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Where has it all Gone?

by Lesley Dawson

We lose many things over the course of a lifetime. Important things and those that are trivial but seem important at the time. How many times I have lost my umbrella or my bus pass I cannot count. Most often I don't remember that I have lost it until the next time I need it.

How many times have I vowed to lose weight? I have joined Weight Watchers and Slimming World and religiously weighed myself each week. I know I can lose weight but then I forget what I intended and start to eat each chocolate again.

Some people are extremely good at finding their way in new places. I can get lost in my hometown when I have a map in my hand. In fact, I even lost my car one evening. I couldn't remember where I had parked it. My Portuguese friends were convinced it had been stolen and never cease to remind me to note where I park.

Losing luggage may not be your fault but you still suffer for it. My memory goes back to arriving in Johannesburg to find that my suitcase was missing and the only clothes I had were what I stood up in. I wonder how much it costs airlines to deliver all the baggage that didn't arrive on the carousel at Gatwick when it should.

I have friends who must win all the games they play. Once, playing Monopoly, I was criticized for giving away my houses on Mayfair and not auctioning them off in the proper fashion. On another occasion, it was such a surprise to possess the winning lottery ticket for a huge chocolate egg. I couldn't believe I had won.

Losing my voice used to happen regularly every winter in Bradford as a result of my bronchitis attacks. When you can't communicate life becomes very frustrating, but I am sure that my students were quite happy that I couldn't speak. Writing thoughts down on paper doesn't have quite the same interest as hearing them out loud.

Loss is a part of life but we in the west have so got used to the wonders of modern medicine that we are affronted and shocked by serious illness and death of loved ones. Why has this happened to us is a refrain heard oftentimes. There was a time when every child until the age of five was vulnerable to pneumonia, malnutrition and infections and parents didn't count on them reaching adulthood until they went to school.

At the other end of the life spectrum, we now have to deal with loss in dementia. Losing one's memory can mean losing one's whole life. What can be more tragic than a woman not being able to identify her spouse or her children? It must be even worse for the person concerned who doesn't recognize this person is who seems to assume familiarity but who appears to be a stranger. At my mother's funeral I read a poem entitled "My two mothers" to remind myself that the women who gave me such a hard time because she couldn't go home, had in the past cared for me when things had gone wrong, bathed my grazes and kissed away my sorrows.

What must it be like to lock the door, pocket the key and walk away from your home of many years, not knowing if you will be able to return? Packing up all the things you think you will need or will miss, while looking around at all the keepsakes you have amassed over the years that you must leave behind? If you can and do return, what does it is like seeing your home destroyed or someone else living there?

The art of losing isn't hard to master as it is part of life.