

The Dark Pieces

All through my childhood, my parents kept a giant jigsaw puzzle set up on a puzzle table in the living room. My father, who had started all this, always hid the box top, so family members and visiting guests would work on it without knowing the picture ahead of time. As time went on, hundreds and hundreds of pieces would each find their place. Over the years, I came to love seeing a hint of pattern emerge, discovering what had been there, hidden, all along.

The puzzle table was my father's birthday present to my mother when I was three or four years old. I remember him setting it up and pouring out puzzle pieces onto it. Alone in the living room early one morning, I climbed on a chair and spread out the hundreds of loose pieces lying on the table. The pieces were fairly small; some were brightly colored and some dark and shadowy. The dark ones seemed like spiders or bugs, ugly and a little frightening. They made me feel uncomfortable. Gathering up a few of these, I climbed down and hid them under one of the sofa cushions. For several weeks, whenever I was alone in the living room, I would add a few more pieces to the cache under the cushion.

My mother, growing disheartened with the time it was taking to finish the first puzzle, finally realized that more than a hundred were missing. She asked me if I had seen them. I told her then what I had done with the pieces I didn't like and she rescued them and completed the puzzle. As piece after dark piece was put in place and the picture emerged, I was astounded. I had not known there would be a picture. It was quite beautiful, a peaceful scene of a deserted beach. Without the pieces I had hidden, it had made no sense.

Perhaps winning requires that we love the process unconditionally. Life provides all the pieces. When I accepted certain parts of life and denied and ignored the rest, I could only see my life a piece at a time - the happiness of a success or a time of celebration, or the ugliness and pain of a loss or a failure I was trying hard to put behind me out of sight. But like the dark pieces of the puzzle, these sadder events, painful as they are, have proven themselves a part of something larger.

Profound loss and grief changes when an unsuspected meaning begins to emerge from the fragments of our lives. Over time, this meaning has proven itself to be durable and trustworthy, even transformative. It is a kind of strength that never comes to those who deny their pain.

- from [*Kitchen Table Wisdom*](#) by Rachel Naomi Remen