



GriefConnections

Volume 6, Issue 2

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Empty Arms, Healing Hearts Dana Comstock

Just Those Few Weeks

by Susan Erlin



*For those few weeks-
I had you to myself.
And that seems too short of time
To be changed so profoundly.
In those few weeks-
I came to know you... And to love you.
You came to trust me with your life.
Oh, what a life I had planned for you!
Just those few weeks-
When I lost you,
I lost a lifetime of hopes, plans, dreams, and aspirations...
A slice of my future simply vanished overnight.
Just those few weeks-
It wasn't enough time to convince others
How special and important you were.
How odd, a truly unique person has recently died
And no one is mourning the passing.
Just a mere few weeks-
And no "normal" person would cry all night
Over a tiny, unfinished baby,
Or get depressed and withdraw day after endless day.
No one would, so why am I?
You were just those few weeks my little one
You darted in and out of my life too quickly.
But it seems that's all the time you needed
To make my life so much richer-
And give me a small glimpse of eternity*

Miscarriage is a subject that is often minimized by society. People don't seem to know how to deal with all of the emotions that it entails. In reality, miscarriages occur more often than one may realize. Approximately 1 in 5 pregnancies ends in miscarriage. However, when I experienced a miscarriage last February, I felt as if I were very alone. I had a lot of family support, yet I felt no one could truly comprehend the depths of my feelings. Then I got to thinking, "should I even be feeling this way?" "Am I really making a bigger deal out of this than I should?" These questions that were forefront in my mind and heart led me to search for resources that could help myself and others dealing with miscarriage and the grieving process that occurs when traveling down this winding, bumpy road.

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My journey encouraged me to seek God in a way that I hadn't before and I began to pray and search my heart. I was led to find an amazing resource, "Grieving the Child I Never Knew" by Kathe Wunnenberg. When I received this book, I immediately read through it and knew that this book was something I needed to share with others. It showed me that I was NOT alone. That my feelings ARE real. And, that God's plan is steady. He will walk with me through this journey of grief. The book validated my feelings of loss, anger, and guilt, and yet lead me into a path of forgiving, relating, and most importantly, hope.

In November, I decided to use "Grieving the Child I Never Knew" to start a miscarriage support group called Empty Arms, Healing Hearts. I prayed that others would see a need and be encouraged that other people share the same emotions and are seeking support and help. I discovered that not only was there a need for this group for women having recent miscarriages, but also those that have had miscarriages many years ago. The Support Group has been meeting weekly, using the book as a devotional and guide for discussion. I feel that it has been helpful to me in order to change my perspective about my loss. Sharing my experience with others has also helped me progress in the grieving process.

It is my desire that more women will continue to seek help and support when going through the pain and heartache of a miscarriage. So many times we feel we must grieve in silence, but my hope is that we can support each other. Resources need to be readily available for women to seek the help they need. The Empty Arms, Healing Hearts Support Group meets Wednesdays at 7pm in Room 3 at Victory Highway Wesleyan Church in Painted Post. The group is open to the public. Please feel free to contact me if you are interested (or someone you know) in learning more, or if you simply want to talk!

The Staff & Family at Phillips Funeral Home would like to offer a free copy of "Grieving the Child I Never Knew" by Kathe Wunnenberg to any mother who has suffered the loss of a miscarriage.



Dana Comstock
Support Group Leader

Journaling as a Bereavement Counseling Tool William G. Hoy

For much of my counseling career, I have encouraged bereaved people to write about their grief. Sometimes, those writings have taken the form of collections of letters written to the deceased or files of ideas about "what I would say" if given the chance again. Most of my clients and group members who write through their loss, however, have chosen to keep a journal—a simple blank book in which they record musings, reflections, historical anecdotes, and verbal expressions of their feelings.

Writing seems to appeal to cognitive-oriented people. I find that bereaved individuals who are reticent to speak feelings in a group or individual session can often verbalize them much more readily in words on a page. Journaling also affords a good opportunity to develop metaphors. Finally, journaling creates a running record of the bereavement experience; many times, re-reading my own journals helps me see just how far I have grown in some aspect of life since this time last year or five years ago.

So how do we encourage a bereaved person to begin? Whether in a group or individual session, I often introduce the idea with a question like, "So what do you think about recording some of your thoughts and feelings on paper?" An experienced journal-keeper usually describes his journaling habits, and often has already begun "writing through grief." People who are not experienced journal-keepers likely need help getting started.

Such an individual meets the questions about writing with responses like, "I really don't like to write," or "I wouldn't know where to start." If there is any openness to journal-keeping, I suggest a few prompts to get started:

Write a letter to your loved one. Tell her some of the highlights and low points of your day. Write about the period when you thought about her most or missed her most. This introductory writing—which can be done daily, weekly, or at whatever interval the journal-keeper chooses—is particularly good for expressing emotion.

Journaling as a Bereavement Counseling Tool con't William G. Hoy

Sometimes the affect that can't be orally described is more easily expressed on paper.

Start with a metaphor and create a new one. I have given group members and individuals a metaphor to begin their writing and invited them to create a more exacting metaphor for themselves. Of course, metaphors are helpful in grief because they use some of the characteristics of a familiar object or concept to describe a less-understood issue. Some of the metaphors I have used with clients include icebergs, quilts, and waves.

Describe a favorite memory. One benefit to journaling in grief is the opportunity to more fully describe the details of particularly vivid memories. After my own father died in 1993, I made a list of a couple dozen of my favorite memories from our life together—vacation destinations, character qualities I admired, and quirky habits. Each week, I selected one from my list (adding a few along the way) and gave myself an hour or more just to write about that memory. This proved to be one of the most helpful experiences in moving through that loss. For me, getting away from home and familiar distractions—I went to a fast-food restaurant—proved helpful in writing.

Express regret. Nearly every relationship is characterized by some regrets when that relationship is interrupted by death. Perhaps it is words not spoken or a deed left undone; perhaps it is the hurtful thing said that I now wish could be “taken back.” A grief journal provides a safe, private place to express those regrets. I have had clients who asked forgiveness through the pages of their journal when they had been unable to say the words aloud.

Read entries from a few days/weeks/months ago. After a bereaved person has been keeping a journal for some time, encourage him or her to reread those pages. Often, they will be amazed at the progress they've experienced since writing those words. This exercise is often useful in pointing out not only how “bad off” the bereaved person initially was, but also pointing out how far they've come. Obviously, the longer the time interval, the greater the progress will likely have been.

As this year began, I was drawn to reread pages written in my journals—some more than 25 years ago—back when I was much more disciplined to actually write regularly in a journal! Frankly, I was amazed at some of the concerns that held sway two decades ago, stressors that I hardly even remember now. And, I was also amazed at how insignificant some of the issues of a twenty-something were when looked at from the perspective of middle age!

But rereading some of my old journal entries—my final semester in college, the move from my native Louisiana to California, the months of “courting” the woman who would become my wife, the birth and growth of our children, and a thousand other transitions—also provided an opportunity for profound thanksgiving to God for the growth in the first chapters of my life. And a journal of the grief journey—with which my journal is certainly laced—provides the same opportunity to remember, reflect, and express gratitude.

The Author: William G. (Bill) Hoy is an educator and counselor specializing in death, bereavement, and end-of-life issues. For more than 25 years, Dr. Hoy has counseled with bereaved individuals and families, and over the last several years, has been primarily involved in writing and presenting continuing education workshops for caregiving professionals. He is the author of *Guiding People through Grief*, and his newest book, *Road to Emmaus: Pastoral Care with the Dying and Bereaved*. He teaches in the graduate program in bereavement and leadership at Marian University.

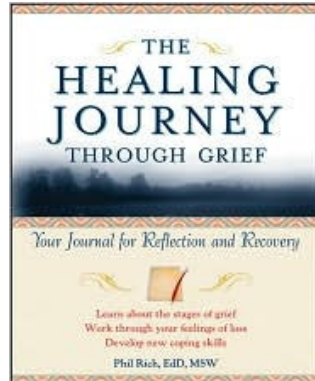
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Memory Quilt 2010

If you would like to design and sew a quilt block in memory of a loved one as a part of this year's Memory Quilt, please contact the Grief Center of the Southern Tier at 607-936-9077, Phillips Funeral Home at 607-936-9212 or Carpenters Funeral Home at 607-936-9927. A Memory Quilt packet will be sent to you. All quilt squares must be completed and returned no later than September 13, 2010.

Do you know someone who would benefit from receiving this newsletter?

Want to receive *GriefConnections* in your email box every month—absolutely free! Simply send an email to: griefconnections@phillipsfuneralhome.com and write SUBSCRIBE TO GRIEF CONNECTIONS in the subject line.

Library Notes

The Healing Journey Through Grief *A Journal for Reflection and Recovery* by Phil Rich

From the Back Cover

"A source of comfort and expert guidance"

Like a knowing and sympathetic companion, this unique journal is designed to help you work through the painful emotions, thoughts, and memories that surface when you have lost someone dear to you. Written by a professional counselor, this book supplies you with important information about grief and the grieving process. But, more importantly, it invokes the healing power of writing to provide you with a means for collecting your thoughts, sorting out your feelings, and taking an active part in your own recovery.

To purchase a copy of *The Healing Journey through Grief*, stop in or call the Special Memories Card & Gift Shop located at Phillips Funeral Home, 17 W. Pulteney St., 607-936-9212.

Upcoming Events**Loss of a Spouse Support Group**

Wednesdays at 6:30 pm at Victory Highway Wesleyan Church, 150 Victory Highway, Painted Post. For more information, contact Sandi Follette at the Grief Center of The Southern Tier at 607-936-9077.

Loss of a Loved One to Suicide

First and third Thursdays of each month at 7 pm at the Hand in Hand Methodist Church on Wardell Street, Elmira. For more information, contact Sandi Follette at The Grief Center of the Southern Tier at 607-936-9077.

Compassionate Friends Support Group

Last Wednesday of each month at 7 pm at Our Saviour Lutheran Church, 2872 Westinghouse Road, Horseheads. If you are interested in joining the group, contact Joann at 562-8090 or by email at jmorgan55@stny.rr.com.

Infant Loss

Empty Arms, Healing Hearts is a support group centered around infant loss through miscarriage. For more information, contact Victory Highway Wesleyan Church at 607-962-7000.

Abortion

Forgiven and Set Free—a post-abortion class. For more information contact Victory Highway Wesleyan Church at 607-962-7000.

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