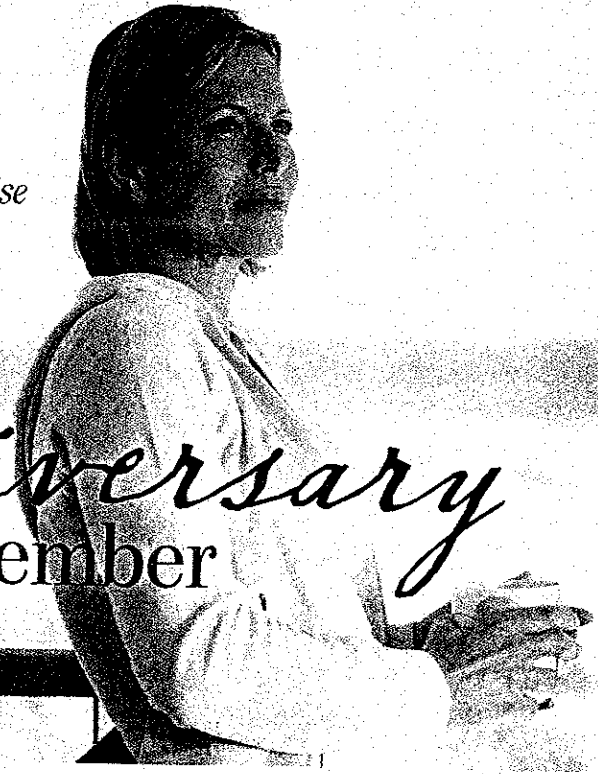


*Finding peace despite  
a broken promise*

by Sheila Fields

# An Anniversary to Remember



On Nov. 7, 1981, I married my high school sweetheart and we honeymooned in the Caribbean. A few years into our marriage, we planned to renew our vows on our 25th anniversary by returning to our honeymoon spot.

Then our marriage bubble burst.

In 1998, we divorced. When a song or scent triggered a marriage memory, I thought about our plans. I grieved over what might have been and dreaded a spouseless 25th anniversary.

Then in 2006 I was offered a work assignment in the Bahamas, and I was ecstatic. The resort's Web site took my breath away. The palm trees and turquoise sea beckoned me away from harried New York and my life as a single mom. All I could say was, "Thank You, Jesus."

Then God spoke to my heart: *You are my bride, and*

*I will take you back to the Caribbean on your 25th anniversary.*

The lover of my soul had heard my yearlong whimpering, and I knew He wanted to heal my heart and mind. I was giddy with anticipation like a bride-to-be, so I packed something borrowed (a suitcase and some island-style skirts), something blue (a journal to track my island activities), something old (a quarter century of memories and a second journal to record how I would let them go) and something new (a leather journal to write about

my life experiences after the trip).

I flew from New York on Nov. 9, 2006. Ironically, 25 years earlier, my husband and I departed from LaGuardia Airport on Nov. 8.

After arriving at the resort, I was escorted to a suite where French doors opened to a balcony overlooking the sea. The moon cast a silver shimmer over the water and took me back in time. As honeymooners, my husband and I had sat on a beach after dinner. The peace of our moment together was as seductive as the scent of the island flowers. While sitting with the man I loved, I looked over the bay and told him that our lives probably wouldn't be as carefree and peaceful

again—and I was right.

Alone on the balcony of my hotel room years later, I recounted the events that led to my divorce but was surprised by the peace that enveloped me. God was there with me, comforting my heart.

During free time, I had fun fishing, snorkeling, playing with dolphins and enjoying a beach party. When all was still and quiet in the early morning hours, healing came. As the sun split the eastern sky, I listened to the waves lapping the shore and wished my quiet times on the balcony could last forever.

I shed some tears and poured all my words about the past onto the pages of a journal until there weren't any left. Then, because I wanted to leave the old behind, I tore up the pages describing my past life. I thanked God for the good and praised Him for holding me through the storms. It was then that the years of healing became complete.

Though different from what I'd planned, my life is wonderful. Certainly, divorce is devastating, but it is possible to let go, recover and move on. For me it included three journals, two Caribbean honeymoons and one great God!

Perhaps God is urging you to leave your pain in His arms and walk bravely forward. Trust that He is with you every step of the way.

*Sheila Fields still fills journal pages in New York.*

## Leaving the Past Behind

Marriage is meant to last until death, but sometimes people make bad choices, bringing unexpected sorrows and an empty bed. Learning to walk alone is scary and heartbreaking, but it can be done with God's help.

If you are facing life on your own, the following tips from professional counselors can help you let go of the past.

"People sometimes remain in the past because they have no hope for the future," says Linda Stoll, a pastoral counselor and certified life coach. "They continue looking at what's behind, instead of focusing on what can be seen out the big window right in front of them."

Other things that keep people tied to the past include fearing change, holding on to selective memories and not doing the inner work that frees a person from the past and releases her to live in the present. Moving forward, however, begins with a choice.

"A person must decide to forge ahead toward healing," Stoll says. "With the help of a well-trained counselor, discerning pastor or recovery ministry, people can see the past for what it was, both good and bad, erase the old tapes that play in their heads and discover who they are in Christ."

The process of letting go often includes a special ritual. Kristen Harrington, a marriage and family counselor, suggests making a list of all the good and bad in the lost relationship and then burning the list. A burning ritual like this can help a person find closure.

"Seeing the smoke rise, you realize it's over and you can go on," she says.

Other rituals might include creating scrapbooks, memory boxes and quilts. "Putting these things together can be cathartic especially when done in community with others who are grieving a loss and attempting to understand it in a healthy context," Stoll says. "The planting of a tree (to mark your new life) or a donation to an organization that has special meaning can be beneficial. One client I worked with sold the jewelry that her former husband had given to her and sent the money to a shelter for abused women. Making a choice to redeem our losses by choosing to bless others is a pivotal step in moving ahead."

"Give yourself permission to feel the pain of loss. Grieve what you wish the relationship could have been," Harrington says. When the choice is made to let go of the past, God's healing moves in.