

By Ruth Ostrow

Every day I pass a sign on the road into town. Every day there are fresh flowers tied to it. I don't know what happened there, but I heard stories that a child was killed crossing the road. The flowers have been there for maybe two years now. Sometimes when I drive past I get tears in my eyes because I'm so touched by the devotion shown by classmates, family or friends who continue to go to the makeshift shrine and place their offering.

Ceremony is so important in life, to make our everyday losses and gains sacred. In Byron Bay it's tradition to honour the passing of things we've loved and the welcoming in of the new with some form of ritual or celebration - going down to the water, dancing under an open sky, or just lighting a candle with friends.

Which is why I was so upset to read about the awful new trend here and in the United States to throw divorce parties - not sacred ceremonies honouring a lifetime spent with someone; rather, nasty mockeries of the past with games such as Pin the Blame on the Spouse, throwing wedding rings into toilets, and using voodoo dolls. Someone I know had an RIP gravestone with the ex-wife's name on it in the middle of the room.

All of which simply masks deep-felt grief. In separation we mourn the loss of the illusion, the dream of happy ever after, often more than the person. Sacred ceremony acknowledges the anger and the pain while still celebrating the good years, the children, the laughter and tears, the great things we take away from every union, even if it's simply a lesson not to go there again.

All relationships - especially painful or difficult ones - help us to grow. None is a waste of time. The fact is that one in every two marriages isn't going to make the long haul. Some people are clearly not meant to be together forever. After all, monogamy (or "till death do us part") is a religious concept that doesn't exist naturally in the animal kingdom. According to recent scientific studies, even creatures who allegedly "mate for life" have been shown to produce offspring born of rival suitors.

So instead of feeling like failures, rejectees or embittered and full of spite when, and if, it's time to move on, how much more life-affirming to let go with acceptance. And how much more empowering to bid a once-dear friend farewell with respect.

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