

Stepping Stones

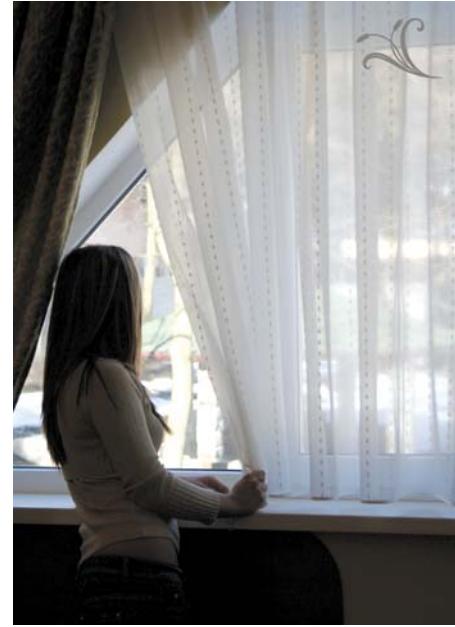
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NEWSLETTER

MANAGING YOUR GRIEF

By Martha Tousley

DOING GRIEF WORK

It is when denial falls away, when you begin to recognize and experience most intensely all the reactions to your loss, that the real work of mourning begins. In ways that are personal and unique to you alone, you will gradually integrate your loss into the framework of your life, as you slowly give up the reality that included the physical presence of your loved one.



Grief work can be done through private activities such as reading and writing, and with others through talking, participating in bereavement counseling or finding support in a group. It is an active rather than a passive process, not only of coming to terms with your loss, but also of finding meaning in it as well. Such work takes enormous energy. It is both emotionally and physically exhausting, and may well be the hardest work you'll ever do, but it can also produce tremendous healing and growth.

IDENTIFYING A PERSONAL SUPPORT SYSTEM

Think about and identify the *people, groups and activities* in your life that form your personal network of support and help give meaning to your life. Consider asking a friend or family member to help you develop a more complete listing, especially if you don't have the energy to do this by yourself. Write down each potential source of support, including their name, telephone number and address, so you'll have them handy when you need them.

People you can depend on might include family members, relatives, friends, neighbors, teachers, colleagues, clergy, your family physician, family lawyer,

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accountant, insurance agent and hospice bereavement staff. **Groups** might include your church community or your affiliation with work or special interest circles, clubs and organizations, and hospice bereavement support groups. **Activities** include whatever brings you satisfaction, relaxation, comfort or relief, such as meditating, writing or journaling; engaging in hobbies (gardening, photography, collecting) or arts and crafts (painting, drawing, modeling); listening to or making music; or simply talking and crying. Other suggestions:

- ◆ List all the interests, activities, hobbies, courses or skills you've enjoyed in the past or always wanted to pursue, and follow up on at least one of them each week or each month.
- ◆ Visit your public library or local bookstore and ask for information, literature, films, audiocassettes and videotapes on grief, bereavement and loss.
- ◆ Find local chapters of national self-help and support organizations related to your specific type of loss.
- ◆ Watch and listen for announcements of lectures, workshops and seminars on grief in the community. (Check local radio and television stations, newspapers and bulletin boards in your grocery store, library, church or school.)
- ◆ Use the keywords *grief* and *grieving* in a search engine to find many helpful sites on the World Wide Web that offer information and support to people who are mourning.
- ◆ If you work outside your home, let your supervisor or employer know what's happening in your life. Assure them that, although you may not be at your best right now, you have every reason to believe that in time your performance will return to normal.

SEEING A BEREAVEMENT COUNSELOR

Sometimes friends and family may worry too much about you, get too involved in your personal affairs, or not be available to you at all. When it seems that support from family and friends is either too much or not enough, a few sessions with a bereavement counselor may give you the understanding and comfort you need.

Unlike friendship, a professional counseling relationship offers you the opportunity to relate to a caring, supportive individual who understands the grief process, doesn't need

you to depend upon, and will allow you to mourn without interference. Within the safety and confidentiality of a therapeutic relationship, you can share your intimate thoughts, make sense of what you're feeling and clarify your reactions. An effective bereavement counselor is knowledgeable about the mourning process, helps you feel understood, offers a witness to your experience, encourages you to move forward, fosters faith that you will survive, and offers hope that you will get through your grief.

Seeing a bereavement counselor is appropriate if:

- ◆ You feel uncomfortable with yourself or find yourself unable to function normally.
- ◆ You have reactions from which you can get no relief, or over which you feel no control.
- ◆ You wonder if your responses are normal, or if they've gone on too long.
- ◆ You have thoughts or feelings you feel guilty about or you're reluctant to share with anyone else.

FINDING SUPPORT IN A GROUP

Unfortunately friends, family members and co-workers may not fully understand or appreciate the attachment you have with your loved one and the pain you may still be feeling weeks and months after the death of your loved one. What is more, your need to talk about your loss may outlast the willingness of others to listen. So later in your mourning a support group may be one of the few places where you can come to be among others who understand, and where you can still talk about the one you have loved and lost.

A bereavement support group provides a safe, structured place where normal, healthy people bound by the experience of loss can come together on a regular basis to share their stories, get their concerns and feelings validated, learn more about the grieving process, express and work through their feelings, and reflect with one another on the meaning of it all. Members have the opportunity to grow by giving help as well as receiving it.

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Support from Others

Author Unknown

Don't tell me that you understand.

Don't tell me that you know.

Don't tell me that I will survive,

How I will surely grow.

Don't come at me with answers

That can only come from me.

Don't tell me how my grief will pass,

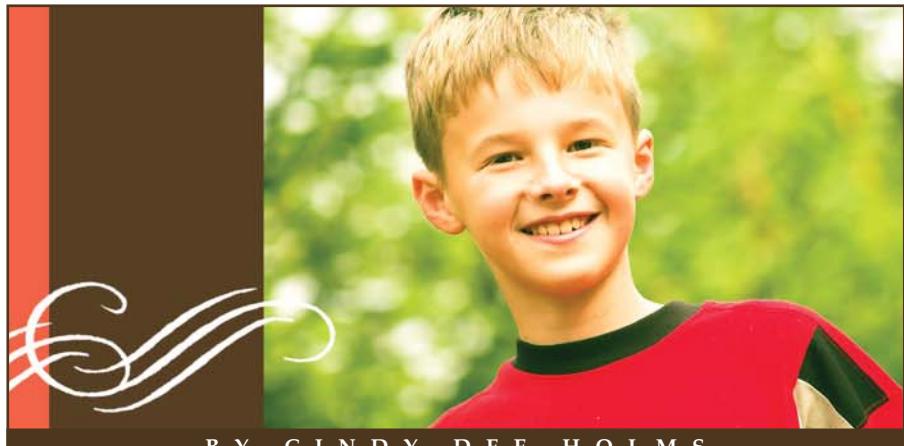
That I will soon be free.

Accept me in my ups and downs.

I need someone to share.

Just hold my hand and let me cry

And say, "My friend, I care."



BY CINDY DEE HOLMS

PLEASE DRESS ME IN RED

In my dual profession as an educator and health care provider, I have worked with numerous children infected with the virus that causes AIDS. The relationships that I have had with these special kids have been gifts in my life. They have taught me so many things, but I have especially learned that great courage can be found in the smallest of packages. Let me tell you about Tyler.

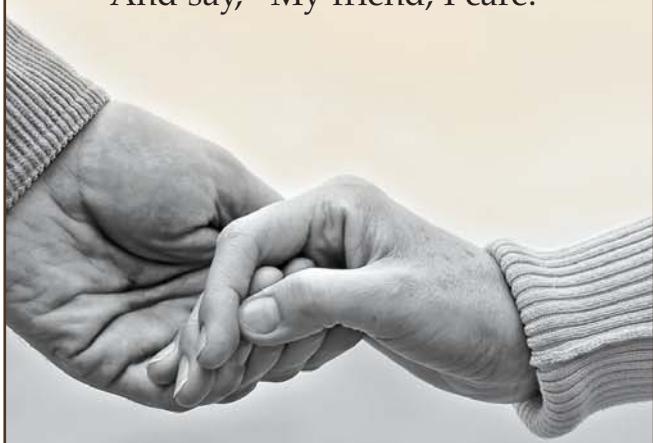
Tyler was born infected with HIV; his mother was also infected. From the very beginning of his life, he was dependent on medications to enable him to survive. When he was five, he had a tube surgically inserted in a vein in his chest. This tube was connected to a pump, which he carried in a small backpack on his back. Medications were hooked up to this pump and were continuously supplied through this tube to his bloodstream. At this time, he also needed supplemental oxygen to support his breathing.

Tyler wasn't willing to give up one single moment of his childhood to this deadly disease. It was not unusual to find him playing and racing around his backyard, wearing his medicine-laden backpack and dragging his tank of oxygen behind him in his little wagon. All of us who knew Tyler marveled at his pure joy in being alive and the energy it gave him. Tyler's mom often teased him by telling him that he moved so fast she needed to dress him in red. That way, when she peered out the window to check on him playing in the yard, she could quickly spot him.

This dreaded disease eventually wore down even the likes of a little dynamo like Tyler. He grew quite ill and, unfortunately, so did his HIV-infected mother. When it became apparent that he wasn't going to survive, Tyler's mom talked to him about death. She comforted him by telling Tyler that she was dying too, and that she would be with him soon in heaven.

A few days before his death, Tyler beckoned me over to his hospital bed and whispered, "I might die soon. I'm not scared. When I die, please dress me in red. Mom promised she's coming to heaven, too. I'll be playing when she gets there and I want to make sure she can find me."

From A 3rd Serving of Chicken Soup for the Soul
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If Tears Could Build a Stairway

If tears could build a stairway
and thoughts a memory lane
I'd walk right up to heaven
and bring you home again
No farewell words were spoken
No time to say good-bye
You were gone before I knew it
And only God knows why.
My heart's still wrapped in sadness
And secret tears still flow
What it meant to lose you
No one can ever know.

But now I know you want us
To mourn for you no more
To remember all the happy times
Life still has much in store.
Since you'll never be forgotten
I pledge to you today
A hallowed place within my heart
Is where you'll always stay.
God knows why, with chilling touch,
Death gathers those we love so much,
And what now seems so strange and dim,
Will all be clear, when we meet Him.

Author Unknown

We are pleased to continue our tradition of caring through these complimentary issues of *Stepping Stones Newsletter* and our professional staff.

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If you have enjoyed this reading, please let us know! We'd love to provide you with additional grief materials and resources to help you cope during this difficult time. If you would like more information, or if you would like to speak to someone who can assist you with filing for veterans' benefits, Social Security and insurance benefits, or who can help you prepare your own or a loved one's funeral plans in advance, please reply to this email, and a funeral home representative will contact you shortly. We sincerely hope that we have been able to brighten your day with this edition of *Stepping Stones*.

Please don't hesitate to let us know if there is anything we can do to assist you.