

Facing the Greatest Loss

Tony F. Jones

They Told Me to Brace Myself

On May 7, 1986, I was called to see the warden and the chaplain at Hamilton Correctional facility in Jasper, Florida. Once I was there in the office, they asked me to be seated. They passed me the phone, and I identified myself. The person on the line was a doctor from the hospital in Luverne, Alabama. First he said, “Brace yourself because the news I have is shocking and hard to bear. Your mother has lost her battle with lung cancer.”

At first, I tried to withhold my tears, but I was unable to. Losing my mother one week before Mother’s Day was overwhelming. I burst into tears and broke down.

Finding Comfort

They offered me assistance. They said I could call family members, go to “medical” to see a mental health counselor, take time off from my work as a baker and a cook, or be alone in a one-man cell. I accepted their help. I had trouble adjusting to the greatest loss in my life. Worrying and crying and not eating is normal when you are upset, but it did not bring back my mother. I was only hurting myself at that point. But while I was alone, I talked to God and asked Him for comfort.

As time went by, my counselor and another person visited me and gave me advice on how to cope with stress, like listening to jazz or instrumental music. At first, I thought that it wouldn’t help me. But as I gave in to it, I found these sweet melodies to be soothing to my soul. In isolation, I read many books. I wrote letters to family and friends. I spent long hours outside which helped me cope with the situation at hand.

Facing Grief in Prison

When I was back in population, I talked to other men who had lost loved ones. We gathered two



hours daily to share, comfort, and strengthen each other. Family members visited me, and that helped too. Losing parents is difficult regardless of where you are at. But suffering these losses while in prison is even harder because you don’t have your loved ones around you.

I was in so much pain, I decided to take prescribed medication. But medication didn’t give me a sense of well-being. It didn’t fix my heart, mind, or soul.

Behind these prison walls of iron and steel, I face stressful situations daily. But I remain calm. I rest, take warm showers, sleep, read, and write poems and letters. I stay active, meditate, and pray. These actions don’t take away my problem, but they are better than prescribed medication. They give me comfort and help me face my tomorrow.

AFTER YOU READ: How did the author deal with his grief? What worked for him and what didn’t?

Tony F. Jones has written for various issues of The Change Agent. He is in prison in Georgia. Manzanita Jones supported the writing of this article.