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In our previous reflection, we shared our 2022 organizational theme, “Growing Together: Joy on the Journey.” We considered how there are times when we need to *search for* and *choose* joy. We look forward to practising choosing joy together in the months ahead. Sometimes, though, joy simply springs up in the most unlikely places. Grief is a landscape where I have seen joy spring to the surface like an unexpected geyser. As I accompany teams and people who use our services while processing grief, diverse and complicated emotions arise. Inevitably, people who are grieving will share a humorous story about or a fond memory of the person who passed. Tears of joy push their way through the sadness.

One gentleman we support has a unique response when he hears that someone he knows has died: “I’m happy,” he unexpectedly begins, “...for her. She’s in a good place! But I’m sad that she’s gone.” We often face these conflicting emotions, and it’s best to be honest with them. They reveal the unique complexity of the person we miss and our relationship with that person.

I’m reading a book written by a grandmother looking back at the birth and early years of Nani, her granddaughter who was born with a genetic disability. The grandmother writes, “Pain is everyone’s shadow – and only things with substance cast a shadow.” Wherever you’re at today, you are likely touched by shadows. These may be the shadows of people you have been separated from through life circumstances, illness, or death. Anticipated moments or events can cast a shadow too, if our hopes do not take shape as we had imagined.

Nani’s mother wrestles with her own unmet expectations. She lives a different life and in a different relationship with her daughter than she expected. Eventually, Nani will grow up and receive services similar to those that Christian Horizons provides. In those early months, as Nani’s mother fought through conflicting emotions, she says,

I have been happy these last months – full of joy. I mean *full* of joy. I wish I could paint ‘full of joy.’ It’s beautiful! Yet it has been during my joy that my deepest, most honest grief has come. I feel both inside. There’s no conflict. I think they build onto one another. It’s strange!

“Strange” is also one way to describe our reality at Christian Horizons over the past months. For many, primary feelings about the pandemic include worry, stress, and grief. Yet you may have also felt gratitude, moments of peace, and joy! It’s okay to feel strange

feelings in the midst of a strange time. It's more than okay – it's to be expected. Our prayer for each person at Christian Horizons is that we move from *moments of joy* in the midst of grief and loss to *moments of grief* in the midst of joy. We will feel grief for a long time. Our losses have been substantial, and have cast a shadow. But eventually we know that mourning will turn to dancing again (Psalm 30:11).

Making the Connection

- Spend some time considering your own grief and joy. Do you have someone you can talk to about your experiences? If not, who might you turn to?
- Visit the *Disability and Faith Forum* (www.disabilityandfaith.org) for a three-part series on grief with people with developmental disabilities. If you have questions, are looking to share your own experiences, or are interested in further resources, the Organizational and Spiritual Life team would love to hear from you at ministry@christian-horizons.org.
- The January 27th, 2022 *On the Horizon* contained a reminder about mental health supports for employees, and announced an upcoming grief support group for people who use services. Consider who might benefit from these opportunities!