

# The Gifts of Change

REACHING THE OTHER SIDE OF BEREAVEMENT

By LINDA KAVELIN POPOV



Linda Kavelin Popov is author of *A Pace of Grace*, co-founder of The Virtues Project, and an international speaker on personal and global transformation. [www.virtuesproject.com](http://www.virtuesproject.com); [www.paceofgrace.net](http://www.paceofgrace.net)

**F**or everything there is a season. Each significant change brings us to a fork in the road, a new decision point. The question arises: What season is this in my life?

A life-changing loss of someone close, as I have experienced in the last year, can turn us inside out. When the last child leaves the home nest, when we retire, develop an illness, make a move, there is a vacancy of the familiar that sooner or later must be filled. A new homecoming beckons on the other side of the emptiness. We are called to reassess, review and revise our life design. If we choose to make this a mindful process, it can lead us to fresh happiness.

As author Christina Baldwin says, "Change is the egg of the phoenix." It is in the human spirit to rise from the ashes over and over. A friend whose husband died recently told me in a tearful phone call, "I need to move. This house is all about 'us.' I need to find my way to 'me.'"

People promised me, in the midst of my bereavement, that I would eventually get to the other side. Thankfully, that has happened. I find that this cataclysmic change has created a new space in my life. I am aware that like Alice, I can fall into a hole, or venture deeply into trust, taking the necessary time to discern what this season of my life will hold.

This is what I have discovered so far.

Being is more important than doing. My brother John grew in virtues as he faced his own death. He dove deeply into trust, gratitude, awe and joy. As he let go of doing — driving, working, creating, even reading — his inner life became richer and fuller. Music, prayer, friendship, the pure experience of gratitude as he gazed out at the beauty of his view, or reviewed his wonderful life, became his new milieu. As I adopt these virtues more deeply through small kindnesses, contemplative time for reflection and prayer, walking in the quiet, my life is newly enhanced.

Beauty is essential to a soulful life. "The human soul needs actual beauty more than bread," D.H. Lawrence said. I am determined to let go of anything in my home that is no longer useful or beautiful. Slowing down into awareness, I take in more of nature's beauty. A trip to the Canadian and American Rockies to find new perspective restores my soul and opens me to wonder. Focusing on a single blossom while shifting into mindfulness can have the same effect.

Boundaries protect what we value. As I discern what I am ready to say "yes" to, I also need to know my "no's." Not every opportunity can be taken. I crave spaciousness, not



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only as a writer but as an elder. This means giving up, once and for all, being an E-Type personality — being everything to everyone.

Sustainable balance is the goal. Whenever I send birthday money to my grandchildren, I remind them to "spend some, save some and give some." This is the touchstone for my evolving boundaries and goals — to balance simplicity, moderation, joy and service. I seek what a young skate-boarder once described as "pristine momentum."

Because we can do something doesn't mean we should. Choosing wisely will allow peace and passion to be in equal measure in my new life. May each of us find the steps to that dance, knowing it is our right and our truest path to a pace of grace. ✨