

Group Deals With Death of Children

*Through my sorrow Of
today
I will find another
tomorrow
And yesterday will
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A speck of life which will
pass
In
another
time*

Author's name withheld - age 18,
Died, April 7, 1981

By DEBORAH EDWARDS

Through my sorrow of today

Sorrow: "The sun never again shines quite as bright," said one grieving parent. "Why has this happened to us?"

Grief: "I don't wish she were here - she SHOULD be here!" said another. "Why did it have to happen to her?"

Guilt: "His brother blames himself because he read in the newspaper that he left his younger brother on the dike near the river, where his body is yet to be found," said one mother. "What can I do? He's completely withdrawn! Why did the newspaper say that?"

Anger: "The police came to our door one night last May, and said our daughter was dead - 'killed when her car was struck by a train, 'Come down in about an hour,' they said, 'and identify her body.' After we confirmed that it was she we asked the police where her (missing) jewelry' was, 'Their cool, unemotional response was, 'It happens all the time!' It's about time professionals know how to act with the simplest decency!"

I will find another tomorrow

Many parents in the Springfield area whose children have died have found that it can be helpful to know that others have been through the grief process and emerged to find life meaningful again, according to Compassionate Friends, a

self-help group for bereaved parents, run by parents who themselves have lost children.

It is believed that working through the emotions that accompany grief - anger, guilt, resentment is vital if the bereaved parent is to fully recover.

Compassionate Friends is a worldwide organization. The local chapter was founded about the death in relationship to years ago and has 50 to 100 members. They meet the third

Wednesday of each month at Memorial House Auditorium at Mercy Hospital. Membership is open to anyone who has experienced the loss of a child.

The Rev Helen Gatazka a psychologist with Baystate Consulting Service Department of Psychiatry, Baystate Medical Center, is advisor to the Springfield chapter. She also serves at First Church in Ludlow. "My best advice to grieving

parents is to find support from other people," she says.

Dr Galacka speaks to church professional and civic groups on the subject of professional attitudes. In a recent interview, she said, about professional:

"We let ourselves off of the hook by 'believing that professionalism means 'detached'. Doctors believe that professionals should not be emotionally involved - they don't realize that people reach out to them, and want to know that they care.

"They have to know that they have a right to talk shout it," she said. "Compassionate Friends enables parents to admit intimate feelings that their family and friends can not deal with. It is common for them to become depressed and withdrawn from the rest of the family.

"We want the anger to come out," she said. "There are very few public places where it is acceptable to be angry - only in groups of peers who feel the same anger."

Dr. Galacka advises people not to be afraid of negative feelings. "It's natural to lose faith in God, religion and everything else you've ever believed in."

"Since the death affects the whole family," said Dr. Charles Barnes, 'clinical director of Mental Health Associates of Springfield and a recent guest speaker at a Compassionate Friends meeting, "the whole family must adjust itself.

One of the topics concerning the group is how children mourn. "They're not little adults," explained Barnes. "They tend to explain the death in relationship to the themselves. Since they see themselves as the center of the universe the child may develop a survivors complex which may manifest itself in the belief that they are the next to die.

"There is usually about a four to one ration of women to men," at a meeting of Compassionate Friends said Evelyn Billings, one of the co-chairmen. "men are not accustomed to showing their emotions," she explained.

And yesterday will become a speck of life which will pass

Studies show that while there is no formula for the process of grief, there are certain patterns of response that many people go through. Dr. Glen Davidson of Southern Illinois University School of Medicine, found, in fact, that the grieving process often goes on long after what society - friends and relatives included - considers 'time enough'.

"Our parents were our link to the past, our spouse our link to the present - our children are our link to the future," said Mrs. Billings. "Compassionate Friends gives us the hope that we can survive this."

"You carry the scar the rest of your life - everything is now bitter-sweet," said the mother of the young woman killed in the train crash. "At Compassionate Friends," she said, "we can let it all hang out, because we know how the other person feels."

In another time

One of the goals of Compassionate Friends, according to Dr. Galacka, is to help the grieving parent to realize that the joy of having had the child far outweighs the grief of losing him.

"Always remember that even though they've been taken away after they were here only a short time, the memories of that child can never be taken away," she said, "Parents have to learn that they don't want to hang on to the bitterness, so that it obscures the positive aspects."

"Each day if I gain a grain of sand toward an understanding of the 'why', there might One day 'be a beach where there was once only a grain of sand," said one bereft mother.

Questions can be directed to: Compassionate Friends' national headquarters at P.O. Box 1347, Oakbrook, Ill. 60521.

