



**THE
COMPASSIONATE
FRIENDS**
Supporting Family After a Child Dies

Bluegrass Chapter Newsletter

“We need not walk alone.”

www.tcfbluegrass.org

P.O. Box 647, Nicholasville, Kentucky 40340

April 2011

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A Bereaved Parent's Spring

Regardless of the calendar or the meteorologists, April marks the beginning of spring for many of us. The world outside begins to awaken from its winter slumber, and the sights and sounds and smells of spring abound, from the flowers peeking out of the ground to the birds chirping merrily outside our windows to the smell of the blooming trees as we venture out for our first walk of the season.

This is what spring is all about unless, of course, you are a —newly|| bereaved parent, and then you might just be oblivious to it all. In fact, you may even resent the reappearance of spring and its symbolic rebirth.

The message to you from an —old timer|| on this grief journey is to be easy on yourself --it won't always be this hard -- and just feel whatever you feel. Don't let anyone tell you how you —should feel this spring (or next).

Like all seasons, spring will have its share of emotional triggers for the newly bereaved — graduations, Mother's Day, planning for summer vacations, favorite flowers, and just waking up. But just as April showers bring May flowers, the tears of grief will ultimately sow the seeds of hope, and someday you, too, will see the beauty of spring again.

For those of us who have been on our grief journey for awhile, not only do we recognize (and welcome) the beauty of spring again, but we also see our children in everything that is beautiful in spring. It's our way of carrying them with us through spring and through all of the season. So, as spring unfolds, here's wishing each of you peace and whatever joy you are able to find.

Not Guilt, Regret

-“We Need Not Walk Alone” Spring, 2011

One of our basic responsibilities as parents is to keep our children safe from harm. So, when anything happens to them, we feel guilty whether we could realistically have done anything or not. When the ultimate tragedy occurs, we are devastated. How could we let it happen? Why didn't we stop it? If we have compounded our guilt with any degree of human error of commission or omission, we are beyond devastation. Even words, whether of anger or left unspoken, haunts us. Guilt implies intent. If we intended to harm our child, we can feel guilty about that. If we never intended harm to ever, ever come to our child, the correct name for emotion is regret. The crushing pain is still there, but regret is softer, gentler, less judgmental, and easier to forgive and to heal. It is also more accurate. If that name doesn't feel strong enough for our feelings, it will in time. Let it float there and try it now and then. Not guilt — we feel regret.

Our Children

Forever Loved and Remembered

April Birth Dates

4/2 **John Thomas Reynolds** Son of Joan & Richard Reynolds
4/5 **Kelly Renee Powell** Daughter of Cecil and Barbara Powell
4/5 **Michael R. Lucas** Son of Anne and Ed Lucas
4/8 **Annemarie Timm** Daughter of Helen and Charles Timm
4/9 **Anthony Eugene Gay** Son of Larry and Gayle Gay
4/11 **Sean Robert Wright** Son of Sherry Conway & Mark Wright
4/13 **Tony R. Applegate** Son of Dolly Wallace Bellemey
4/13 **Jason Davis** Son of Curt Davis
4/15 **Colin Spencer** Son of Stephanie Spencer
4/15 **Jeonna McDaniel** Daughter of Jennifer Sebastian
4/20 **Ivy Britton Freeman** Daughter of Kevin and Cindy Freeman
4/22 **Brenna Jiwon Kihlman** Daughter of Dale and Shan Kihlman
4/24 **James Edward Auberry** Son of James Auberry
4/24 **Glenn Ray Carter** Son of Angela Carter
4/28 **Katie Lynn Brandenburg** Daughter of Michael & Gennie Brandenburg
4/28 **Jeremy Daegan Hicks** Son of Joe and Sheila Hicks
4/29 **Bridget Elizabeth Kolles** Daughter of Greg & Mary Ellen Kolles
4/29 **Christina Leigh Kolles** Daughter of Greg & Mary Ellen Kolles
4/30 **Kevin Wayne Gardner** Son of Doug and Vicky Gardner

Sibling Corner...

Learning to Survive in a New World

The world is now a different place. The bereaved sibling is a different person. Each of us heals in his or her own time. The sibling may seem to be doing well and then suddenly feel as if they are starting over once again. Memories can be a source of strength, comfort or pain. They can be both uplifting and depressing. Siblings grieve as individuals, and there is no standard plan. Their grief is now part of them. Ignoring it will not help, for it will keep coming back when it is least expected. Their lives will gradually improve as they learn to acknowledge grief without denying it or letting it take control. Their perception of the world has changed, as well as their priorities. Indeed, they are new people in a new world.

“Do you have any brothers or sisters?” What was once a simple question now brings so much pain. The question, “Do you have any brothers or sisters” is often asked as a part of getting to know someone new. The answer may vary depending upon the circumstances. No matter how siblings respond to the question, they know that the relationship does not die and that they will always be brothers or sisters to their sibling who died.



Our Children Forever Loved and Remembered

April Remembrance Dates

4/1 **Ash Valic Coffey** Son of Stacy M. Coffey
4/2 **Cody McClure Speer** Son of Lin and Mark Simmons
4/10 **Andy Jones** Son of Jean and Cal Jones
4/15 **Jennifer Podgorski** Daughter of Monique Podgorski
4/15 **Bill Varney** Son of Judy Varney
4/16 **Daryl Clinton Barnes** Son of Vada and Mike Barnes
4/16 **Deana Mari Sea** Daughter of Darrell and Jean Sea
4/16 **Brian Jason Hardin** Son of Richard and Sue Hardin
4/17 **William Henry “Bill” Sanders** Son of Barbara Sanders
4/19 **Jesse Caldwell Higginbotham** Son of Jerome Higginbotham & Rebecca Woloch
4/19 **Kara Elizabeth Horton** Daughter of Carole Mull
4/19 **A. Daniel Morris** Son of James and Marie Morris
4/18 **James Michael Farris** Son of Hulda Farris
4/19 **John Andy Girdler** Son of Ella Girdler
4/20 **Madeline Violet Benton** Daughter of Amy & Tony Benton
4/21 **Shari Eldot** Daughter of Roz Eldot
4/22 **Ron Jones** Son of Mel and Jeanette Jones
4/23 **Weston “Ashe” Marlowe** Son of Brandi & Wesley Marlowe
4/24 **Trista Erin Lane Hail** Daughter of Bill and Debbie Lane
4/25 **Robin Ricci Kuniff** Daughter of Norma Forston
4/26 **John Thomas Parks** Son of Rosemary Parks
4/27 **Joshua Scott Barker** Son of Deborah Barker
4/27 **Lisa Jean Johnson** Daughter of Sam and Doris Strader
4/28 **Mark Robert Bartella** Son of John and Brenda Peterson

Whether they are the result of joy or sorrow, tears are a response to emotions for which we can find no words. They reveal our most vulnerable self. When we cry we are releasing the pain of the loss, not the memory of the one we cherish. The most dramatic rainbows seem to follow the most severe storms. Now when my eyes overflow, I use a guided imagery technique to visualize my tears washing away the pain that I carry inside my heart and soul. And when they finally stop, I look for the brilliant rainbow of love and hope.

In remembering our children, In sharing with each other...
We ease our pain, We share each step,
We help smooth the road, And we serve as witnesses
To the fact that we can make it beyond grief
As we support each other.

A Father Speaks: Where are all the Butterflies?**By Jim Hobbs BP/USA of North Texas**

Driving to work with the radio on, I sit next to a fellow co-worker and friend in the passenger seat. It's early in the morning and the conversations is light. A song reminds me of Jesse, my deceased son, so I tell a story about Jesse. A cloud of silence and dread fills the car. My friend shifts his position and I can feel how uncomfortable he is. I swallow the memories of Jesse and switch the conversation to last night's ball game. Sound familiar? It's painful to your friends to hear about your deceased child and it's painful for you to silence your memories too. Certain studies claim that women are social beings and are more able to communicate their emotions than are men. This same studies state that men are mostly competitive and tend to hide their negative emotions, such as sadness or grief, especially from other men. Does that mean that men have less need to deal with their emotions? I don't think so.

From personal experiences and experiences of other men whom I have known, grief is one emotion that demands relief. Without grief recovery, grief can become a destructive force that, at some point, can consume your physical as well as your mental and spiritual health. Bereavement support groups remind us that we need not walk alone.

From a man's viewpoint, I think our support group's monthly gatherings offer an important avenue for men to work through the grief recovery process. Other doors are often shut to men who need to discuss their anger, guilt, sadness and even happy memories concerning their deceased children.

Let's talk with and listen to each other.

The Elephant In The Room**By: Terry Kettering**

There's an elephant in the room. It is large and squatting, so it's hard to get around it.

Yet we squeeze by with "How are you?" and "I'm fine." And a thousand other forms of trivial chatter. We talk about the weather. We talk about work.

We talk about everything else—except the elephant in the room.

There's an elephant in the room. We all know it is there. We are thinking about the elephant as we talk together.

It is constantly on our minds. For, you see, it is a very big elephant. It has hurt us all. But we do not talk about the elephant in the room.

Oh, please, say her name. Oh, please, say "Barbara" again.

Oh please, let's talk about the elephant in the room.

For if we talk about her death, perhaps we can talk about her life. Can I say "Barbara" to you and not have you look away?

For if I cannot, then you are leaving me alone....in a room... with an elephant.

Tissues, Tears & Treasures

~Saint Paul Chapter Newsletter, Feb/March/April 2007, Page 7

A circle of chairs and boxes of tissues,

A roomful of tears and emotional issues.

Frightening at first, I did not want to enter into this strange group, and be in the center.

What I soon learned, as we sat side by side, we were bound by the love of our children who died.

Each shattered heart, desperately seeking a moment of peace, from the pain and weeping.

So many things different, and yet all the same, hearts lost in a fog of loss and of pain.

Those who have journeyed, much further than me, reached out in comfort, listened quietly.

Each shattered heart spoke, and the tissues were passed, we never avoid speaking of the past.

This circle of friends, have found a bond, and here I'm still known As "Tony's Mom".

Slowly, I've found I can reach out to others who are newly bereaved, fathers and mothers.

Strength I have found in this Circle of chairs, to grieve and to heal and to show that we care.

The Gap...

The gap between those of us who have lost children and those who have not is profoundly difficult to bridge. No one, whose children are well and intact, can be expected to understand what parents who have lost children have absorbed and what they bear. Our children come to us through every blade of grass, every crack in the sidewalk, every bowl of breakfast cereal. We seek contact with their atoms, their hairbrush, their toothbrush, their clothing. We reach for what was integrally woven into the fabric of our lives, now torn and shredded.

A black hole has been blown through our souls and, indeed, it often does not allow the light to escape. It is a difficult place. For us to enter there is to be cut deeply, and torn anew, each time we go there, by the jagged edges of our loss. Yet we return, again and again, for that is where our children now reside. This will be so for years to come and it will change us profoundly. At some point in the distant future, the edges of that hole will have tempered and softened but the empty space will remain - a life sentence.

Our friends will change through this. There is no avoiding it. We grieve for our Children, in part, through talking about them and our feelings for having lost them. Some go there with us; others cannot and through their denial add a further measure, however unwittingly, to an already heavy burden.

Assuming that we may be feeling "better" six months later is simply "do not get it". The excruciating and isolating reality that bereaved parents feel is hermetically sealed from the nature of any other human experience. Thus it is a trap - those whose compassion and insight we most need are those for whom we harbor the experience that would allow them that sensitivity and capacity. And yet, somehow there are those, each in their own fashion, who have found a way to reach us and stay, to our comfort. They have understood, again each in their own way, that our children remain our children through our memory of them. Their memory is sustained through speaking about them and our feelings about their death. Deny this and you deny their life. Deny their life and you no longer have a place in ours. We recognize that we have moved to an emotional place where it is often very difficult to reach us. Our attempts to be normal are painful and the day-to-day carries a silent, screaming anguish that accompanies us, sometimes from moment to moment. Were we to give it its own voice we fear we would become truly unreachable, and so we remain "strong" for a host of reasons even as the strength saps our energy and drains our will. Were we to act out our true feelings we would be impossible to be with. We resent having to act normal, yet we dare not do otherwise. People who understand this dynamic are our gold standard. Working our way through this over the years will change us, as does every experience - and extreme experience changes one extremely. We know we will have recovered when, as we have read, it is no longer so painful to be normal. We do not know who we will be at that point or who will still be with us.

We have read that the gap is so difficult that, often, bereaved parents must attempt to reach out to friends and relatives or risk losing them. This is our attempt. For those untarnished by such events, who wish to know in some way what they, thankfully, do not know, read this. It may provide a window that is helpful for people on both sides of the gap.

EASTER THOUGHTS

By Sascha From WINTERSUN

One more winter overcome, one more darkness turned to light and promise.
Winter is the price for spring. Struggle is the price for life.
Even in sorrow, remember to prepare your heart for celebration—next spring perhaps.
Or the spring after that...



Sometimes a Man Needs to Cry

By: Lewis Grizzard, Columnist

The man's friend, Jennifer wrote me a letter and told me about his problem. These sort of things make you sick, but they happen and then what is left to do is somehow find a way to cope. The man had two daughters. They were bright and they were beautiful. One was 16. The other was 18. Last year the girls were in an auto accident. They were hit by a drunk driver. The 16 year old lingered for a week. Then the doctors determined she was brain dead and she was disconnected from the life support system.

In a week the man had buried both his daughters. “All his life,” Jennifer wrote, “he had been the pillar of strength for his family, his church and his many friends.” He had never weakened in his support for them when they needed him. I guess that's why he didn't show us the grief he knew that was inside him. “I never even saw him cry. I guess he was just trying to hold on so we wouldn't see that big, crumbling heart he was hiding.”

You can't hide a heart like that for very long. In the year since his daughter's deaths, the man has had two heart attacks. Jennifer is convinced it is his grief that is causing his health to decline steadily. In the letter, Jennifer also asked me to do something I don't normally like to do, and that is to use this column to give somebody a message. Some people write and want me to wish their mothers Happy Birthday in this space. Others want me to write something as a practical joke on some of their friends. I would have to go out and find a real job if I resorted to things like that. But I'm going to break my rule just this once. The letter almost pleaded with me. “He reads your column,” Jennifer wrote. “I know you're not Dear Abby but maybe there is something you can say to our friend. It's time for him to realize that grown men do cry, that it's OK to let grief and sorrow flow out like a river among family and friends. The doctors don't know what to do about him, but I think there are just some remedies that don't come from a bottle or an operating room.”

Jennifer is right. I'm no Dear Abby nor a counselor, nor a minister, nor a psychiatrist. But, if the man is reading this column – and he certainly would know he is the subject of it by this time – maybe I can make a few points. It is obvious your friends love you, sir, and they care about you. By not sharing your grief with them, by not leaning on them in time of your greatest need, you are hurting them. And it hurts them to see you unwilling to share your burden with them. It hurts them that you are depriving them the ability to help you. The heart is an amazing mechanism. Give it half a chance and it will mend itself and the best place to start is to put your arms around somebody who loves you and cry.

Contrary to what a number of us dumb clucks think, tears often are a grown man's best friend.



Volunteer Opportunities

If you would like to give of your time to our chapter, we always welcome volunteers. This is your chance to give back and to help out with the efforts of our chapter. Volunteer opportunities range from helping to set up a meeting, facilitating meetings, and just helping in any way that you can. This is a great way to give back in memory of your child after you have found hope, encouragement and strength from

TCF. Making the change from needing and finding help to giving help and support to new parents is another healing milestone.

A New Perspective on Easter

Easter Sunday! Oh, how the memories come flooding back to Easter's past. After Church, the conversation was always the same. "*Can I put on my dungarees?*" And, I would say: '*No, you can't! It is Easter Sunday! You can stay dressed.*'"

The Easter ham, the colored eggs, a supply of film and a prayer for beautiful weather always seemed to take top priority. Of course, I was always aware of the meaning of Easter. After all, I was raised in a Catholic family and went to Catholic schools. I knew that Christ had died on the cross so that our sins would be forgiven. I knew that God gave His only Son so that we may have everlasting life. But somehow, those thoughts were always replaced with the new Easter outfits and the big family feast.



Since Richie's passing, I have a totally different perspective of what Easter really means. My grief has given me a reason to do some serious reflecting and some deep soul searching. And, by doing so, I have gained a new understanding about this holiday. That God gave His only Son so that we could have everlasting life has taken on a whole new meaning for me. It is my tool of survival as a bereaved parent. Now, on this day, I reflect on the hope, the rebirth, and restoring my faith in the Lord. And, if I get depressed, I think of how the Blessed Mother must have felt when her only Son was nailed to the cross, and I count my blessings.

I have come to realize that grief is my cross to bear. And, I know now, that by God giving us eternal life, means that I have not lost Richie forever. I will see him again. It gives me the ability to face each new day without him being here with us. And death doesn't seem so permanent to me anymore. It makes the days easier to handle, knowing that we will all be reunited. And, knowing, when we leave this earth, we will all rise up to the Kingdom of God for eternity helps give me the power to defeat this terrible thing called grief.

Now, Easter to me is a day of miracles. It is a day of family, peace and wisdom. I am sure, at some point, grief will visit me this Easter. I am sure that it will open my memory bank and let the pictures of the little boy coloring Easter eggs come through; a little boy telling the Easter Bunny to bring him white chocolate because he likes that much better. I will also see a teenager showing his little sister how to make the Easter egg coloring into a psychedelic pattern.

I will remember the last Easter plant that Richie gave to me. And I will see the uncle who shared in the joy of watching his nephew, Daniel, on an Easter egg hunt. I will hear him saying: "*Look over there Daniel, maybe the Easter Bunny left one over there.*" Oh yes! I am sure that I will remember it all. But I expect that. It is normal. After all, these memories are part of the past. If I deny them, I deny life altogether. And losing a loved one does not mean losing the love that you hold for them. Love is stronger than separation. And, as always, I will think of the memories as messages - messages from Richie, making sure that I don't forget him.

So, for now, I will put all the Easter baskets, colored eggs, patent leather shoes, and Easter bonnets back into my memory bank. And, I will dwell on my new perspective on Easter. I will celebrate rebirth, the Resurrection of our Savior, and the renewal of my faith. I will rejoice in my newfound perspective, knowing that life is everlasting. And, I will be content in knowing that because God gave us eternal life, the best is yet to come.





Signs and Symbols

By: Betty Ewart, Bereaved Mother, Lewisburg, WV

We had a small group at our *Bereaved Parents* group recently so we just sat and talked about anything anyone brought up. We talked about how, before our children died we might have thought some people's conversations about experiences they had a bit weird, but now we understand and have our own stories to tell.

I have thought more about that in the days since. I think there is something to be said to grieving parents, grandparents and siblings about signs and symbols. How often has a newly bereaved parent told us, “I think I’m losing my mind” or “I just can’t concentrate like I used to” and how relieved they are when we tell them that they are NORMAL –we have all felt that way and experienced that. Maybe some of them – and some of you— have had “signs” too and just haven’t said anything for fear someone will think we have “really gone over the edge.” An old catechism I had to memorize as a child said that a miracle is an “outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace.” As children we used to be taught allegories and to think deeply about things to find a meaning. There was a Santa Claus, an Easter Bunny, Angels, etc. Lucky is the child who is still taught this way!

In the June 16 issue of *TIME*, in the report about the first anniversary of the tragedy at Oklahoma City, the story of the Memorial to be built there was told and every design offered includes what they call the Survivor Tree, in this case an elm tree, that is the only thing in the lot surviving the bombing. One father, who met his daughter there at the tree for lunch, still goes there each day since her death in the bombing and remembers her and talks to those who pass by. This is his sign and continued communication with his daughter.

When we were in England recently, we went into Westminster Cathedral and looked at the memorials to kings, queens, poets, warriors, etc. We lit a candle at the bank of candles for Ruthie and, as we left, I couldn’t help but have a tear in my eyes as I thought of that candle burning there in the great cathedral as a sign to Ruthie that we haven’t forgotten and love her always. The next day we took Chunnel to Paris. As we returned to London and emerged from the Chunnel, we found that it had rained in England. And there in the sky was – not a single rainbow – but a double, beautiful rainbow. In that we saw a sign from Ruthie that she remembers and loves us still too!

As our group talked we found we had things that had happen or that we had seen that we knew we couldn’t mention these things to some because they wouldn’t understand. We wouldn’t have before! But now we do understand and we can tell each other about these signs and what they symbolize to us. So if you have a sign or a symbol, treasure it and don’t let anyone tell you it has no meaning. It has meaning to you! And these signs and symbols are of a deep grace and peace that means much to us all. Share your Survivor Tree, your candle, your rainbow, your butterfly and don’t doubt for a minute that there is a reason for the happening or sign even though you may not know exactly what it is right now.

Lexington

Third Monday of Every Month
6:30 p.m.—8:30 p.m.
Hospice of the Bluegrass
2321 Alexandria Drive
Lexington, Kentucky

Meeting Information



Winchester

First Tuesday of Every Month
7:00 p.m.—9:00 p.m.
Hospice East
417 Shoppers Drive
Winchester, Kentucky

Doors open one-half hour before meeting times to provide the opportunity to visit with old friends and acknowledge new ones. Please plan to arrive early so the meeting can begin on time.

Easter and Grief Work

By Elizabeth Estes, TCF/Augusta, GA

The Easter morning of resurrection should be especially comforting to bereaved parents because of its promise that our children live, and if they do, we shall surely be reunited in some form with them in the afterlife. However, particularly in the first years after Tricia's death, I did not find much joy in singing, "Hallelujah!" I felt God knew about His son, and while I tried not to begrudge Him that, I had no such positive reassurances about my daughter.

When people told me, "God is a bereaved parent, too," I often thought that He made the plan for Jesus' life, and I didn't know that overall plan for Tricia's. God would be more in my position of anguish, sadness and disappointment if Jesus had decided to say, "No, I believe I do want this cup taken from me." Then God's plans would have been thwarted just as I felt mine were. So I didn't get much comfort from God's bereavement. After all, God at the time of Jesus' death was a spirit being and Jesus was an earth being, Jesus' death once more put him on a spiritual plan, thus reuniting him with his father. I wished the reverse could be true for me.

Knowing that I believe about life after death became very important after Tricia died. Had she completed, according to some cosmic plan, what she came to this earth to do and therefore was given an opportunity to leave? So began my quest for "Easter" victory. It's been a long trek, which had to reconcile my traditional church upbringing of blind believing with what became a new spiritual concept of Easter.

Please note that I don't say religious concept. I do believe after much reading, reasoning, and searching that Tricia lives and that one day in some form I will be reunited with her. Through memories of her and our mutual love and respect for each other, I am already reunited with her, transcending the physical limitations of this earth plane. My mind and heart can take me to her whenever I choose. I also intuitively sense that at times she reaches out and touches her earth family and me. I wore her amethyst birthstone ring to her brother's wedding in February, felt she was there with us, and felt her love surround our family.

For the newly bereaved, happy occasions are so often tinged with almost unbearable sadness and tears. After fourteen years, Tricia's presence at her brother's wedding comforted me, brought no tears to my eyes. I felt she was delighted, laughing her clear tinkling laugh, at some of the frantic antics that went on to get that wedding held and concluded.

My husband sometimes accuses me of being a heretic. Possibly I am when it comes to accepting what I was taught to believe before I reached the age of reason and agony. I do know I am more integrated spiritually since I doubted, disputed, and at least partially resolved what I perceived as conflicts between the way life is and the way my religious beliefs had explained it to me. Each bereaved parent will eventually untangle the mystery of his own spirituality if he desires to do that. Certainly, the bereaved should give themselves license to question and reach out for the hallelujah of Easter morning. It's there!

Find A Little Time for Spring

by Sascha, BP/USA Hinsdale <http://www.bpusahinsdale.org/>

Find a little time for spring
Even if your days are troubled,
Let a little sunshine in –
Let your memories be doubled.
Take a little time to see
All the things your child was seeing,
And your tears will help your heart
Find a better time for being.



Taking a Vacation from your Grief

Its summertime and to most people that means hot, sticky days, cool lemonade and spending lazy weekends by the pool. Families are eagerly anticipating their yearly pilgrimage to the beach or the mountains, that special place which brings them peace and solitude and a chance to re-charge their batteries so they are able to take on the coming year. They pack up their bags and their kids expecting another year of rest and relaxation. For bereaved families, getting away from it all is not so simple. You may be able to physically remove yourself from your home, you may even be able to enjoy a walk on the beach with your partner or a ride on the ferris wheel with your kids. But the feelings and emotions that accompany your grief are always there.

For parents whose loss is more recent, those feelings are close to the surface, like a wave that has just crashed on the beach. There is little relief from the sadness, it just keeps coming and coming like waves continually pounding the surf. There are constant reminders that your child is not there. For parents whose grief is not quite so fresh, the feelings are further underwater, bubbling to the surface with less frequency and less intensity, but still there. Time has softened the rough edges of their grief, their loss has been incorporated into daily life, they are surviving. No matter what your plans are for this summer, whether you are going away or plan to stay close to home, give yourself permission to take a vacation from your grief. Allow some laughter and some fun to mingle with the sadness. Having a moment of happiness or a day of fun does not minimize your child's life. It does not make you a bad person because you have allowed a ray of sunshine back into your heart. It simply means that while you will never forget what you have lost, you are willing to hope for the future. A future which is uncertain and constantly changing; churning much like the ocean waters that return back to the shore each day.

An Ugly Pair of Shoes

I am wearing a pair of shoes. They are ugly shoes, uncomfortable shoes. I hate my shoes.

Each day I wear them, and each day I wish I had another pair.

Some days my shoes hurt so bad that I do not think I can take another step.

Yet, I continue to wear them.

I get funny looks wearing these shoes, they are looks of sympathy.

I can tell in others eyes that they are glad they are my shoes and not theirs.

They never talk about my shoes.

To learn how awful my shoes are might make them uncomfortable.

To truly understand these shoes you must walk in them.

But, once you put them on, you can never take them off.

I now realize that I am not the only one who wears these shoes.

There are many pairs in this world.

Some women are like me and ache daily as they try and walk in them.

Some have learned how to walk in them so they don't hurt quite as much.

Some have worn the shoes so long that days will go by before they think about how much they hurt.

No woman deserves to wear these shoes. Yet, because of these shoes I am a stronger woman.

These shoes have given me the strength to face anything. They have made me who I am.

I will forever walk in the shoes of a woman who has lost a child.

Tear Soup, A Recipe for Healing After Loss

Serving Size: One

Helpful Ingredients to Consider:

- A pot full of tears
- One heart willing it be broken
- A dash of bitters
- A bunch of good friends
- A handful of comfort food
- A lot of patience
- Buckets of water to replace the tears
- Plenty of exercise
- A variety of helpful reading materials
- Enough self care
- Season of memories
- Optional: One good therapist and/or support group

Directions: Choose the size pot that fits your loss. It's ok to change the pot size if you miscalculated. Combine ingredients. Set temperature to a moderate heat. Cooking times will vary depending on the ingredients needed. Strong flavors mellow over time. Stir often. Cook no longer than you need to.

Suggestions:

- Be creative.
- Trust your instincts.
- Cry when you want to, laugh when you can.
- Freeze some to use as a starter next time.
- Write your own soup making in a journal so you won't forget.



The sky is filled with Angels
With puffy lacy wings
The remnants of God's beauty
With treasures they now bring

Each one of them a Guardian
That travels in the sky
To watch throughout eternity
Their parents from on high

Smiles that come from Angels
They fall like crystal rain
Eases earthly burdens
Lifting all life's pain

Halos so astounding
That glitter gold each day
Following their loved ones
In such a perfect way

Wings in gentle breezes
That fall from up above
Kissing every parent
With everlasting love

Angels soar through heaven
With everlasting light
Looking down from heaven
Saying their "goodnights"

Kissing all who loved them
So gently on the face
This life's tender mercy
Each parent can embrace

Wings and shiny halos
Travel from on high
Surrounding all their loved ones
They never say good-bye.

Finding Hope

Some find hope in butterflies, and some in children's smiles.
Some find hope in photographs, and some in walking miles.
Some find hope in quietness and solitary reflection.
Some find hope in helping others and sharing friendly affection.
Some find hope in holding tight to all the old traditions.
Some find hope in the creation of a special new variation.
Some find hope in family gathered, some in cherished friends.
Some find hope in seeking God, feeling peace in worship again.
Beyond the sad and beyond the past,
beyond the ache that lasts and lasts,
there is a path that winds its way
into your future and a hopeful day.



Life Can Be Good Again

By Don Hackett, Kingston, MA

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For nearly 16 years, his voice has been silent. It is a span now nearly equal to the time it was heard. Never did I anticipate life without the sounds that marked his presence. Learning to survive that silence once seemed an impossible task, one so overwhelming I could find no hope or expectation of finding life once more. He was our son, our only child. The tempo of his growing measured the cadence, the beat, for our own living. His passing left an existence without any value that I could immediately perceive. Ultimately, I came to recognize that I was wrong.

Life still had meaning, but it had fallen to me to find it, just as it had been in the years before his coming. Indeed, even as it had been throughout the time of his living, life still demanded my active participation, my own commitment to give it purpose and resolve.

Hindsight affords an ease in stating this realization that did not exist while struggling in the depths of bereavement. The steps taken to finally seize life again seem logical and ordered while intellectualizing the process but I know that this is much easier to write than it is to experience.

I confess, with both sorrow and gladness, that I can no longer summon the full measure of those savage feelings and the unremitting pain that engulfed me in those early years. Working through them was the most demanding challenge of my life, enacting tolls in physical health perhaps even greater than the long term effects on mind and emotion.

Today, however, I can reflect with gratitude upon a decade of mastery over the sadness. Control of my thoughts returned to me and I know freedom from the utter devastation of those early years.

Looking back reveals essential turning points on the road to healing. Some would seem to generalize easily for anyone. Others seem to respond to personal strengths and weaknesses more particular to an individual. These points included:

- Self forgiveness for the many deficiencies found within on the endless soul journey that is our lot in the wake of our child's death.
- Forgiveness of others, relatives, friends and associates, who are less affected than are we, who seem unable to help us in our time of deep trouble and need.
- The accepting, at last, the finality of our loss, and that we must gradually unleash ourselves from our former lives and structure anew.
- Learn to communicate value to spouses, friends and surviving siblings, our love for whom seems shrouded behind the totality of our grief.
- Find ways to give expression to our need to some-how memorialize our child, be it through writing a book, planting trees, sustaining scholarships or any number of ways. Our need to preserve and safeguard our child's memory is real and deserving of our attention.
- A time comes for many to find new homes, jobs and purpose. These are often part and parcel of any significant change in our lives.
- Surrender to time, giving ourselves space within it to do our work. Use time to foster healing within, to enable us to grasp today and tomorrow with hope.

No recovery will return us to life as we knew it while our child lived. That life is forever gone and, to a certain extent, we may well have to accept that, as we perceive life today. The finest days of our lives may well be a part of our past. Somehow, we must recognize that this is not unique to surviving our child's death, but is often a portion of the human condition.

Olin is dead. As much as I would wish it otherwise, it will never be. He is not forgotten. His voice, his laughter, his joy, and his shortcomings live on in me.

No day passes without thinking about him. I am grateful for his touch upon my life. Yet, joy is again mine. Pleasure is no longer a forbidden or guilt-producing element in daily living. I live, gladly and with purpose, with Olin both behind me in time, but with me internally.

Is this not our goal, to heal, to find strength to love both yesterday and today? Our children have been the richest part of our lives and today should reflect the grace of that love in all that we are today.