

## *Fear, Resilience and Things We Cannot Change*

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In his book, *Five Things We Cannot Change*, David Richo speaks directly to the struggles experienced by many bereaved persons. “There are 5 unavoidable facts of life built right into the very nature of things, over which we are powerless,” he states:

Everything changes and ends.

Things do not always go according to plan.

Life is not always fair.

Pain is a part of life.

People are not loyal and loving all the time.

When we resist the reality of these basic truths, we encase ourselves in disappointment, frustration and sorrow. After a death, how often do we feel or think those very things: “It’s not fair that my husband died within months of our planned retirement together!” “Why did it have to be my mother that died? It’s too painful living without her.” Whether death is sudden or follows a long terminal disease, the truth of the 5 unavoidable facts becomes glaringly apparent to a bereaved person. Everything has changed and there are many painful endings that are neither fair nor planned. Bereavement is not for the faint of heart!

When in grief, we need to remind ourselves that humans are resilient. We are “hard-wired” to survive the upheaval and anguish of grief. Over the ages, humans have adapted new ways of being in the world. We can do this.

Resilience is not something we either have or we don’t; it’s something we learn and cultivate within ourselves. American Psychological Association offers a brochure, *The Road to Resilience*, which details ways to build resilience. These include:

Make connections to others.

Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems.

Accept that change is part of living.

Move toward your goals.

Take decisive actions.

Look for opportunities for self-discovery.

Nurture a positive view of yourself.

Keep things in perspective.

Maintain a hopeful outlook.

Take care of yourself.

Another resource is Susan Jeffers' book, *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*. Fear can immobilize us under the best of circumstances. In grief, there are many potential difficulties: a man who suddenly finds himself responsible for making financial decisions after a lifetime of deferring to his spouse, a person whose partner had the role of "social butterfly" who now feels isolated and alone, or the young person who needs to get a real job following the death of a very generous parent. The title itself, *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*, serves as a push through the avoidance that stymies a much-needed action.