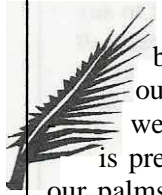


LAMENTATIONS

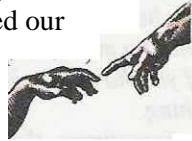
Issue 67

Middle

April, 1998



April 5 is Palm Sunday. In body language, when we have our palms down, we are saying we are not open to anything that is presented to us. When we have our palms up, we are open to what is presented. Not only should we have our palms up, but we should extend them to others, telling others how they can help us. Reaching out to other fellow travelers who need our empathy will help them, as it helps us.



The following are excerpts from several books that have helped me in my acceptance of what others are not doing for us:

James E. Miller wrote the book, ***What Will Help Me?/ How Can I Help? 12 Things To Do When Someone You Know Suffers A Loss.*** He reminds us:

Let's first admit this: those who are there to assist you have a difficult role. In our culture, unlike many other cultures, there are almost no rules that prescribe what others are to do when someone like you has suffered a serious loss. In addition, many people have had little or no experience with loss and suffering in their own lives. Also, it's a subject that our society generally wants to pass over and ignore.

It should not surprise you, therefore, if you find that others fall short in the kind of care they give you, or they don't give you. They may avoid talking about your loss, thinking that's what you want, not realizing you really want the opposite. They may avoid broaching the subject out of their own discomfort, not realizing that almost everyone feels as uncomfortable as they do.

Once you begin speaking, these people may not give you the opportunity to say as much as you need to. They may not want to express as much emotion as wants to come out. They may compare their own very different and much more limited losses to yours, thinking it will forge a bond between you, when it may actually create a distance between you. They may offer you a variety of clichés, thinking it will help. Perhaps you've heard some of them already, like, "God doesn't give you more than you can handle," or "I know exactly how you feel," or "Cheer up. It could be worse."

Someone who is with you regularly in a helping capacity may find it hard to let you have the privacy you sometimes crave. Others may not give you the follow-up you deserve. Some may offer you too much advice and not enough understanding while others may want to take too much control and leave you too little freedom.

In short, your helpers may be awkward in their helping, just as you sometimes feel awkward in needing help.

It will be up to you how you respond in this delicate situation. On the one hand, you may feel tired and out of sorts. Your patience may be wearing thin. You may feel that you deserve better treatment. At the same time, you may not want to make waves. You may hesitate to risk offending someone who is important to you. You may be unsure what is proper and what is not.

There will probably be times when your forgiveness is what will work best. Often people's hearts are really in the right place, even if that doesn't appear to be the case initially. There will probably be other times when your honesty will help those others improve their care giving skills. If people like you do not inform them, they may never learn until they experience their own serious loss. And that may be a long time. There may also be times when

you choose to state your position with the full force of your firmness and conviction. Only you can decide.

And old expression goes, "And adversity not learned from is an adversity wasted." One learning that may come from this adversity of yours is what good care giving is all about. You may be able to help others become better caregivers today, while you are on your way to being a better caregiver yourself tomorrow.

Mr. Miller has written many helpful books, including ***How Will I Get Through The Holidays***, which was reviewed in a past issue of **LAMENTATIONS**. His video tapes are wonderful (or as Young Jim used to say, "Awesome!") and take you to a "safe, and peaceful place" while you are watching them. I highly recommend anything that he has written or any video that he has produced. Each time you view a video, you get a new and different perspective.

You may contact him about his books or tapes at:

Willowgreen Publishing:

Telephone # - 219-424-7916

Fax # - 219-426-3002 E-mail-

jmiller@willowgreen.com

Janice Harris Lord wrote, ***No Time For Good-byes***, a book on coping with sorrow, anger and injustice after a tragic death. In her chapter, ***Spirituality***, she stated:

Others are confused and frustrated with the things people say about God. They wonder why, in the trauma of staring an ugly death in the face, anyone would dare talk about "eternal life" or "heaven" as if that should take all their tears away.

Friends, relatives, and even the clergy may say religious things which can hurt more than help. Almost always, these people mean well. They want to help you feel better. They may not know how. Or more likely, they may not understand that feeling better is probably not possible for some time, and that all you really want is for them to join you in your suffering. It is also possible that you might misunderstand what others mean when they talk about God.

If this line of reasoning doesn't make sense and is unacceptable, you will probably feel angry and resentful about the explanation. You may identify with the Jewish leader who responded. "Oh. I hope not "when asked if there was a meaning to the holocaust.

Why, then, do they so often use the phrase, "It was God's will?" It is an easy answer to questions they don't understand.

Persons who relate to you after the killing of your loved one are usually nervous and anxious. They want to be helpful. They want you to feel better, but may not think before speaking.

The role of a Higher Being in what happened to you is your own faith decision. If you believe that somehow it was "God's will" that's fine. If it doesn't make sense, try to understand that those who say it mean well. They may be sharing their own faith decision and are not trying to hurt you.

You will need to decide, based on your own life experiences and religious convictions, what to do about forgiveness. It is a difficult task. If others imply that you should offer forgiveness, tell them it is an important matter and that you will handle it in a manner that your integrity allows.

Because most of the people who love you feel inadequate in helping you feel better, they wish that God would do it for them. They especially wish that their God would be present in you. Thus, words which may sound overly simplistic and trite. actually may be expression of their own genuine concern.

The following are some guidelines for dealing with the religious dimensions of your suffering.

- Look for someone who has had an experience similar to yours who also has a meaningful religious faith. If you feel comfortable doing so, ask that person how their faith is helpful to them. You may not be able to share their experience.

- Avoid discussion with religious people who use God as a simple answer to complex questions. Try to accept the fact that their faith journey may have been different from yours.

- Try reading a few chapters from the Book of Psalms in the Bible—perhaps Psalms 23 and 139. Write in a journal or notebook what they mean to you.

- If you continue to be troubled about religious feelings or beliefs, contact a hospital chaplain or a counselor of your religion. These people have had special training in accepting and dealing with grief. Or you can seek out a pastor, priest or rabbi who has previously been helpful to you or others.

John Munday with Frances WahJoehaus-Munday, wrote, **Surviving the Death of a Child**. She gives us good advice:

Many people whom we would expect to behave otherwise run away from bereaved people and try to avoid contact with them. e'ven when they are aware of their responsibility to help.

Ministers, rabbis, and priests may stay away because they know the bereaved is in pain and they don't know what to say.

Estimates suggest that a large number of parents who lose a child drop out of church. The largest single reason that these parents drop out of church is mistakes made by the minister, rabbi, or priest.

The second largest reason why parents drop out of church is the congregation. They offer no oil of joy for mourning. because they, too, do not know what to say. Finally, friends and relatives may mean well but say the wrong thing also. These people do not intend to isolate or harm the grieving parents. They just do not know what to say.

Often, in such relationships. parents' pain and hurt build up and, instead of healing, greater stress occurs in a marriage.

The tragedy of all this transfer of anger is that it could be prevented or at least limited. If friends and family would talk together and try to express how they feel, perhaps they may not make the pain worse. Perhaps the time they spend together would be healing instead of harmful.

It is fair to want to know what to say to those who are in such great pain. It is fair for them to want to know why no one will talk with them. It is important that people communicate during the early time of grief, and so it is important to find. out what to say.

Much of the behavior that damages or ruins relationships can be prevented. There are two general guidelines to keep in mind at all times. Whether one is clergy or spouse or friend, neither is easy. First, it is important to listen to the bereaved, listen long after you think that no more needs to be said. Second, if you have to talk, don't say the wrong thing.

Sometimes, the terrible feelings and the stress overshadow the fact that there is a real need to talk and be talked to. It is important that those who would offer comfort be physically present as well as emotionally supportive, no matter what the grieving parent may say.

The overriding principle of grief ministry is just simply being there for the bereaved.

The bereaved want others to comfort them, particularly others who have been there and really understand.

It is good to allow the bereaved to cry and to encourage them to continue crying if they show signs of starting.

Let the bereaved friend or family member tell the story. Over and over and over.

Be a long term listener, not just on the first day or the first week but in the weeks and months to follow.

Recognize that if you start to listen, you will be expected to continue listening. You will not be expected to have the answer, just to listen. Even after a year, do not be afraid of silence and listening when you are with the bereaved person, if the bereaved is important enough to you that you began a listening relationship, that person is important enough to continue it.

Above all, let your bereaved friend set the time schedule for healing. Unless you have been there, you will not know how long *it* takes. If you have been there, you know it takes forever, but there are stages of healing. Let each person walk that journey at an individual pace, crossing the stepping stones one by one. And remember to be there, offering them a needed hand.

How many times do well meaning friends act just like Peter, James and John? Jesus said he needed them to be there for him, and they could not even keep their eyes open. They did not have the energy to support their friend, especially since they didn't even understand why there was so much grief.

Grieving parents need and expect others to be with them. They want to talk about what has happened. Their expectations can be met, but only when we are present. And those who sit with the bereaved need just as much as did Peter, James and John to learn what to say at such a time.

For the most part, talking with the bereaved is a process of accompaniment, of being there.

The one trying to reach the bereaved has not performed any magical act but, rather, has just been there, doing something the loved one might need. Notice, and appreciate. These small acts of love and concern often start the healing.

Roger F. Miller wrote, **What Can I Say?, How to Talk to People in Grief.** He stresses the importance of empathy from the view point of a pastor, and one whose father has died:

Whenever I was in a situation playing the role of the pastor, the caregiver, their source of emotional and spiritual support, I was very conscious of that role and because I really cared about the people. I tried my best to do and say things that might be genuinely helpful to them in their time of grief. I tried to do and say things that would give both comfort and support and provide a basis for spiritual growth in the future. I used words and silences that were carefully chosen. I consciously avoided clichés and platitudes because I knew that if the words sounded empty to me, they would

surely sound empty and insecure to those I was flying to help. Sometimes there seemed to be nothing helpful that could be said in that situation, nothing meaningful to say, so I would just sit with the family, maybe just holding a hand, feeling helpless and inadequate in the silence.

I'm convinced that the effectiveness of comforting words lies not in the words themselves, but in who offers them and in what way. I realized that I had really been helpful to those families in grief primarily because I had been present during their hurting times.

My wife, Evie, noticed long before I did that right after I said, "Oh so so," the ministers' eyes would glaze over and they would begin shifting from foot to foot until a graceful exit could be made. After this happened several times, it finally dawned on me that while these ministers made inquiries about Dad, it was more to be polite than to render much emotional support to me. The realization that these colleagues did not want to share their gift of presence with me was a very hard thing to handle. Now, years after Dad's passing, I still feel some resentment toward those who extended their gifts of presence by asking about Dad, but who then snatched them away.

I asked myself why they would do such a thing. Perhaps they were made painfully aware of their own mortality by the knowledge of such misfortune so close to home. Or maybe in their eagerness to escape their congregations, relax and loosen up a bit. They didn't really want to hear anymore bad news or deal with any more grief.

When we offer our gift of presence to one in grief, the offer must be sincere. We must be willing to follow through with the emotional investment if we are the ones to make the initial offer.

When we know of someone who is grieving, and we decide to give that person emotional support, we must, to the best of our ability, make ourselves physically and emotionally available. We have to become vulnerable to the same kinds of pain and hurt that the person in grief is experiencing. We need to realize that more important than our word, is our presence. and unless what we say is totally tasteless, the help we give lies not so much in what we say, but in the fact that we are there.

From How To Form Support Groups and Services for Grieving People by Therese S. Schoeneck, these suggestions are made:

The minister is the symbolic presence of God. A pastor is the shepherd. The friend, the one who is called on to lead people through grief.

Not all ministers are equipped to do grief work, nor do all ministers understand grief (and their pastoral responsibilities) as much as they might think. It is important to encourage your ministers to take advantage of ongoing, continuing education opportunities in bereavement caregiving.

Parishioners need to know that they can be free with their clergy, much like Jesus wrestling with God in the Garden of Gethsemane. They will lash out at the clergy who come resent them, resist them, mistrust them, and then feel abandoned by the very clergy who come to help. Isn't that, in part, what Jesus felt in those first few words uttered from the cross? It may be terribly unpleasant to be the target of such arrows, but it is healthy for the bereaved.

Meg Woodson wrote, **Making It Through The Toughest Days of Grief:** Meg gives these suggestions:

Another thing you might do as a griever in a non-feeling church is to try to change the church.

Speak to your minister about your unmet heart needs. Ask other members of the congregation to express similar needs.

Ask your minister for what you need. He may not know. You may get it.

If there's no way you can get what you need in your church, however, you may want to change churches.

Be with God any way you can, my fellow griever, but don't give up on the regularity and structure church gives to the feeding of your spirit unless you must. Don't give up on the company the church provides for your journey. Keep all finding ways to make church easier for yourself.

Make up for what it cost me to go back to church by thinking of all it has given you.

Grief Grafts

I want to share the experience I had with the pastor of my church, where we have been members for 28 years. I am not telling this to hurt him or his reputation as a pastor, but to let you know that many of us have not received the care we so desperately need:

The night Young Jim was killed, our pastor came to our house ... sat on the Font porch, and I felt that he tried to stay as far away from us as possible. He did not have prayer with us, but one of our faculty members at Cumberland College had prayer with us. Our son was an active member of our church ... attending his Senior's Baccalaureate service at our church the night prior to his death. (Jim had the great honor of delivering the Baccalaureate to Young Jim and his fellow classmates.)

After Young Jim's death, our pastor never visited us. After 6 weeks of waiting, I asked one of our Friends to tell him I would like for him to. He tentatively walked up to the front door. He knocked lightly, (I believe, hoping I was not home), and had a frightened look on his face when I answered the door and invited him in.

*He handed me a book to read and I told him to better understand God and death. This book, **The Will of God**, by Leslie Weatherhead, had been given to Young Jim as a graduation gift, the day before he was killed. My pastor didn't want to discuss the book and kept himself busy writing an acknowledgment in the front of the book.*

He told me that one of the hardest things he has ever had to do was to preach in the pulpit the Sunday following Young Jim's death. He said he kept thinking that it could have been his daughter, to which I replied. "But it wasn't."

We talked for a while, I doing most of the talking, and then I asked him if he

would like to see Young Jim's room. That scared him ... he was probably thinking that we had a "shrine" to him. We had already taken Young Jim's bed out and had turned it into a sitting room with pictures, etc. of him. The pastor didn't spend much time looking at the pictures and was in a rush to leave. As he was walking out the door, he said: "You have helped me so much." What a shock!

This was the same man who came to the operating room just as I was going in for an operation, and told me that my mother had just been placed in a nursing home.

Months later I started talking to him about offering a grief support group in our church. He polled the church and there was no response, so he felt there was no interest. I felt that the disinterest showed how much this program is needed and continued to talk with him,

Two years later we started a group. I being the only one who had lost a child. At the next support group meeting we had, there was one other mother who had lost a child.

After this episode with my pastor, I realized that if I was not receiving the help and support that I needed, others who have lost children must also be going through the same isolation. Thus, I began contacting parents when I found out that they, too, had had a child to die. The correspondence was becoming so great that I started writing one letter and copying it, much like people do at Christmas. As a result of this, LAM-ENTATIONS was "born."

I have truly felt that God has given this mission to me, for whatever time, and I will continue until I feel that I have fulfilled my mission.

As a result of my pastor's ineptness in helping me. I have the privilege of getting to know you and your children. Of course, I would prefer never knowing you if that meant that we would all have our children.. but that is not an option. I hope that each of you will find a "mission" in helping others. It can be anything, just get into action in

*some capacity. Perhaps you can help your church in starting a grief support group. I am anxious to hear what differences you are making in this area. Remember: **If it is to be, it is up to me!***

Jim's symbol is a Pegasus and angels.



Jason Minkin (8-22-72), the son of Jerry and Gwen, was killed in an automobile accident, 12-21-96. The Minkins have a webpage for Jason virtual-memorials.com and their E-mail address is jerry12@aol.com This is part of their webpage:

Jason was born, August 22, 1972, in Freehold, New Jersey. Our family moved to Manalapan, New Jersey in December 1975. There Jason attended the Manalapan-Englishtown public schools and later graduated from Manalapan High School, May 1991. Thereafter, Jason went to Brookdale. The College of Monmouth, where he received his A.A. Degree, in Business Administration, December 1996. In addition, Jason also completed a Health Technician's program as a certified Pharmacy Technician.

As Jason always had an interest in modeling, he enrolled in the Barbazon School for Modeling, where he completed their program and did some promotional work, while he was going to school. After having a professional photo shoot, he put together a portfolio for presentation to some of the local agencies.

Jason most recently was admitted to Rutgers University, where he had planned to further his education and pursue a Bachelor's Degree.

Jason was very active in sports as a youth and participated in the township recreational programs, over the years, where he played soccer; basketball and baseball.

I am writing this in loving memory of my son. Jason, a very special person in my life, who was and always know where to start, as there is so much I wish to express and describe about my feelings for him and the very special relationship we shared.

My wife and I were very blessed when he was born and for the 24 precious years he was with us, bringing much joy and happiness into our lives. Jason has a loving sister with whom he shared many special moments over the years. As a loving, caring father, having two wonderful children, I looked forward to being with them every day, sharing in their lives while growing up, and trying to do everything I could to make their lives enriched and rewarding.

Jason was always full of life and love. As a very caring person, he developed close friendships and relationships with many people. He struggled hard to achieve difficult goals for himself but his desire and persistence enabled him to accomplish what he planned for himself at this time.

With his high sense of values and his lifestyle over the years, he truly developed into a fine young man who I am so very proud of.

When we found out suddenly that we lost him, in an automobile accident, our lives came to a sudden stop. With such disbelief it took quite some time for us to realize that this was real and that we would have to get on with our lives and do everything possible to keep him alive as a part of us. Jason is with us in our hearts and in our minds every day of our lives. Wherever we go and whatever we do, I know we are all together.

There are so many memories we have of Jason, to look back on, remember and cherish, for which we are very fortunate. We miss him dearly, but Jason will always be with us to forever love. Love ... like a wildflower garden thrives and grows in our hearts.

Jason was loving, caring and very devoted to his parents, Gwen and Jerry and sister Alyse and always there for his many friends.

Upon reading it and seeing some of the symbols of the other children, Jason's symbol could very well be a NY Jets Football helmet and a black cat. These are two of Jason's special passions. Our Cat Shadow, who Jason personally picked for us and loved dearly, and being a big football fan .. we enjoyed rooting for our team together~ over the years.



Psamantha (8-10-82), the adopted daughter of Gary and Diann Foster, died from an asthma attack, 3-17-91. Diann shared two different experiences:

Since my husband, Gary, is a minister, it is hard to understand how insensitive many pastors are.

I asked Gary to write something, but now that Brittany has died & we're trying to cope in the midst of overwhelming grief, I'm not sure he will.

We live in a small town with no hospital chaplain. Therefore ministers take turns being on call. When Psamantha died, the first chaplain to arrive was very supportive. The second one showed up after we were told Psamantha had died & while we were in the Chapel. This man came in & said he was going to pray. When he was finished, I wanted to kick him. I guess the only reasons why I didn't was because I am not a violent person & I was too numb & shocked by his words. Gary just told him we wanted to be alone as a family & to please leave.

This man's (I refuse to say he was clergy!!) prayer consisted of how happy Psamantha was to be running in heaven & how we should be "rejoicing" to have her "out of her misery" & how we as a family, if we are "true Christians," will wipe our tears & be an "example to the unchurched." Well, I know Psamantha wasn't in misery. Her life was not "miserable". Second, my biblical beliefs do not hold with her dancing around heaven at that moment. And as I traveled down this grief road, I realized that Jesus cried at Lazerus' grave. He did this even though He knew Lazerus would walk out in a few minutes. Doesn't this tell us that Jesus cries when we cry? And according to my Bible, our tears will be wiped away only when we are all reunited in the New Jerusalem where there is no more death & sorrow. As for being an example to the unchurched, my mother told me this every time someone died--my grandmothers, my uncle, etc. Well, what she did was just make me keep my grief private. Sure as a Christian, I do have the Blessed Hope, however, that does not mean I cannot express my grief in whatever way is right for myself--as long as it's not illegal or hurtful to me or my family.

The person who had the funeral service never visited or contacted us after-

wards. Six months after Psamantha's funeral, the man who preached it was relieved of his post because of adultery. He admitted it was going on with multiple partners when he preached Psamantha's funeral. How could he preach my daughter's funeral, with his wife & children in attendance, yet be doing such things? Even though this is not the first clergy who I've personally known who had a sexual problem, I felt violated by the honor we gave him.

As far as the way I view clergy now, it's in a more negative way. I do not trust them. (I do trust my husband & a few other pastors, but most I don't) I have no desire to be a part of the "general pastor wives' social scene" & have distanced myself from those women. Before Psamantha died, I would ask for the chaplain when I or one of my children were ill. Now I don't. This summer, when a hospital chaplain at a Lexington hospital visited one of my foster children's roommates, I left the room with my child until he had finished his visit. I felt a lot of mistrust & felt he was intrusive when he talked to me & my daughter. I didn't ask for him, the roommate's family did.

However, my spiritual life is stronger. I have a more personal relationship with God & I know He is God & is in charge & that when I allow Him to carry my burden, He gives me an easy yoke & a light burden.

Shortly after Psamantha's death, Gary & I took a leave from all pastoral duties for almost a year. At the time, we did not know this is really what is recommended, but we are happy we followed our instincts. We did this with no support from anyone because "you need to keep busy" & "get things back to normal" & "go on with your life."

My hope is that the clergy will open their eyes & ears & be supportive of those who are grieving.

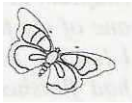
Today I realized that my grief is not different because Psamantha was our child & Brittany a foster child. It is different because the girls were different & we are mourning the loss of their uniqueness & our relationships. At least I know this

time around that my lack of concentration is not due to "craziness." It is a normal part of grief.

Brittany Ann, who was with us for four years, died 2/21/98, not from her birth or normal medical disorders. The doctors say we may never know why. I am hurting so bad, I'm not sure if I'll live or not, but then I know I will.

I will say that the Chaplains at UKMC were very good, however, the speaker at her funeral left much to be desired. He was NOT to have been there, but another preacher was ill that morning & called him. Good thing, it wasn't me in charge. I would not appreciate someone who I asked to speak, getting someone else without consulting me. Anyway at the end of his "words" among which were several stating he would scare everyone into heaven!!! he invited all present to the revival he was preaching!!! I am just so thankful the parents wanted Gary to be a part of the service & he was able to personalize Brittany's life & the happiness she brought to us all.

Love, Diann Foster



Psamantha's symbol is a butterfly.

Brittany Ann, a foster daughter of Gary and Diann, died of pneumonia, 2-21-98. Their E-mail address is, djane@eagleweb.net. Diann tells us about Brittany:



This is the tribute I wrote for our friends. Brittany's symbol is a Teddy Bear as she loved her stuffed animals.

FAREWELL TO BRITTANY ANN

Brittany joined our home on October 14, 1994, at age 3. She was placed with us because her medical needs were too much for her present foster family.

Brittany had a brain lesion & Intractable Seizures which means her seizures were uncontrolled with medicine. Although Brittany was often so ill she was comatose, we, as a family, met the challenges of medicine changes, side effects, and still lots of seizures.

In June 1997 Brittany was hospitalized once again for seizures. During

that time, in consultation with specialists & dietitians, social workers & us, we decided to try the Ketogenic Diet. She began it in August 1997 & within two weeks we saw miraculous results. Before this we had seen glimpses of Brittany's personality, but now we saw many smiles & laughter, she crawled all over the house playing ball with Paul or the dogs. She would untie our shoe strings & reach up to get our papers. And she rarely slept. I guess she had slept so much of her life, she didn't want to miss anything else that might happen.

On February 16, 1998, Monday, she was diagnosed with a "little pneumonia" & admitted to the local hospital, but that same night was transferred to Lexington when her liver tests came back very high. Tuesday morning she was put on life support, but improved until early Friday morning when a CAT scan showed severe brain swelling. Friday afternoon. Gary & I, Brittany's birth parents, the social workers, doctor & chaplain met together. Friday night Brittany's condition steadily worsened & she died Feb. 21, 1998. Diann was with her at the end & held her the whole time. The medical staff was very supportive & treated us equal with her birth family. Our family traveled to Paintsville, a four hour drive, for the funeral. Gary & I bought the casket spray & her birth father had the florist prepare a card attached saying it was "In Loving memory from the foster family." & listed all our family member names. Gary was also asked to participate in the funeral service where he gave the eulogy & shared some of the special times we had with Brittany.

We thank God for the privilege of having Brittany share our home & lives. We miss her a whole lot, but know that soon & very soon our Lord Jesus will come & we will be reunited never to part again. On that day, Brittany will not need a helmet to protect her from injury due to her seizures, a special diet or her wheelchair; she will walk & talk & sing & grow up in a perfect world.

Pat and Ann Dawson's son, Andy (4-7-79), was killed in an automobile accident, 12-21-96, The Dawson's Email address is, quitr13@aol.com. Ann gives some of her experiences:

Rosemary Smith has provided me with great solace in the time since Andy

has been gone. I don't need to tell you what a comfort it is to be able to talk with other people who are "fellow travelers," as you put it, on this difficult journey.

My 18 yr. old son, Andy, died July 27, 1997. I'm responding to your query about how church communities helped. We had quite a lot of help from our church. I am a Catholic. Andy was in the hospital in a coma for a week before he died. One of our priests was with us every day. Mid-way through the week, Andy was helicoptered to another hospital 80 miles away. Our assistant pastor drove up there and was with us praying for Andy the night before he died. When we returned home the next day he was at our house, waiting for us. Our pastor came over that night and spent time with us. Our high school hosted a crisis intervention for Andy's friends and our priest, Father Jeff, attended to lead the kids in prayer. He also spent time with Andy's friends, cousins, and siblings before and after Andy died, praying with them. He continued to call us regularly after that to take us to lunch, or just be there for us. He called my daughter a few times when she had to leave to go back to college a few weeks after Andy died, to see how she was doing. He put me in touch with a cousin of his who had lost a son and we began a correspondence. Our bereavement group from church contacted me a few times and invited me to attend their sessions, but I wasn't up to going to them. However, one of the women from the group called me to come and visit with her. She had lost a daughter a few years ago, and I have spoken with her. Almost 2,000 people attended Andy's funeral, and a large number of them were members of our church. We were overwhelmed with flowers, food, cards, etc. In addition to our two parish priests, 2 priests from 2 other parishes who knew our family presided at Andy's funeral Mass without our even asking them to. I would have to say that we have been most fortunate in the support we have received from our church

during this time. I came to realize that it truly is through the works of others that God is allowed to do his work here on Earth. In those horrible days after Andy died, I thought God had abandoned me, but through the caring of so many people around us. I was able to feel God's love and presence. This helped me understand a little more the mystery of the purpose of our lives here on Earth. Thank you for all you do for grieving parents. You, too, are a sign of the Father's love in my life.



Andy's symbols are a star, football helmet and the #66.

Cherie Million's daughter, Jennifer Lynn DeShone (10/13/84), was murdered, 4/29/97. Cherie shares her tragedy and a poem written by Jennifer. Their E-mail address is jenner@swbell.net

Jennifer was tragically taken from us on April 29, 1997. She was brutally murdered in cold-blood by Christopher Derrick Kinion. She was 12 years old and the light and soul of my life. I miss her more than words could ever expressMy life and the lives of anyone that knew Jennifer are forever changed ...

But the one person's life who has changed most of all is Jennifer's.

I'M UP HERE

I'm up here
 You're down there
 Nothing between us - but a mile of air
 Where I sail - clouds pass
 Where you run - green grass
 Where I float - birds sing
 But the one thing that keeps us
 together is Kite strings.

Written by: Jennifer Lynn DeShone
 1997 - age 12

Jennifer's symbol is the Sunflower ... we planned some just one week before her murder ... I had them at the funeral and they grow wild everywhere around here.



Ron and Phyllis Sieg's 15-year-old daughter, Leigh Anne, died from cancer, 2-9-93.

We have been receiving the newsletter for 5 years now. I still have copies of the ones with ideas to use in memory of Leigh Anne. We picked a butterfly as Leigh Anne's symbol and we get butterfly gifts from friends and relatives to let us know they are thinking of her. We have also had people tell us that they think of Leigh Anne whenever they see a butterfly which is, of course, the idea. I hope butterfly rings, necklaces, earrings that I wear almost every day. We have butterfly decorations inside and outside. We are developing a butterfly garden and the only Christmas decoration we have outside is a 2ft by 4ft butterfly outlined wrapped with 200 Christmas lights.

It has been a couple of years since I have written you telling about Leigh Anne. Leigh Anne was born on December 7, 1977, and died February 9, 1993, at the age of 15. She had neurofibrosarcoma, which was diagnosed 6 months before she died.

I am writing in response to your request of instances where clergy have made matters worse instead of better. The first happened when Leigh Anne was in the hospital for the first time. She had just been diagnosed and was about to undergo her first chemotherapy treatment. A minister from another church came in, that we did not know, had never seen before. He went straight to Leigh Anne's bed, without saying anything to my husband or me and blurted out to Leigh Anne. "Are you ready to meet your Lord?" All of us were too stunned that we just sat and looked at each other. I will forever wish that I had had the presence of mind to kick him out of the room right then and tell him exactly what I thought of his total insensitivity. Leigh Anne nor us had any idea who this person was. After he left, Leigh Anne turned to us and said, "Boy, that was being direct, wasn't it!" I told her being a minister did not mean you were intelligent.

The second instance was when a minister visited us in our home. Regular chemotherapy had not worked and Leigh Anne was facing high dose chemo. He told Leigh Anne that he did not know not know why God had not answered our prayers, (she was on over 50 church prayer lists), but he thought that God

wanted to teach either a doctor or a nurse something, although he did not know what. Which of course, right then I wanted to say, "And he wants to use my daughter to make this point?"

The third was by a lay minister after Leigh Anne's death. He made the comment "You never know how much Leigh Anne might have been spared in later years." I wanted so much to reply that with her having undergone these chemo treatments, hospitalizations, and her knowing that there was nothing more they could do, and that she was going to die at only 15. "How much worse could it be?"

The fourth was also from a lay minister that asked my husband, "if he was rejoicing in his daughter's death yet?" He told him that would never happen.

You asked how these instances had affected us and our ability to worship. My husband and I no longer believe in God. I really can't say that these instances had much to do with that decision. Our reasons are broken promises, unanswered prayers, too many injustices, and taking a good hard look at religion that revealed some very basic flaws. Even though these instances were not what provoked our decision. I feel that they show a total lack of clergy training on how to deal with losing a child which everyone knows is totally different than any other type of grief

I have a feeling that you will be receiving numerous letters on this topic.



Leigh Anne's symbol is a butterfly.

Bonnie Robinson's son, Daniel (7-29-75), was killed in an automobile accident, 1-14-95.

Daniel died in a car accident on January 14, 1995. He was born a beautiful healthy baby July 29, 1975 He was my only son.

His father and I divorced in 1989. I focused far too much on my lost marriage. My efforts to help Daniel were never enough. His life was consumed with alcohol, drugs and at nineteen years of age I lost him.

Daniel's sign is Leo, loving, friendly and very giving, truly a beautiful gift from God.



Daniel's symbols are moon, stars and Leo sign.

David and Cindy Jo Greever's daughter, Michelle (8-24-84), was struck by a car 11-5-93.

*Earth Day
April 22, 1995
"OUR WORLD"*

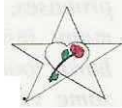
*The world is less than a perfect place
for those who live within ...*

Although God made us with an abundance of Love and our hearts are riddled with sin ...

So if even you're feeling disappointed by the one's you love, remember your Savior your Father is all knowing from above ...

*Just trust in Him, Your Savior, to take you through the hurt and remember this world we live in, is less than perfect, This world we know as Mother Earth ...
by Cindy Jo Greever*

Michelle's symbols are a star with a heart and a flower,



Michael (1-25-71), son of Dick~ and Jean Sand, was killed in an automobile accident 6-18-94.

I am truly sorry that I did not let you know how my church dealt with our son's death. I felt that they were very conscientious, but not very sympathetic.

We are Catholic and all of our priests were at the mortuary and very gracious, but priests do not marry so they do not have children, and because of this, they do not know the deep feelings we have for our children, our flesh and blood.

Our priests are very into God and heaven and they feel that our children are in a much better place.

They did offer to have the parish come into our home and prepare food, and be with us, and pray for us, and they gave a beautiful mass and burial for our Michael, but nothing said or written at this time is adequate, and nothing was enough. I do not mean to

sound ungrateful, but I tried all day to hide from my grief. As we Fellow Travelers know, this is not possible, and you cannot run from your grief

I know they did what they could, but they are not Mothers.

Michael's symbols are a star, an angel, a Stetson hat and boots.



Ruth Canter's youngest son, Charles (6-8-55), died from an overdose of prescription drugs, 10-8-95. Her oldest son, Perry (9-26-53), died from hemorrhaging, 3-21-96, and she lost her husband five years ago.

I am alone and still suffer every day. Miss my two sons and my husband more every day. Think I can't bear another day. Things have not gotten any better, they are worse. My oldest son will be gone 2 years the 21st of this month. Danny has been gone three years. My husband 5 years, pray for me.

You had asked about the pastor of my church. I receive a letter each month asking for money for some project or other. My neighbors do not visit me or each other.



Charles' symbol is a sunflower.

Perry's symbols are



water sports.

Stephanie (9-25-71), the daughter of Mary Kate Gach, was stalked and murdered 10-9-92. Mary Kate shared her grief. Her E-mail is marykategach@compuserve.com:

When I knew for sure that a beast had taken the life from my Stephanie, on the next day after I had discovered her missing from home, I surrendered my whole self and soul to God, in such a total way that I said to Him, "I am wiped out. It's all over. Do what You will with me. It doesn't matter." I was alone in my bedroom and I lay my body down on the floor and prostrated myself to the only Power I knew could possibly help me. I prayed without ceasing until a grief counselor came to be with me and tried and saved my life, for I obviously did not wish to continue to be.

I have continued praying (talking to) Him every day. It has seemed to be a journey of holding onto His hand and

Him. This has kept me going. This is not to say that my fellow humans have not held me up. Many of them have done so, consciously or unconsciously. These gentle and compassionate people have appeared at my side from all directions and at odd times- "angels unaware."

The least supportive folks, in my case, have been those I have known in the "church" setting. It has been my experience that the churchgoers as a whole prefer to avoid me or to pretend not to see me. This cuts across Protestant and Catholic lines, as Stephanie and I were first long-time members of the one and then members of the others at the time she died. This particular Protestant minister did not come to me on the night of her death, but sent an elder. Later, when I returned to services there, he shook my hand at the door but never mentioned Stephanie. I have seen this elsewhere so I know it is not an isolated case. A wonderful sermon would flow from his lips each week, but he could not face this. I have puzzled over this a lot. In the case of the Catholic priests, they were there with me after her death, but they also did not seem to know what to say. Needless to say, the prayers and rituals helped, but I cannot think of a single instance where anyone in either church was able or even seemed to try to connect with me, except for Sister Deborah, a Benedictine nun who was serving at the church near the campus where Stephanie was at the time she died. Sister Deborah was important to my child and the lady successfully touched me on occasion when she recounted memories she had of my daughter.

I have reached full circle now, five plus years later where I believe it is between God and me, that no other human can know or even begin to salve the wound. The most I can expect is that some will simply accompany me at times, and that the bereaved ones, like you, will nod and will know what pain I am feeling or am attempting to speak about and that you will know that I

know your suffering. We all know each other's suffering. "We" are connected by a spiritual bond and I believe that God is in our midst, for He alone knows what we are enduring. I do not attend any church on a regular basis now, except on Stephanie's birthday and at Easter and occasionally for the personal spiritual ritual such as Eucharist. I definitely sense that they do not wish to see me coming and that they would prefer to not be reminded of the violent and senseless death of Stephanie. I do feel that the church has let me down since Stephanie's death, but God has not. When I call out and ask for help to go on, His peace washes over me. He never fails.

Stephanie Alexis Gach was my only natural child. She was gentle, caring, inquisitive, enthusiastic, and determined to make the world a better place. She was murdered on October 9, 1992, just two weeks after her 21st birthday, in the springtime of her life. Her killer resides on death row at Atmore, Alabama.



Stephanie's symbol is a brown rabbit.

Mark (2-3-83), the son of Mark and Joyce Tapia, died from an embolism while scuba diving, 7-27-97, their E-mail address is MLTAPIA@aol.com. Joyce shared the wonderful experience their family had with their priest:

In response to how we felt our church community aided in dealing with our grief Very Positive!!! We received a tremendous outpouring of love and support from the entire church and community. We feel without this love and support we could not have made it through these difficult months. We also feel very blessed to be the recipients of this love and support. Our children's school has also been extremely helpful. Example: My oldest daughter Margaret, who turned 14 on February 3, 1998, was surprised at school with a surprise birthday party. Many parents, teachers, and friends helped to make this a wonderful success. Margaret was presented with numerous gifts which delighted her. After cake... ice cream,

and goodies, the class took time to remember Mark by writing a special memory of him on a piece of paper shaped like a dove. The class then shared their memories with each other and presented the memories to me in a white wicker basket as a special keepsake. I could go on and on with examples of these heart-warming experiences.

I would like to elaborate further on my previous correspondence. I have compiled a list of some of the special things that were done for my family after the death of my son.

1. Both priests were present when the helicopter arrived at the hospital with Mark.

2. They followed him into the emergency room where they performed the last rites for him.

3. When I arrived at the hospital they slowly prepared me for the news of his death because no one else could bring themselves to, even the attending physicians and my father. When I asked them where my son was Fr. Zoghby told me, "He's in heaven."

4. They remained until the rest of the family arrived.

5. They had to break the news to my mother and sister the following morning upon their arrival from Disney World.

6. They were present at the family gathering the night before the funeral.

7. They presided over the funeral mass and graveside service.

8. They had food trays sent to our home.

9. They called to check on us.

10. They came by to check on us.

11. They hugged us.

12. They sent a card informing us of every donation made to the church building fund.

13. They placed many announcements in the church bulletin concerning our thanks to the church community for everything they did for us and announcements about the basketball tournament we held later.

14. They remembered Mark on his birthday during the weekly school mass.

15. They retired his school jersey #23, had it placed in a shadowbox with his picture and placed a plaque at the bottom that read "OUR SUPERSTAR" In Loving memory of Mark Lewis Tapia, Jr. Feb. 3 1983 - July 27 1997.

16. They are presently deciding where his shadow box will be permanently placed.

17. The ladies at school delivered dinner to us for five consecutive weeks with one person coordinating the menus so we never received the same meal twice. These same ladies also did my grocery shopping, too.

Love from a fellow traveler



After much thought and consideration we have decided on Mark Jr's symbols, a basketball with wings and a Labrador. He had just finished a week-long basketball camp at Springhill College, which he had eagerly awaited since the end of the school year. In his last school game of the season, he had 20 rebounds, a record no one came close to all season. Before camp he made his dad buy him a jersey like the pros wear and he wore this to camp every day. He also has a basketball poster on his wall of Shaquille O'Neal. One of my neighbors' who lives directly behind me, whom I have never met, sent me the nicest letter after Mark died. In it she recalled how she and her husband enjoyed listening to Mark practice every day while they relaxed outside. All of her children are grown and gone now and she said that she could tell what a great player he was going to be by the amount of balls he could sink. (basketball lingo). We feel that at the time of his death basketball was at the top of his list of favorites. In reference to the lab, we brought home our first dog for the kids when Mark was four years old. We still have her, and two of her puppies. I have many pictures and precious memories of him with his dogs throughout the years. The symbol we chose for the tee shirts for the First Annual Mark Lewis Tapia Jr. Basketball Tournament was a basketball with wings on each side. Everybody loved it.

Robby (10-31-77), son of Robert and Sharon Reynolds, committed suicide, 1-27-97.

I recently received your February issue of Lamentations. As usual, when I see it in my mailbox, a feeling

Comes over me of which I don't know if I can explain. I want you to know how much the newsletter has helped me in this past year. We just passed the year mark since the loss of our son. It has definitely been a hard year but Lamentations does make a difference. I am always anxious to read it and sometimes wonder how you are able to express yourself so wonderfully.

Robby's symbols are an angel holding a star inside a heart with a yellow butterfly above.



Marcia Carson's son, Dell (12-22-69), was murdered 12-15-91.

Thanks for remembering Dell's death and birth dates. Your newsletters requested that we write about things preachers have said. When my Dell was being buried, none of the preachers in my home town said anything special to me. It was as if my child's death was just an activity for an otherwise dull winter. I didn't get any words of comfort. Later in the year, however, we had a guest preacher who said that some preachers do not know how to offer comfort. They offer it during the funeral but some people need long term comfort. Not just comfort on that day. But for days, months, and yes years after. During one of our Compassionate Friends meetings, a visiting speaker said these words that have come to mean the most to me. He asked me if I didn't think that God was angry because my son was killed. I had never thought of it like that. I was of the frame of mind that God didn't care. Then I knew that yes. God was angry also. I was not on my own in my sorrow.

Here is a poem I wrote for the anniversary of my son's death:

The Thief in the Night
Marcia K. Carson

A thief came in my life one night
Just dropped in and stole you from
sight
you went on ahead, this I know
It's your light in Heaven that has the
skies all aglow

Although I'm missing you, I cannot forget
How your presence warmed the hearts
of those you met

You did real good in the thunderstorm
today

Only you son can play the drums that
way

Your sparkling smile set the world in
deep light

As the lightning flashed and rolled in
our sight

So long I've sat and looked for your face
But the thief that came left not a trace

So long I've been fooling myself
Thinking I see you. it's someone else

I know you are in Heaven above
Know that our memories are filled with
love

You are boxing and singing with Angels
now

We will be together someday somehow
No Thief in the night can ever succeed
In stealing your spirit, the glow we need

Sleep on my son for this I know
Heaven is one place the thief can't go.

Dell's symbols are



boxing gloves and a unicorn.

Janna (4-6-81), the daughter of David and Peggy Webb, died from a brain hemorrhage 7-12-93. Peggy wrote these two letters:

The newsletter brings me so much encouragement. I also appreciate having the addresses of those whose names come from Clay County where I grew up or from Northern Kentucky where I now live. I try to send cards to those whose children have birth dates or death dates similar to Janna's and if the manner of death is similar to hers. To some that may sound weird, but if have learned anything from losing Janna, it is that we need to act upon those impulses of kindness when they occur. Waiting denies us opportunities which may never recur.

I ask you to pray for David, Scott, and I as this is the week of both David and Janna's birth. My wish is that I will be able to convey to my husband the joy of celebration that I feel he was born and

is my beloved companion in both sickness and in health, this despite the heavy loss we have suffered. Our constant concern, also, is that our son, Scott, so nearly a man himself will nevertheless know that he is still our firstborn and the recipient of our unconditional love and the object of our wonder that he survives and succeeds even in the face of the pain he must feel, both for himself in losing his sister and for us.

As I write this. I am reminded of the fact that Easter was always such a time of rejoicing for us, both because of Janna's birth and because of Jesus' resurrection. We cling to His promise that Janna's death is but a different sort of birth. one in which we will all one day gloriously partake, and through which we will one day see her again. Won't the clouds roll away? Won't the sun shine? And with what joy and celebration we can all sing in exultation that death did not win! With John Donne in his famous sonnet, we can proclaim that at the very moment that Death thought he had won, he actually lost, for in dying, we win everlasting life! Is, He not a wonderful God?

HOLY SONNET 10

Death, be not proud, though some
have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not
so;

For those whom you think'st thou
dost overthrow

Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst
thou kill me.

From rest and sleep. which but thy
pictures be,

Much pleasure. then from thee much
more must flow,

And soonest our best men with thee
do go.

Rest of their bones and souls'
delivery. Thou art slave to fate,
chance, kings, and desperate men.

And dost with poison, war, and
sickness dwell,

And poppy. or charms can make us
sleep as well.

And better than thy stroke; why
swell'st thou then?

One short sleep past, we wake
eternally.

And death shall be no more; Death.
thou shalt die.

John Donne (1572-1631)

I just wanted to write to let you know that I continue to appreciate the newsletter. Sometimes that experience is yours, sometimes that of another traveler but in all instances my heart expands to include new friends. I don't know all of them in the ordinary sense of the word, but in a way that I cannot explain, I think that loss, love, courage, endurance, maturity, and faith.

In the last newsletter, you requested that we share with you those bits of grief advice which have hurt us most..

As early as three days after Janna died, before we even buried her, someone told me that Janna died so that God could teach me a lesson. Is there anything crueller than to tell a mother that her child died because the mother needed to learn a lesson? I think not.


I have learned lessons as a result of Janna's death: lessons about God's love for me and faithfulness to me. But I say that God denied my child her chance to go to school, cheer at every ball game, become a teacher, wife, and a mother is to say that He is cruel. That same God is not the one who loves me, supports me, comforts me in my loss. The contradiction is too obvious. Would I, as a mother, take my child's favorite American Girl doll, Samantha, just so that I could console her when she grieves at that loss? Would I take her Samantha so that she could learn that she loves Samantha but has just been taking her for granted? Would I take Samantha and hide her from Janna for all time just because I think Janna should learn to be patient? I am trying hard to think what lesson might justify taking Samantha from Janna, but I can't.

Yes I have learned lessons from Janna's death, just as we learn from anything, good or bad, that happens to us. Several years ago when my children were small, I was in a bad automobile accident in which I fractured two of the vertebrae in my neck. As a result, I was in the hospital in traction for nearly two months. On the same morning that I had the accident, my father died as a result of the emphysema that had kept him bedfast for several years. I was totally helpless, dependent on other to

tend to my needs. All of the roles that I had been assigned to me were now taken away, and my sole purpose was to lie in bed and heal. That was hard. My family needed me; I needed to say good-bye to my father; my children needed me; my husband needed me. Feeling so helpless, grief stricken, and alone, I learned about God's presence in the darkness and about patience,

But it isn't just bad things that teach us lessons. I have always wanted to teach, and I have been fortunate to have been able to live my dream. I have, I hope, become a better and better teacher as I have had experiences that have taught me how to deal more effectively with children, some of whom don't always want to learn what I have to teach. Motherhood, my own sweet Scott and Janna, made me a better teacher. From the experience of being a mother, I came to understand that each child who walks into my room is "some mother's darling, some mother's child," in the words of the old son. That child deserves my care and concern as much as my own children deserved the same from their teachers.

I'm not sure why Janna died. That remains for God to tell me when I do have the chance to talk to Him about that in heaven. But, you know. I learned a lesson even from the "bad" advice I was given, that Janna died to teach me a lesson. I learned to guard my words with other grieving people; that sometimes the best advice is none; that the most comforting words are, "I Love You," "I'm here," and the name of the one they have lost, in my case "Janna."

Janna's symbols are  yellow butterflies and a rainbow.

Michael (6-30-76), the son of Michael and Linda Miller died as a result of an automobile accident on 2-15-95. Linda responds:

I am writing to you about the good experience we have had with our minister.

We moved to Murfreesboro, TN., in September 1994. Michael D. had his accident in February 1995. At the time of the accident we had not found a new church. We were concentrating on getting settled in our new home. Michael D. had just graduated from high school in May. He was trying to find a job and

making decisions about his future. So we had just not taken the time to find a church. So at the time of the accident we were without a religious home. We returned Michael D. back to Louisville, KY., where we are originally from. My sister's minister was excellent to us and held Michael D's funeral for us after returning home to TN. A few days later I received a phone call. He introduced himself as Rev. Jerry Mayo from First United Methodist Church in Murfreesboro.

He had gotten a call that morning from my sister's minister in KY. He explained our situation to Rev. May. Rev. Mayo asked if he could come visit with us. He did visit with us several times. He is a true minister of God.

I would like to share 2 things that he said to us that will stay with us the rest of our lives. Rev. Mayo stated that he was there to be our friend and to help us in any way during this tragedy in our lives and not as a recruiter for First United Methodist Church. He would stand by us as a friend no matter what church we chose to attend.

His most important statement to us was and I quote, "God did not cause Michael D's accident, but God was there to rescue Michael D. into his kingdom." What a powerful remark. Without a thought First United Methodist has become our church home.

Words cannot describe our love and respect we have for Rev. Jerry Mayo. He continues to be with us and pray with us as we are still trying to cope with the loss of our child.

This sums up why we feel like Rev. Jerry Mayo is a true minister of God to say these things to us and our son whom were total strangers to him. So we have only love and respect for Rev, Mayo.

Michael's symbols are a cowboy angel, a football, and the #77.



Melissa Drury's son, Ethan (9-6-93), and husband, Lynn (4-1-60), were killed in an auto accident, 9-7-97. Melissa responds:

I am writing in response to the question you asked in your February newsletter about what effect the clergy has had on the ability to worship after the death of a loved one.

First of all, I thought that it was just me having a problem with my minister. Now, it seems as though I am not alone. I am looking forward to reading your April newsletter with other reader responses.

The first time I met my current minister, I was in the hospital after just having my precious Ethan. He (my minister) was very kind and visited me often while we were in the hospital. I tried to like my minister, but there was something about him that I just couldn't quite figure out. After Lynn and Ethan (my husband and son) were killed, it seemed like my minister was always there, offering words of comfort.

Sadly enough, what he thought were words of comfort only served to make things worse. He was very determined to counsel me through my grief I am only now at a point in my grief where I feel that I can even share with anyone. My minister even had the nerve to tell me that he had just had some instruction on grief, and if I would give him 45-60 minutes of my time, he could take all of my pain away. I was immediately taken aback. I could not believe that someone thought so much of themselves that they could take away the pain I was feeling at the loss of my beloved husband and 4-year-old son!

Since that moment, I have had a real problem with returning to the Church that I have been a member of for eighteen years. I have immense faith in God; if I didn't, I would never have gotten as far as I have.

No one can take away any pain I feel, ever. Every day I suffer with the pain in my heart at not holding my husband and son. I have my 9-year-old son left, and as much as I love him, he cannot fill the void in my heart. If he can't heal my pain, no one can.

I think that the ministry has a lot to learn about grief. We are, after all, human beings. We all cannot just say, "Well, they (our loved ones) are in a much better place and we should be thankful that they don't have to suffer on this earth like we do." Maybe ministers

should sit in on some meetings of grieving parents and spouses. They may get some insight on what we really need, not what they think we want them, to say or do.

Thank you for listening. This is the first I have truly talked to anyone, and it has made me feel a little better. I have read the newsletters and they have-made me feel not so alone anymore.



Ethan and Lynn's

symbols are a cherub and dinosaur.



The following Lamentation was written by a "fellow traveler," who wants to remain anonymous:

You asked in this newsletter for us to share with you our experiences with the clergy. I will try to tell you about our experience though I am not sure I will be able to put it in the correct wording. I hope you will bear with me as I try to relate it to you.

When our son, killed himself we weren't attending any church. I and my children had previously gone but had stopped going. I used the excuse of my husband, as he didn't go and felt that I went too much so it made conflicts within our marriage. So instead of staying with my church, I guess I took the easy way out for me at the time to keep peace within my family. At least I thought that was what I was doing when I stopped going. Yes, I now look back and regret that I ever stopped going, as by my not going to church, I withheld a relationship with God from my children. Yes, they did go to church from time to time, but they weren't seeing God work for them within their home and family_ For this I am very sorry. Yes, it makes me feel that I failed my children.

When we went to the funeral home to make the arrangements, neither of us had even given a thought to a pastor or who would do the eulogy. When they asked, we just looked at each other not sure of what to do. But we had lost my husband's grandmother the previous year and we both really liked the pastor that did her service so we asked if maybe he would be willing to do our son's. The funeral home called him and he immediately said; "But of course, he would." And it wasn't long before he showed up at the funeral home and talked to us.

Now you have to realize that he didn't know anything about us, our son or any of our immediate family. So he only had a very short time to get to know us and our son. He talked to each of us individually and asked us to tell us about our son. I know in just getting my other children to talk to him and he answered their questions was such a blessing. But the biggest blessing came when he did the eulogy. He made everything so personal and everyone commented how wonderful a job he did as he laid out our son's life story. I guess God has given him this gift and it is a very special gift because I am sure he has helped so many people that have lost their loved one's to make their service personal. Our son took his life but there wasn't the condemnation that I feared, but told of a loving God that knew Robby's heart.

After the service was over, though, I didn't hear from him for awhile. My sister called and asked him to call and talk to me because I needed someone to talk to so badly. She had asked me if there was anyone that I thought I could talk to and I said I would talk to the pastor. But it was several days later, he called about nine or so. Well, I guess I needed to talk so badly that I just started pouring out to him and by the time he finally was able to "get me to hang up" we had been talking for a couple of hours. I guess it was I doing the talking and him mainly listening. I thought that he would understand because after all he was a pastor. And he did give me some comforting words and listened. When he didn't call back I thought I had talked his ear off and he didn't want any more of that. Of course I didn't just talk, a little talk, a little crying. etc. But I did like him and three weeks after my son's death, I just got up on Sunday morning and told my husband that I was going to church. That the only way that I was going to get through this was with God's help and I needed church. I just made up my mind that I had to do what would help me and if I didn't let God help me then I knew there was absolutely no way I was going to make it through this life. I decided to go to

the church where this pastor was at thinking that since my husband did like him that maybe one day he would decide to go with me and besides I liked the pastor, too. So I went back to church. There were Sundays that I cried all through the service and hadn't a clue of what was being said, but I was there and I wanted to be there in God's house. I kept going to church and on Sunday everyone treated me very nicely, but as I am a shy person I didn't really mingle with anyone very much. Well, this continued but I began to feel like I was missing something. On Sunday everyone was nice, but I never heard from anyone during the week. And I guess I needed that extra help at this time and didn't understand why people could be so nice on Sunday but not continue throughout the week to check on me. I talked to God about it and thought maybe I am at the wrong church and asked Him to tell me where to go, but instead of telling me to change churches, it was like He kept saying to me if there is a problem you can help change it, talk to people and let them know what you need. They can't read your mind, if you will only open up and tell them, you will feel differently. So I continued on with church and each Sunday I felt a little more at ease though no one still checked on me during the week.

Well, about this time I decided I needed to go to a support group and the nearest one I knew was in Louisville, KY., which isn't that far from me, but I just hated to drive over there at night by myself and my husband didn't want to go to any group meeting. My sister did go with me to a meeting so I didn't have to go alone at night, but I knew that I couldn't expect her to go with me every month and also it seemed like since it only met once a month, that it was such a long time between meetings. So I talked to God about it and He kept telling me there were so many parents right in our own area that we could start one right in our own little town. I questioned a couple of neighbors, who had also lost a child, if they would be interested in getting one started. They said they had thought about it after the loss of their own child but never followed through with it but if "I" wanted to get one

one going they would help. Well, "I" didn't want to be the one in getting it started and kept talking to God about it and waiting for someone else to do it. God kept telling me to do it, but I was afraid there was no way I could do this and God would supply someone else to lead or if not then I would just try to go to the meetings in Louisville. One Sunday after church I talked to our pastor about getting a group started and he thought it was a great idea and would be really good for our community. So the group was started. There are now five of us that meet regularly and we have met for three weeks. I try to have some kind of little handout for each of us. I included various poems and articles that I have come across over this past year. I have read about everything I can get my hands on concerning grief, bereavement and the loss of a child. Although sometimes I have to read it several times to comprehend, as my concentration level hasn't been the same as it once was which I understand is very normal. And since starting the group, I talk to my pastor quite a lot and I have shared with him how a parent feels with the loss of their child.

I now understand that though he is a pastor, since he hasn't actually had the loss of a child, that there was absolutely no way for him to comprehend how I was feeling and, just because he was a pastor, sometimes they don't know all the right things to do and say either. But he is learning and maybe through listening he will be able to help someone else in the future. I have read where we need to tell people what we need and by telling them they are listening. It just took me opening up and helping them to understand. Though they won't be able to understand entirely our feelings and pain (and I hope they never do), they are more open to listening and trying to understand. Sometimes it just takes us to teach them.

Martine Carpenter's son, Brent (2-7-76), completed suicide, 2-6-94. Martine shares her thoughts:

I have never written before, but I felt the need to do so since after going to my mail box on Brent's birthday to have a card from someone I had never met; but

knowing quite well that we held the same loss in our hearts. This is something for me that will never go away. The love a mother feels for a child is really hard to explain. Whether it be a day or 4 years, a hole in my heart will always be.

My son, Brent, a day before he turned 18 shot and killed himself on a farm in Oldham County, KY. He and his Dad would go hunting and fishing and had some good memories there. Brent had tried to take his life two other times, but finally succeeded after getting a gun from a friend. We had taken steps to lock his Dad's guns up, but when a person is determined, there is actually nothing we could have done. Brent had been hospitalized off and on for 4 years. We felt we had done all we could have done for him. He would not take the medicine the doctors had prescribed and stated it did not help. His thought process was such a handicap for him. He was smart and very intelligent, but was not able to make simple decisions. It frustrated him and also his loved ones to see this happen.

We also have a daughter, Tina, that was 14 when he died but has now out lived her brother and turned 18 in September. Tina tried to overdose not long after Brent died. They had become closer before his death. I thank God she didn't succeed. My life would surely be over if I didn't have her. Even though I know she will need to move on in life and some day have a family of her own. I just hope it will be better than what she has had to face in the past.

I hurt so much to know that my family that I loved so much was actually being ripped apart. I go to church and without church friends this would have been so much harder to face. Without a doubt I will see Brent some day. I look at life any more like just another day closer to seeing my son.

My marriage has ended in divorce. I was looking at our house as 4 needs to be here not 3. And his Dad wanted to keep Brent's room the way he left it. I could not do that and go on with life. The anger that I myself cannot come to terms with hangs over me. Brent and his Dad argued so much.

In fact Brent hated his Dad.

What challenges life gives us. At times I wonder if I could handle another obstacle. But I am sure God has a way of me dealing with anything that comes my way.

Brent's symbol is a white rose.



Jim and June Brown's son, Aaron (2-17-83), died from an accidental shooting 1-8-96. June shares:

I, like all of the other mothers, cannot believe I have come this far since Aaron's death. I feel your pain and also feel your love.

Since Aaron died, I have found out how many more children and adult children in our county have died. I have a lot of special friends that I didn't have before, but it's because we have something in common ... we are in grief for our children!

You wanted to know how our clergy helped us with our grief Rev. Doyle Thomas is a very special person. He helped me by telling me how special Aaron was and still is.

It upsets me when people say that God took him for a reason. Like Rev. Thomas said. God didn't take Aaron. He may allow things to happen, but He didn't take him!

Aaron was a child and he was playing with a gun that he thought the bullets were out of, because he took them out and laid them in the floor except the one that was in the chamber that can't be seen. I know that this was an accident and accidents do happen. But at least I know and feel in my heart that my son is in Heaven!!

If Aaron had not died at a young age and if he had died later in life, would I know or really feel like he is in Heaven? Now I feel like I can be with him in Heaven someday.

This is what I keep believing in my heart. This is what Rev. Thomas helped me with. He made me understand that when Aaron had the accident, he didn't suffer; that his spirit had gone to Heaven before his vital signs were gone. This man has a special spot in my heart.

Aaron's symbols are a sun-shine, a heart with wings, a bass fish and an angel.



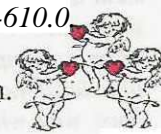
Curt and Debbi Dickinson have lost 3 babies which were miscarried in the 2nd trimester of pregnancy: Junior (12/24/80); Kimberly Melissa (8/25/87); and Angel Winter Dawn (12/25/89).

I read this in The Compassionate Friends Newsletter of Southwest Louisiana, May 1995 issue, and wanted to pass it on:

If your missing child would have graduated soon, you may be receiving mail in your child's name concerning graduation or other student items. If you do not wish to receive this mail, send a letter or postcard to the following address requesting removal of your child's name from their list.

American Student List
330. Old Country Road
Mineola, NY 115011
Or call (516)-248-610.0

Angels and hearts
symbolize their children.



The GRIEF Connection

"Connecting those who are bereaved to the strength in self in others, and in God."

**London, Kentucky
(60.6)-864-7051**

Bereavement Facilitators:
Sharon Kidd, B.S., C.I.S.D., N.C.B.F.
Connie Howard, M.S., C.I.S.D., N.C.BF
***Critical Incident Stress Debriefing**
***National Certified Bereavement Facilitator**

Community Grief Support Group will meet the third Tuesday from February 18 through June 17 at 6:30 - 8:00 p.m.

A Time for Healing:

Coming to Terms with Your Divorce Begins Thursday, March 5th, and will meet each Thursday night until April

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7:00 - 8:30. p.m.

First Baptist Church of London
Call 864-4194 or 864-7051

Leslie Tietsort asked that I put the following in the newsletter even though it is too late for this year, the families are already working on a 'quilt for next year's conference in Washington, D.C. ..

It is the goal for the **Suicide Prevention Advocacy Network** to have all 50 states display a quilt. The purpose is to

place a "Picture on Suicide" that will serve as a visual image of the huge number of suicides that occur in America today. Families are asked to make a 12" x 12" white fabric square and make the message or picture no larger than 11" x 11". You can write on the square with pens, but be sure and include your loved ones name or relationship. If at all possible, use a picture, thus giving the quilt the "Picture of Suicide."

For further information you may contact:

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If you have felt that your church did not provide adequate care and support, I hope you will consider compiling a list of ways they may help, or could have helped you, or how they could help someone else in the future. Since we are experiencing such a great loss, we, more than anyone else, can tell others what we need. Perhaps you can place books in your church library that have meant a lot to you, or you can form a bereavement committee so you can guarantee others won't suffer as you. Maybe you can talk with your clergy and be open about how you feel and how they can help. Our clergy are often times not trained in dealing with grief so you may be their source of help. It is important that we support each other.



Are you in a church this month because of taxes? I would suggest that you eat a **Crunch** candy bar. .. it always helps me!