

Thoughts on Mother's Day

For those who have experienced the loss of a child, Mother's Day becomes less about mothers and more about children. Often, there are painful memories of profound loss. Sometimes, there are joyful memories of a precious child. Always, there is the realization that this one special life has forever changed the life of the mother. On Mother's Day, the absence of our children is a void we try to fill with memories - a handmade card from long ago, a special photograph from happy times, a song once loved and shared - but the memories can never replace the presence of our children.

Mysteriously, we have been called to walk a different road together - one without our children. As we might observe other families experiencing what we had once enjoyed on this special day, we might feel envious. We cannot delight in the pleasures of a Mother's Day brunch or family outing that celebrates the joy of being the mother of such a special child. Why were we asked to carry this burden of being separated from the person who gave us the title of "mother?"

Perhaps there are no answers adequate enough to satisfy each one of us. That is what makes life as well as motherhood such a great mystery.

Recently, at a meeting of In Loving Memory [the TCF satellite group for parents with no surviving children] a strange question came up for discussion: "What benefit, if any, has resulted from the death of your child?" Some people thought immediately that the question was a mistake. Others thought that the question should be thrown out. Some others asked why we should not consider this question - perhaps it had some merit. Perhaps benefit is expressed in each individual child's legacy - through contributions, research, scholarships or other good works carried out in loving memory of our children. Perhaps another benefit is the perspective each of us brings to the support group. Certainly, Alive Alone, In Loving Memory, and The Compassionate Friends are what they are because of who we are - and who our children are - and because we honor their memory.

Not all of us shared the same set of beliefs, but we all believed that our children were the greatest influence on our lives. They were the ones who "gave birth" to the persons who became their mothers. They changed us from the day they entered our lives. Their lives and their deaths have changed our lives for the rest of our lives. So perhaps the greatest legacy of our children is in the person we have become for each other, for those we support through Alive Alone, In Loving Memory, TCF, as well as for our families, our friends, and our communities.

Many, many years ago, another young mother lived in a remote village, far from the center of what was considered the civilized world. Her only son grew up and learned to practice his father's trade. After years of working quietly at home, he left and began traveling through their country, teaching and healing the crowds of who came to hear him. But his message and his miracles threatened the established traditions of his day, and the local leaders feared his influence among the people. Ultimately, his mother, who followed him everywhere, watched her precious only son suffer and die the most horrible death known at that time. But before he died, he told his followers, "Love one another as I have loved you." As he died, he commended his mother's care to his dearest friend.

So, his mother found the key to the mystery of how to continue after his death. His mother understood the way to honor her son and his memory. His mother followed his teachings and kept his memory alive for his friends. Perhaps we might learn from her, and follow her good example, for she was the most perfect mother of all time.

Mary A. D. Petrino

In Loving Memory of Julia Kenney Teresa Petrino, August 8, 1984 - June 9, 1999