

Grief and Ritual

Naomi Toms

Knot. Wind. Draw the yarn across. Wind. Bring it back across. Wind.

Little hands, mature hands. All learning the same motion, their hands feeling the comforting softness of the chenille yarn. With little movements, their creation builds up volume until, before much time passes, a little stocking has been created.

Knot.

The physical touch, the physical motion. The mindless rhythm and the tactile sense open up a unique space. A space of creation... of processing... of love, spoken in the language of little actions.

Children, parents, and grandparents, all work to create something beautiful. They create something beautiful, for the beautiful ones they've lost.

At *An Advent of Hope*, an Elizabeth Ministry event, family members received the chance to make space for their grief. The children - preborn babies, infants, and toddlers - that, though safe in heaven, are unfathomably far from their loved ones here on earth, were here shown love through these little acts. Siblings, parents, and grandparents created unique memorial ornaments for their beloved babies in heaven. They received, in return, catharsis. The gift of a touch of love. The space to create space for their dear ones.

It is known that ritual acts make a world of difference as a person processes grief. For my part, as I guided the creation of these little stockings, I could both see it and feel it in action.

I could see it filling hearts. Family members walked away with their new creations, holding them with care. How they treasured them. Many came back to make more, for many have lost multiple children. Learning this new skill, to create a piece with their own hands that honours their loved little ones, changed their demeanor. The rhythm of the back and forth, the feel of the yarn, created a space for peace to come and settle.

And I could feel it too. For my little baby was with me too - in my heart, and pictured on the table in a little photo with her own booties I had commissioned the year she died. The rituals of artmaking and crafting were what gave me the channel I needed to love on my little daughter, when I could no longer touch and hold her.

When loss is great, words are not enough. In fact, there are no words.

But there are little actions. And little actions, though they cannot bring anyone back... well, they help. The grief of being unable to show love to a loved one is, momentarily, lifted. And in that space, peace can come... even if just for a moment.