

## After One Year...

By Phyllis Sewell, in memory of her son

“What I want to know is how do I go on from here?”

Many heads always nod in agreement when this question is asked at a Compassionate Friends meeting. Is that your question, too? It has been over a year since your child has died. In your own way you have met and survived those special days, holidays, his or her birthday and all the events you had anticipated sharing with your child, at least once. Now what? Where do you go from here? Life is going on around you, yet your own life may seem at a stand still. It has had a drastic and traumatic change. A tug-o-war is waging within your mind and body. Part of you wants to hang on tight to the life you knew when your family was whole. But after a year of grieving and crying for your child you realize that life as you knew it is no more. The separation death has brought is daily becoming more real.

If you are at this point in your grief, you know how it is. We are weary and tired from the constant effort and energy it takes to keep moving ahead each day. Possibly we find ourselves putting up a false front and saying “OK”, “fine”, when people ask how we are doing, because we think that is how they think we should be feeling by now. We remember a year ago, when we looked ahead to this time, thinking we would be back to normal, our grief somehow healed and resolved. Now we often seem to be two different people. A person living with the burden of the loss of our child and the emotions, depth of sorrow and pain that only another bereaved parent can understand; and at the same time a person going through the motions of living in the normal world of everyday work, activities, friends and problems, which we are often tempted to let go on without us. A feeling of panic isn't uncommon yet you must have developed some survivor skills if you have come this far.

How do we get out of here and go on without leaving the life of our child behind? Some helpful words might be ‘slowly, carefully, patiently and prayerfully’ accepting ourselves as we are, and truthfully facing our feelings.

Our own son was killed 18 months ago by a hit and run driver. If you were to peel back my outer shell right now and expose my thoughts, you would see that loving, exciting seventeen-year-old we shared so many good times with and my wish to have him here on his nineteenth birthday this month. You would see my desire to know more about heaven and God's plan for eternal life, a deep lonesomeness, fatigue and many unanswered questions. It is strange. I have apprehension as I move back into life, yet a real fear of staying emotionally where I am.

Yes, it is hard work to go on because no one can do it for us. The great effort it takes to get out of bed each morning, to plan ahead for dinner and to make the most out of each day must come from within us. Now is a good time to take inventory of our resources. Do you have your health, home, husband, other children, other family members, friends, a job, faith in God? Do you have talents which have been neglected or something your have always wanted to do which could be developed?

Making an appointment for a health or dental check, deciding to lose those pounds you gained through frustrated eating, planning some special times with your family, initiating contact with an old friend and rebuilding relationships, releasing new energy into your job, taking time to seriously study your faith, enrolling in a class to learn something new may be the boost you need. Do you have strengths of understanding, loving, caring, listening? No doubt you have already reached out to help someone else in their need or grief because you know how that kind of love has helped you.



Last Summer a “Things to Do” list evolved out of my own frustration of not being able to budge, or take even one step forward. Each day I tried to accomplish at least one small task from this list. As I saw little bits of progress, my attitude and depression began to lift. I kept this list simple, thinking of those things which would encourage me to succeed in areas that I was weak, such as housework, planning meals and meeting the needs of my family; yet allowing me time for a quiet half-hour by myself, going out to dinner with my husband, taking a walk, a bike ride or playing the piano and being able to care for others in a helpful way; especially other bereaved families. Of course some days are still hard, but over the months my ability to move ahead has increased. If you are stuck in one spot and the obstacles ahead seem big ones, I encourage you to make a list of your own to fit your own style, talents and strengths. Our life is still worthwhile even as we continue to work through our grief.