home — a Memoir*. The seeds of *As We Grieve* were sprouting. They had been planted years before with one of her sister's deaths, and continued to grow each time a friend or family member died. Groft began to think about the moments of grace she had experienced with the death of two of her sisters, her parents, her best friend. The bones of the book took shape. So Groft collected stories, as all good writers do, and noticed how others' experiences aligned with her own. She asked friends and relatives, people at her church, and anyone with an interest to share their own stories. The heart of the book began to beat and she was rewarded with grace. Groft was the farmer, planting the seed, tilling the soil, watering with great care, pruning where necessary. People intrinsically knew they could trust their most intimate stories with her, knew that she would handle them with respect. Groft took their raw, unfettered emotions, wrapped her inherent and hard-earned wisdom and compassion around them, and produced a jewel of a book. *As We Grieve*, reveals Groft to be part counselor, part confidant, part best friend. "I hope it feels like a companion to them, like an embrace at a time when all of us need it most."

I cried intermittently throughout my own reading of *As We Grieve*, cried for each of the contributors and what their pain reflected back to me of my own heart. Some I knew personally, most not, yet all of their stories resonated with a poignancy, a universality that gave me a safe place from which to review my own emotions. For anyone who has lost a loved one or is currently experiencing that most profound emotion we call grief, *As We Grieve* will provide, if not complete relief — because only time and grace can do that — at least a bandaid with a big old squirt of the stuff that takes the sting away. p.j.lazos 10.18.15