

GRIEF SUPPORT NEWSLETTER

APRIL, MAY, JUNE 2010

SPONSORED BY PRAIRIE DU CHIEN HOSPICE

The "Grief Support Newsletter" is printed quarterly as a reminder of the bereavement services available through the Prairie du Chien Hospice. We realize some of you do not wish to attend a support group, but appreciate receiving our newsletter. You will receive the newsletter for six months after requesting it. If you feel you need to receive it after the six months, please call us toll free at 1-888-439-6680, or locally at 357-2000, Ext. 2264. If you do not want to be on our mailing list please let us know immediately. It is only meant for those of you who feel you can benefit from it.

HOSPICE GRIEF SUPPORT GROUPS

The Grief Support Groups are for those of us who are going through the grieving process of losing a loved one. The meetings have a planned program, but are flexible according to the needs of those in the group. The support groups allow one the opportunity to share feelings and experiences. If you do not wish to say anything, we will respect your privacy.

For more information, please feel free to contact the Prairie du Chien Hospice through our toll free number 1-888-439-6680 during office hours.

Locations:

Prairie du Chien, WI:
PDC Memorial Hospital
1st Thursday of the Month – 7:00 PM
3rd Tuesday of the Month – 5:00 PM

PDC: Facilitator - Barb Stagman, SW
APRIL 8, 2010 – 7:00 PM *
MAY 6, 2010 – 7:00 PM
JUNE 3, 2010 – 7:00 PM
*Changed due to Easter Holiday.

PDC: Facilitator – Donna Lund, SW
APRIL 20, 2010 – 5:00 PM
MAY 18, 2010 – 5:00 PM
JUNE 15, 2010 – 5:00 PM

Dear Friends,

The upcoming months hold many days in which we will remember our loved ones- -Easter, Mother's Day, Memorial Day, Graduation and Father's Day. These days may bring to mind both happy and bitter- sweet memories to all of us. As these days come upon us, may we reflect back on the happy times shared with our loved ones and keep them close to our hearts.

As we remember these days past, let us take what we've gained and learned and weave them into a strong meaningful fabric in which to build our future. Although, at times, grief may be too painful, love is never forgotten or conquered by death. Our loved ones' memories can continue to live on, as we share these precious memories with those around us.

As we close this letter, we want you to know our thoughts are with you and your families. As you some how find the strength to begin each day without your loved ones, we encourage you to continue on and persevere and know you never walk alone. Our Hospice Staff remain only a phone call away.

Sincerely,
Barb, Donna and the
PDC Hospice Staff

EVERYONE IS WELCOME!

HOSPICE UPDATE

By Marsha Konichek, RN
Hospice Director

Dear Friends of Hospice,

I was happy to see the mild March we had. We can only hope that April and May follow suit. In looking at the future, someone with grief may be saddened at the thought but I encourage you to have hope. Hope for more good days than bad. Hope to have more things to look forward to. I would also encourage you to seek out support. Remember that people want to help you but they may not know what to do. They need guidance like you may need support. You do not need to go through your grief alone.

I also want to thank everyone who helped out with our rummage sale and bake sale. It was successful again this year.

Upcoming events for Hospice include Hospice Volunteer Training in April. If you know of someone who may be interested, have him or her contact the Hospice office. The training dates are April 13, 15, 20 and 22 from 5:00 PM to 8:00 PM at Prairie du Chien Memorial Hospital. Persons must attend every session.

I hope you all take care and remember you are not alone in your grief. We are here for you.

Volunteer Spotlight



My name is Yvonne Gillitzer. My choice to become a Hospice Volunteer was an easy one. Some of the things I like about the Volunteer program are there are many ways of helping, such as fundraisers, newsletters and, most of all, helping out the patients and their families through one of the most difficult times in their lives.

IMAGES OF SPRING

Sweet honeysuckle, flowing with nectar,
The sweet aroma of your purity blows over the grave
where she lies sleeping,
Sleeping beneath the sycamore's scaly bark.

Green grass, waving in soft breezes,
Covers the scars of cruelty and hurt with your blades day
by day.

Spring rain, showering the air with your freshness,
Cleanse her wounds and wash away her tears.

Wild flowers grow there.
She too was a tender plant, untamed and beautiful.

Lourene Mackey
TCF, Murfreesboro, TN

MISSING GRADUATE

Parent's happy faces all around me
With a glow from within.
Pomp and Circumstance is playing,
Now the program will begin.
The graduates are lined up,
They are coming down the aisle.
Some have serious faces,
Yet some have a little smile.
I look down the aisle,
Hoping for your face to come into sight.
This is your class,
It was to be your graduation night.
All the graduates pass by,
But none of them are you.
A tug of my heart tells me,
You are not here; your death is true.
God called you home...
I wanted you here in such a bad way.
Looking into your classmates' faces,
Do they recall you, missing this day?
Memories, sweet memories,
Now fill my mind and heart.
There will be no golden tassel,
This day for my Sweetheart.
The class is oh!, so happy,
This isn't the time to be blue.
Now I must go shake a hand,
And get a hug or two.

Emma Valenteen, TCF
Valley Forge, PA

If you have any ideas for topics for the Hospice newsletter or know someone who may enjoy receiving it, please call us at 608-357-2000, Ext. 2288 or toll free at 888-439-6680.

Some articles in this newsletter were reprinted with permission from the following publications:

Grief Digest
Centering Corporation
Omaha, NE 68104
402-553-1200

FATHER'S DAY

Every father believes in his role as protector of his family. He has been assigned the job of fixer and problem solver. He has been told since his youngest days, that he must be strong - must not cry.

But each father among us has to face the point that no amount of fixing, problem solving and protecting has been able to stop our child's death. And inside we must ask ourselves about our failure, and we must face our lack of omnipotence.

Father's Day is often a forgotten holiday, overshadowed by the longer standing tribute to mothers. But for the bereaved father it is a poignant reminder of bitter sweetness. Sweet in the memory of a loved, now lost, child; bitter for the death and pain and recognition of inability to stop what happened. Fathers often do not have a chance to share their hurts and concerns. Often times they are unable to do so, a remnant of childhood learning about the strength and stoicism of "big boys". A father may be uncomfortable opening up to his wife, and the wife who pushed him to talk may be pushing too hard.

Father's Day does not have to be a day when everyone pours out of the woodwork to say, "I'm sorry we haven't talked. Let's do it now." But it can be a time when the family gives Dad a hug, does something special, helps with the chores and mostly lets him know how important and needed and loved he is. It is some of these things that he has lost with the death of his child. And like Mother's Day, the day set aside for fathers does not have to be limited to a Sunday in June. It can be any and every day.

Fathers often show their hurts differently, often internally. But they do HURT.

Gerry Hunt
TCF, White River Jct.

WHAT IS A MOTHER

*It takes a Mother's LOVE to make a house a home,
A place to be remembered, no matter where we roam...
It takes a Mother's PATIENCE to bring a child up right,
And her COURAGE and her CHEERFULNESS to make a dark day
bright...
It takes a Mother's THOUGHTFULNESS to mend the heart's deep
"hurts,"
And her SKILL and her ENDURANCE to mend little socks and shirts...
It takes a Mother's KINDNESS to forgive us when we err,
To sympathize in trouble and bow her head in prayer...
It takes a Mother's WISDOM to recognize our needs
And to give us reassurance by her loving words and deeds...
It takes a Mother's ENDLESS FAITH, her CONFIDENCE and TRUST
To guide us through the pitfalls of selfishness and lust...
And that is why in all this world there could not be another
Who could fulfill God's purpose as completely as a MOTHER!*

NURTURE YOURSELF

By Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D., Fort Collins, Colorado



Editor's note: This is another in a continuing series of articles by Dr. Wolfelt from his recent book, *Understanding Your Grief*.

"There is nothing in nature that can't be taken as a sign of both mortality and invigoration." ... Gretel Ehrlich

I remind you that the word "bereaved," which to our modern-day ears can sound like an old-fashioned term that only a funeral director might use, means "to be torn apart" and "to have special needs." So despite its obsolescence, the word is still accurate and useful. Perhaps your most important "special need" right now is to be compassionate with yourself. In fact, the word "compassion" means "with passion." Caring for and about yourself with passion is self-compassion.

This article is a gentle reminder to be kind to yourself as you journey through the wilderness of your grief. If you were embarking on a hike of many days through the rugged mountains of Colorado, would you dress scantily, carry little water, and push yourself until you dropped? Of course not. You would prepare carefully and proceed cautiously. You would take care of yourself because if you didn't, you could die. The consequences of not taking care of yourself in grief can be equally devastating.

Over many years of walking with people in grief, I have discovered that most of us are hard on ourselves when we are in mourning. We judge ourselves and we shame ourselves and we take care of ourselves last. But good self-care is essential to your survival. To practice good self-care doesn't mean you are feeling sorry for yourself, or being self-indulgent; rather, it means you are creating conditions that allow you to integrate the death of someone loved into your heart and soul.

I believe that in nurturing ourselves, in allowing ourselves the time and loving attention we need to journey safely and deeply through grief, we find meaning in our continued living. We have all heard the scripture, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." To this I might add, "Blessed are those who learn self-compassion during times of grief, for they shall go on to discover continued meaning in life, living and loving."

Remember, self-care fortifies your long and challenging grief journey, a journey that leaves you profoundly affected and deeply changed. To be self-nurturing is to have the courage to pay attention to your needs. Above all, self-nurturing is about self-acceptance. When we recognize that self-care begins with ourselves, we no longer think of those around us as being totally responsible for our well-being. Healthy self-care forces us to mourn in ways that help us heal, and that is nurturing indeed.

I also believe that self-nurturing is about celebration, about taking time to enjoy the moment, to find hidden treasures everywhere—in a child's smile, a beautiful sunrise, a flower in bloom, a friend's gentle touch. Grief teaches us the importance of living fully in the present, remembering our past, and embracing our future.

Walt Whitman wrote, "I celebrate myself." In caring for yourself "with passion," you are celebrating life as a human being who has been touched by grief and come to recognize that the preciousness of life is a superb opportunity for celebration.

The Mourner's Code

TEN SELF-COMPASSIONATE PRINCIPLES

Though you should reach out to others as you journey through grief, you should not feel obligated to accept the unhelpful responses you may receive from some people. You are the one who is grieving, and as such, you have certain "rights" no one should try to take away from you.

The following list is intended both to empower you to heal and to decide how others can and cannot help. This is not to discourage you from reaching out to others for help, but rather to assist you in distinguishing useful responses from hurtful ones.

1. YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO EXPERIENCE YOUR OWN UNIQUE GRIEF.

No one else will grieve in exactly the same way you do. When you turn to others for help, don't allow them to tell what you should or should not be feeling.

2. YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO TALK ABOUT YOUR GRIEF.

Talking about your grief will help you heal. Seek out others who will allow you to talk about your grief as much as you want, as often as you want. If at times you don't feel like talking, you also have the right to be silent.

3. YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO FEEL A MULTITUDE OF EMOTIONS.

Confusion, disorientation, fear, guilt and relief are just a few of the emotions you might feel as part of your grief journey. Others may try to tell you, for example, that feeling angry is wrong. Don't take these judgmental responses to heart. Instead, find listeners who will accept your feelings without condition.

4. YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE TOLERANT OF YOUR PHYSICAL AND EMOTIONAL LIMITS.

Your feelings of loss and sadness will probably leave you feeling fatigued. Respect what your body and mind are telling you. Get daily rest. Eat balanced meals. And don't allow others to push you into doing things you don't feel ready to do.

5. YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO EXPERIENCE "GRIEFBURSTS."

Sometimes, out of nowhere, a powerful surge of grief may overcome you. This can be frightening, but it is normal and natural. Find someone who understands and will let you talk it out.



6. YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO MAKE USE OF RITUAL.

The funeral ritual does more than acknowledge the death of someone loved. It helps provide you with the support of caring people. More important, the funeral is a way for you to mourn. If others tell you the funeral or other healing rituals such as these are silly or unnecessary, don't listen.

7. YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO EMBRACE YOUR SPIRITUALITY.

If faith is a part of your life, express it in ways that seem appropriate to you. Allow yourself to be around people who understand and support your religious beliefs. If you feel angry at God, find someone to talk with who won't be critical of your feelings of hurt and abandonment.

8. YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO SEARCH FOR MEANING.

You may find yourself asking, "Why did he or she die? Why this way? Why now?" Some of your questions may have answers, but some may not. And watch out for the clichéd responses some people may give you. Comments like, "It was God's will" or "Think of what you still have to be thankful for" are not helpful and you do not have to accept them.

9. YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO TREASURE YOUR MEMORIES.

Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after the death of someone loved. You will always remember. Instead of ignoring your memories, find others with whom you can share them.

10. YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO MOVE TOWARD YOUR GRIEF AND HEAL.

Reconciling your grief will not happen quickly. Remember, grief is best experienced in "doses." Be patient and tolerant with yourself and avoid people who are impatient and intolerant with you. Neither you nor those around you must forget that the death of someone loved changes your life forever.

Moving On

By Deb Kosmer, Neenah, Wisconsin

Today someone I loved died. I don't believe it; I can't believe it; I won't believe it. Family comes; friends come. The phone keeps ringing. The door bell rings again and again. The ringing seems far away and I hear it, but I seem unable to answer. My legs won't move. My feet won't move. I am glued to the chair. Others answer for me. They seem to know that I don't remember how.

Tomorrow comes. I didn't want it to ever come. I wanted to go back to the time before you died. There I said it. You died. Does that make it true? "There must be some mistake," I tell myself. Maybe this is just a bad dream I need to wake up from. If only someone would wake me up. When people ask me what they can do for me I try to tell them the only thing I want is you. They look sad, they gently shake their heads, they hug me, and still you're not here.

Your funeral is over. Everyone says I did so well. I hardly cried. Don't they see I can't cry—not yet. I am in shock I hear someone else say, "Give her time, that's all she needs." I wonder, can it really be that simple. If it is, I just want to run through time, however much time it takes to get to the place where I don't hurt so much, don't miss you so badly. But no, I can't do that. Even if I could, I would only be farther from you. My heart cannot bear that.

Days pass. Tomorrow, it will be one month since you died. I wonder how I can just skip that day. I am afraid of it; of reliving every single detail of your death, knowing that one month ago you were here with me and my world was okay. Now I have no world. Everyone keeps telling me I just need to make a new world. But I liked my old one. I never asked to have it taken from me. Even if I wanted to, I don't know how to start over. I don't know where the beginning of that world is or how to get there. Everything is so hard and makes me so tired. I just want to stay in bed.

Days pass and turn into weeks. I am stuck in a world foreign to me wondering where it is you are and how you could have left me. I force myself to go through the motions of living and caring for others. They don't seem to notice it's just pretend, and I am starring in the hardest role of my life. If only they had just an inkling of the place I am in, of my fractured and broken heart.

I never used to read the obituaries. Now I feel compelled to do so. I feel like a kindred spirit to others who must also travel the road I am on. I still feel so alone. Now they will feel alone too. I feel like I should say something to them but I don't know them; I only know their pain.

Months continue to pass. I am back at work, back in church, getting my hair done. It all still seems strange, different, and doesn't matter like it used to. Friends call. Sometimes I say, "Yes, I will go to dinner." Other times I say; "Thanks for calling, but not today." Many days its still easier to just be alone where I don't have to hide my tears when they come, where I can talk to you and not feel strange, where I can just be however I am that day and not try to fit into the place others have carved for me.

Finally, one day I surprise myself. I am humming a tune. For a little while, I feel lighter. I almost smile. I begin to judge myself. What's the matter with me? How can I be even a little happy when you're not here. But then I hear your voice in my head or is it my heart, the place where you live, saying you are glad that I am humming, glad I can smile, encouraging me to live again. I don't know whether to laugh or cry, so I do both. But later that day I find myself humming again, and I smile and I know that I am going to be okay.

Moving on

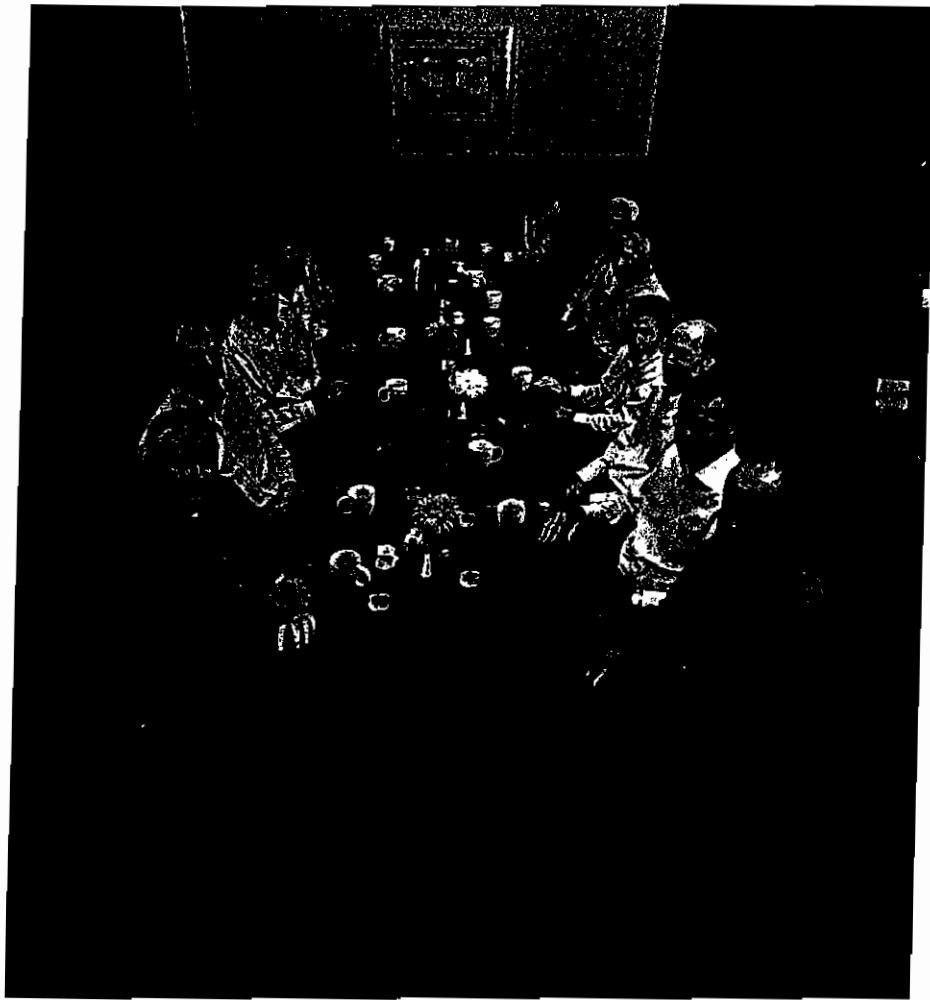
It's what everyone
wants me to do
They all think that I should,
but no one tells me how.

Moving on

Is it some kind of a trip?
Does it require a destination?
I hardly have energy
to be where I am.
Where would I find more?

Moving on

Away from who I am now?
Away from all I have known?
Away from my pain?
Away from your death?
But where could I go
that all of this
would not go with me?
Nowhere, I think
Now if only they'd leave me alone.,
When I am ready,
I will find my own way
To move on,
while taking you along.



The Dad's Group

By Adolf Hansen

It was Tuesday morning, May 23, 2004; the time was 7:00 a.m. The first dad arrived and seated himself at a corner table in the coffee shop of an Indianapolis hotel. A second dad walked into the room, saw the person he was looking for and sat down at the same table. A third dad entered saw the other two and pulled up a chair. Although the three dads had met before, they didn't really know each other.

Jerry's son, Jason, had died just one week after 9/11, and for a couple of months he had attended a grief group composed of several women and one other man, but he found he was not able to express himself adequately in that group. Mark had lost his son, Nick, in 2003 and had also attended a grief group of women and men the following year, but he, too, was not comfortable in sharing what he was going through in that setting. In the spring of 1996, on my birthday and on the eve of Mother's Day, I had lost my daughter, Bonnie. (See *The Last Goodbye* in the April/May/June 2005 issue of *Grief Digest* magazine).

All of us had met before at St. Luke's United Methodist Church in Indianapolis. I met Jerry at a Sunday morning service where I had spoken on the theme, *God Works for Good in Everything*, and had included the story of Bonnie's death. I met Mark at church during the fall of 2003. However, it was Marsha Hutchinson who brought us all together. She had led a grief group at St. Luke's to which both Jerry and Mark had come, but since neither of them had shared deeply of themselves in those groups, Marsha wanted them to meet me, so we could tell our stories to each other.

The three of us met with Marsha the next Sunday afternoon at church. After sharing our stories briefly, we found we really could connect with each other. Marsha asked if we wanted to meet again, without her. We weren't sure we wanted to meet at church, but when it was suggested that we meet for breakfast on the way to work, heads nodded. We agreed to meet the following Tuesday morning at a local hotel's coffee shop that was convenient to all three.

We exchanged greetings, ordered coffee, and began talking and listening—learning more about each other as we tried to figure out what we were really doing, and why we were doing it. The connection between us deepened that morning, and the realization that kept surfacing for each of us was, “Wow! You guys really get it!” It was such a remarkable time we decided to meet again the following Tuesday at the same table, in the same coffee shop. We continued to meet, week after week after week.

Before long, we shared who we were with our server in the coffee shop, Lori Carver. Her genuine smile and her caring presence made it easy to let her know that we were dads who had lost an adult son or a daughter. And her empathetic response encouraged further conversation; she seemed to understand what we were trying to do.

Eventually, information about this group spread to others as well, especially family members and close friends. It wasn't long before the group broadened beyond members of St. Luke's. Two other dads joined the group in the summer of 2004. Each time a new dad joined the group, the “old” dads retold their stories and then listened to the story of the “new” dad. By that fall, three additional dads had joined the group. By word of mouth, the group grew quickly. In the spring of 2005, two more dads came. Now, there were ten regular attendees on Tuesday mornings. It was uncommon for a bereaved dad to visit the group and not continue coming. In the fall of 2005, three new dads came.

By that time, two tables had been placed together to accommodate the group, because the idea of sitting at separate tables had been discussed and quickly declined. The dads wanted to be part of one group. Seating became even more challenging as time went on, because in the spring of 2006, three more dads showed up, including one who had to drive over an hour to get to the coffee shop! On some Tuesday mornings a third table had to be added, particularly when virtually everyone was present. This configuration continued with more regularity when two additional dads joined the group in 2007.

Lori continued to be our server throughout that time. When dads were in deep conversation with each other, she would not interrupt to take orders; she would patiently wait, or leave and return a few minutes later. As a result she became a real friend to the dads. When she became pregnant, she endeared herself to the group even more, because she was carrying a new life while these dads were grieving the loss of a life. On a Tuesday morning in August, 2005, the Dad's Group gave her a gift card to celebrate the birth of her child. She was so surprised and touched, that tears welled up in her eyes, as they also did in the eyes of many of the fathers.

Lori was, and still is, a special person to the Dad's Group! On one occasion she was heard saying, “I can tell there is a deep bond between you guys.” She sensed this in part because she had observed the group, but she also sensed it because she had developed her own bond with the dads. At each Tuesday closest to Christmas she would leave a card on the table with the envelope addressed to “My guys.”

Eventually, Lori accepted a position in management, and she was no longer there on Tuesday mornings. She was truly missed. She had become such an integral part of the group. In September 2007, on her last day to work as a server, she was overwhelmed by the large amount of cash that was in the card she was given. She walked around the circle, hugged each dad, even the last two whom she hardly knew. She wasn't going to leave anyone out.

Over the years, as the group evolved, sharing deepened and broadened. Feelings of all sorts were disclosed, including tears as expressions of profound anguish and pain. It was okay for these men to show their emotions in this setting, because this was a safe place. Over time, other feelings surfaced as well. In the beginning there were few smiles and almost no laughter, but laughter began to interject itself, and eventually the entire group could laugh together. One dad even said, “This is the only group where I can really laugh.”

At first, there was so much to explain regarding the tragedies each dad had experienced. And every time a new dad showed up, every dad told the story of his son's or daughter's death. As a result, the dads heard each other's stories many times, and they began to notice that some of the stories were modified as candor increased and additional details came to light. Dads even helped each other clarify their stories as they made comments and asked questions.

Throughout this process, there was no individual leader of the group. Initially, the first three dads provided leadership, but the group evolved in such a way that leadership became collaborative. The group was never dependent on any one dad to lead.

The Dad's Group believes and practices that there are no rules in the group other than to show up. That was it—just show up! There were no other requirements, though there were some unspoken expectations that emerged:

- Share only what you want to share.
- Speak or be quiet, according to the mood you are in.
- Give all who want to talk the opportunity to do so.
- Be ready to listen with your heart as well as your head.
- Know that you are cared for by the other dads in the group.

On some Tuesday mornings, the dads go around the circle to get caught up with each other on a wide variety of topics, including family matters, job related celebrations or concerns, scores in recent golf tournaments, or experiences on trips out of town. On other mornings the conversation may be sports, politics, religion, personal stories, even jokes—some of which are great and others that are tolerated. There are also many email exchanges throughout the week. When dads leave, either individually or as a group, they often hug each other, give and receive words of encouragement, or make plans to get together by twos or larger groups for other activities.

Hope keeps on surfacing in the group: hope to just make it through another day, hope to get through the difficult times (birth days, death days, and holidays), hope to find strength to go on, hope that more family members and friends will "get it," hope that meaning will be reconstructed, hope that good will come out of tragedy. The dads often provide that hope for each other, and when one is lacking or wavering, others in the group often become his source of hope.

Trust also continues to emerge, as does sensitivity, compassion and caring, but these qualities have taken time to develop, even in a group that is fairly homogeneous. The commonality that brought the group together was the loss of a son or daughter. While the deaths were quite different—vehicular accident, misdiagnosis or negligence on the part of someone else, murder, drug addiction, the taking of one's own life—they were deaths that were tragic. There had been little or no time to say goodbye. There had been little or no time to grieve before the death occurred.

Each dad is encouraged to grieve in his own way, in accordance with his own situation, his own personality and his own grieving style. There is no judgment about right or wrong ways to do it. There is only encouragement to deal with it. Furthermore, there is no judgment of dads because of how the death took place. No dad is thought to be better than any other dad. And no dad is looked down upon for any reason. Each dad lived in a way that showed deep caring for his son or daughter; the manner of their deaths didn't change this at all.

The dads also learned to care about each other beyond the Tuesday morning gatherings. On one very cold and snow-blowing January morning, there was a dedication of the headstone for a son at Crown Hill cemetery in Indianapolis. As one of the dad friends in the group decided to attend, he saw that another dad was already there. Then a third dad showed up. None of the dads knew the others were coming. A fourth dad came, but was so overcome with grief that he couldn't get out of his car.

In March of 2005, four of the dads drove to Muncie, Indiana, a town about fifty miles away, to be present in the courtroom with one of their colleagues at the sentencing of the murderer of his son. In June of the same year, five of the dads attended the dedication of a plaque in a church courtyard in memory of another's son. And on April 7, 2008, three of the dads drove to a rural location south of Greenwood, Indiana, a distance of nearly forty miles, to be present at the dedication of railroad crossing gates that had been installed at the location where two sons had been struck by a train and killed.

There were also many other times when these supportive dads demonstrated their care for each other. When one dad had surgery and unexpectedly ended up in the Cardiac Recovery Intensive Care Unit, dads contacted him and his family, went to visit him, and were stunned when he suddenly died only a short time after the surgery. Many of the dads attended his visitation and his funeral, and the card on the bouquet of flowers from the Dad's Group read: "We love you like a brother."

Another example of caring was when a father was suddenly struck and critically injured by a car on a dark and rainy night. He was taken to the Intensive Care Unit and several dads and their spouses visited with him and his wife during his time of recuperation.

The relationship of spouses to the group began as soon as dads went home and began to talk about their Tuesday-morning experiences. As months passed, interest grew in the possibility of including spouses in some type of social activity. The first was a dinner gathering in a private room at a nearby restaurant. It was an opportunity for the spouses to meet each other. Other social occasions followed in subsequent months in a variety of settings. One of the places where some of the dads and their spouses connected was in church, particularly St. Luke's United Methodist Church, since a number of the dads are members there. However, there are other churches represented in the group as well, but there are also dads who are not active in any local congregation.

The Dad's Group has never been thought of as a church group, even though most have that connection. For those who don't, there is an underlying faith in God that is very important to all the group. It is one of the unifying forces that helps build cohesion in the group.

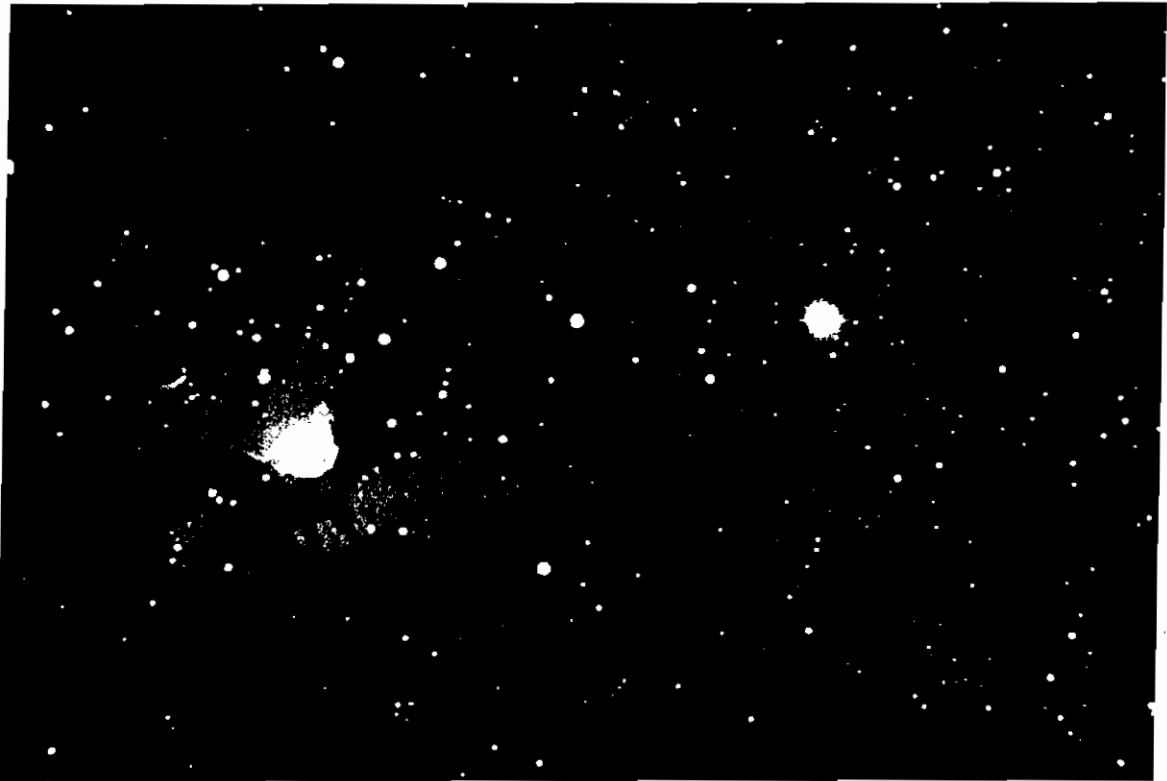
In addition to the incredible caring about each other, there is the mutual support of the memorials that some of the dads have established. For example, three dads sponsor individual golf tournaments, two raise funds for scholarships, and one raises dollars for special needs in the police department. One organizes a run and a walk to raise dollars for a scholarship. Another sponsors a blood drive. Someone else sponsors teams of runners and walkers to raise funds for the American Heart Association. Another raises funds to build safety arms at railroad crossings. Still others have established endowed college scholarships, recognizing students in a way that pertains to the son or daughter being honored.

This Dad's Group believes that good can come out of tragedy—in healthy, creative, and productive ways—in a world that has been radically changed.



TWO PARTS, ONE LOVE

by Rob Anderson, Sugar Grove, Illinois



When our loved ones were physically alive, they were the combination of their bodies and their souls, both loved equally. Those two seemingly inseparable parts created their lives. When they were in our presence, we absorbed them physically. We could touch them, hold them and talk to them.

They were primarily their bodies, which to us was the most essential part of their lives. When they left to go to school or work, when they went out with friends or even when they had just gone to bed, we could still feel them, but we didn't need to focus on that part of who they are because of their physical presence in our lives. They were real and tangible and we always assumed we could call them, wake them, or expect them to come home for us to physically see and hold. Paying attention only to their soul was never part of our conscious lives, even though their souls live as surely as their bodies lived.

Once their physical bodies died, those two seemingly inseparable parts became separated. Their bodies were either buried in the earth or cremated. That part of who they were ended, and since we never had to embrace them as only a life force, we may be tempted to believe that part of who they are ended as well. We thought we'd lost all of them forever; no more body, no more soul, no more life. Our suffering was huge, because we thought our loved ones would never again be a part of our lives.

Our greatest suffering came from the loss of the physical. One moment they were alive, and the next moment they were not. We could no longer touch them, talk to them or physically interact with them, and it seemed to destroy us. The physical that we took for granted no longer existed, and our lives became a firestorm of pain and sorrow. Nothing made sense any more, and searching for their souls only, was something we had never learned how to do.

Learning something new can take time. Even if we're highly motivated it can still be a while before we're able to make sense of something that never made sense before. Ever try to build a car when you've never done it before? The learning curve is very steep. It's the same with our healing and the search for our loved one's souls. Never before did we have to think of them as one dimensional, leaving their bodies behind and focusing only on their life force.

A soul is intangible and untouchable, which can make it difficult to conceive it as real. It's a concept that lives beyond the boundaries of our human reality. We never had to find their soul, so it can take time to learn how to retrieve it and bring it back to us in the form of their life. All we want after our loved ones die is to change the new reality that we can't see or touch them. Our focus lies in our pain from the loss of their bodies. Searching for their souls is a search we have no way of understanding, because we've never had to learn how to do that.

Part of capturing their souls can be achieved by the way we perceive them and our love for them. When they died, everything surrounding them and their lives was referred to in past tense. That's normal; that's how we do it. We say, "I loved him," or "She was a great person." Since we think of their lives as being over, finished and no more, we address everything as an ending. Everything is about yesterday, the past. We tend to believe that since we can't see them or touch them, we have no future with them.

I recently took a class on bereavement training where a woman spoke about a very good friend of hers who had died. She said it was hard for her because, as she put it, "I loved Paul so much." I then asked her a question even though I knew the answer. I said, "At what point did you stop loving Paul, because you referred to your

love in the past tense." It was a difficult question to put into words, since I didn't want to seem as if I were challenging her love.

She got a faraway look in her eyes and said, "You know, I've never thought about it like that. I haven't stopped loving Paul. I still love him." At that point she realized that even though Paul's body was no longer with her, his spirit and his life force did not leave her. The Paul she thinks about is still the man she loves as her dear friend. It's the same way with our loved ones. Death did not take all.

Love has no past tense; we will always love them just as they will always love us. Sadly, we can't love them like we could when they were physically alive. That part of our relationship has ended, which is a hard truth to acknowledge, but critical to our healing. Our entire relationship didn't end when their bodies died. Their spirits and life forces can go on in the present if we allow that to happen. Loving them in the present is a way to keep them close. If we think of them as an "is" and not a "was," they're no longer behind us in the past, but in front of and next to us, in the present. It takes time and training for that to happen, but it can absolutely happen if we fight for our healing.

When you do something in your life you can be proud of, instead of saying, "My loved one would have been very proud of me," say, "My loved one is very proud of me." Our loved ones are proud of us; their life force encourage us to move forward in our healing. And when you tell a story about them, speak about your pride in the present tense, "I am very proud of him for accomplishing that goal," as opposed to saying, "I was very proud of him." You will feel better.

It took training and practice for me to change my belief system, and my vocabulary, to think of my son as an "is" and no longer a "was." I had to consciously fight my life experience of referring to him in the past tense. When he became a present-tense child, I began to feel much closer to him. No longer was my son just the child I lost, but he became the child I had, and will always have. My life became fuller, my healing moved forward.

Death took a lot when it took our loved one's bodies, but death did not take everything. Their spirits and life forces can live on through our memories. Life will never be like it was, but it can be good and have meaning if we recapture their lives and bring them into the present. The person you knew when you put your head on your pillow at night is a person you will always know and always have with you. Not all of them is gone. Think of them as being with you in the present tense, because they can be. Everything they were, they still are. There is no past tense to our loved ones if we let them live in the present.

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