



the adult orphan

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We all know our parents are going to die one day, but that doesn't mean we're not going to grieve when it happens.

“Midlife orphans, orphaned adults – there’s no established term for them, yet losing your parents is one of adult life’s most significant rites of passage. And while society recognizes the loss that children feel when their parents die, adults are supposed to be fundamentally different, quickly dealing with the grief of losing people that raised them from the cradle.

If only it were that simple. Psychologists warn that the impact of losing your parents goes way beyond organizing the funeral and sorting out the will. It might be the natural order of things that parents die before their children, but the sheer inevitability is no cushion to the pain, soul-searching and sheer feeling of rudderlessness that so often happens.”

(The peculiar grief of the adult orphan by John Mangan in The Age 8 September 2013)



“In an instant you no longer have someone around who recalls every minute of your life. Your personal historian, the last one who remembers everything about your life, even the early parts you cannot recall for yourself, is gone.

There will be no more stories of cute things you did when you were two or ten. You don't get to feel like someone's little girl anymore.

When I was 32, I went through a painful divorce. The day I told my mother about the divorce, she asked what she could do. I said, “Brush my hair?” I sat in the living room, at her feet, my head in her lap, and she brushed my hair ... the same way she did when I was little and needed comforting ... There'd be no more of that.”

(Adult Orphans – the secret group almost everyone joins blogher.com/adult-orphans 8 September 2009)

If you're an orphaned adult:

❖ **Tell yourself, your grief matters** – don't allow others to dismiss what's happened because your parent 'had a good innings' or 'went peacefully'. Your grief is still real, try not to fall into the trap of believing your feelings aren't legitimate.

❖ **Consider all the losses** – it's not just about the death of your parent, there are multiple losses now – like the house where you grew up, the person who you'd call when things went wrong, the one who knew your likes and dislikes, the one who taught you how to drive a car, never missed a sports event that you played in, was your children's babysitter... the connections are endless. If you add to that the caregiving role that you may have had for an aged parent, then now you will have no-one to visit, no more responsibilities, and while there can be relief when this happens, it's still going to take some time for you to adapt.

❖ **Create continuing bonds** – find ways to stay connected to them - support their preferred charity, cook their favourite meal at family get-togethers, keep something of theirs that is special just to you, plant something from their garden at your house, bake a cake and celebrate their birthday and honour them on other significant days of the year.

Doris Zagdanski is the Convenor of MyGriefAssist website. She is a leading figure in modern day grief and loss education. She conducts educational seminars for both professional and community audiences. She has written several books in this genre and they are available at www.allaboutgrief.com