

Joy tainted with sorrow

Michael, my first cousin, found love later in life. Julie, a hair stylist, was to be his soulmate. They set a date for the nuptials and yours truly was asked if he might be willing to perform the wedding ceremony. An affirmative and plans were set in motion. We committed July 9th 2016 to our sparse calendar. A beaming couple had discovered they were soulmates and prepared to spend the rest of their lives living out a commitment in marriage.

Then it happened. It was Wednesday, March 9th it was a beautiful spring day. For a change, there was no rain. The buds on the shrubs and trees in my garden echoed the arrival of spring and hope. A phone call and all that changed in the blinking of an eye.

Michael sat into the cab of the truck. He slumped over the wheel and died of a massive heart attack.

Before now, I was looking forward to celebrating a wedding. Now, instead, I was celebrating a funeral. How cruel life can be! One moment, you are planning on standing by the altar waiting for your beaming and blushing bride to walk down the aisle. The next moment, you are lying in a casket and the would be bride cries buckets of tears instead of bucket of smiles.

Many of us would like to have a peaceful ride through life - no rollercoaster, no bumps and bruises; no pain and lots of gain; no crosses and only victories; no rain and lots of sunshine. Riding the crest of the wave instead of living in the pits. Lots of plans and no interruptions.

Our first response to a time like this is " Why? " Why rob a couple of a special day in July? Did they not deserve something to look forward to; something to plan for; something to enjoy for a lifetime? Why rob them of a lifetime of joy and love? What did they do to deserve love to be wrenched from their hearts?

Life isn't fair, we say. Yet, ironically, death is the fairest thing in the world. No one's ever gotten out of it. The earth takes everyone - the kind, the cruel, the saints, the sinners. Aside from that, there's no fairness on earth.

Each day of human life contains joy and anger, pain and pleasure, darkness and light, growth and decay. Each moment is etched with nature's grand design.

One of the lessons I learned from Hurricane Katrina was that God has never created a storm that lasts forever. And despite the darkness of the most foreboding storm clouds, the sun is always shining somewhere. The challenge becomes adjusting one's perception of events enough to recognize the presence of God within the experience.

Life is a collection of moments we would have appreciated more if we had only known they were moments. All of us have had our moments with loved ones; some may be fleeting moments; others may be lifetime, family moments; some may be casual encounters; others may be lifelong happenings; some may be sad moments; others may be moments of joy and happiness; some may be moments of finally finding a true soulmates and all the special trips, encounters, plans, promises made and yet to be celebrated.

I am reminded of something that popular spiritual writer, Henry Nouwen. wrote: "Life is a short in expectation, a time in which sadness and joy kiss each other at every moment. There is a quality of sadness that pervades all the moments of our life. It seems that there is no such thing as a clear-cut pure joy, but that even in the most happy moments of our existence, we sense a tinge of sadness. In every satisfaction, there is an awareness of limitations. In every success, there is a fear of jealousy. Behind every smile, there is a tear. In every embrace, there is a loneliness. In every friendship, distance. And in all forms of light, there is a knowledge of surrounding darkness. but this intimate experience in which every bit of life is touched by a bit of death, can point us beyond the limits of our existence. It can do so by making us look forward in expectation to the day when our hearts will be filled with perfect joy, a joy that no one shall take away from us."