

PICTURES

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Pictures, pictures, pictures, that word makes some of us uncomfortable and for some it makes us want to scream – NO MORE PICTURES! Having pictures taken of us after the death of our only child or all children is often very difficult and for a time impossible. Taking pictures of places we visit or people that we socialize with is often something we no longer have any desire to do.

I vividly remember the first time our church pictorial was to be printed after Rhonda's death. It was difficult because it would be the first photo of Rodney and I without our daughter. It was even more poignant because the previous time that the church pictorial was printed Rhonda had worked as a receptionist for the photo taking of the families of the church. We almost did not have it taken but then decided it would be one thing we would do in Rhonda's memory. I remember coming home and crying for a long time after that photo sitting. On the positive side, I now realize years later, it was a giant step on our healing journey to force ourselves to do something that was uncomfortable but also something we would be faced with for the rest of our lives. We were now a couple and no longer a family of three.

One mother wrote to me several years ago and told of an incident where she had her directory photos taken and the photographer remarked to her, "No kids?" She replied, "No", as she did not want to share with him that her only child had recently died." He commented, "I never had any either...never did like being around kids." She wanted to make a reply about her son but could not bring herself to do so but she was overwhelmed with loneliness and homesickness for her son.

Not long after Rhonda's death I began to realize that no one really cared about photos that we took when we vacationed or met with groups of people. Once in awhile we would take a few photos but rarely shared them with anyone. We would take the camera and return home without ever taking a photo while we were gone. So gradually over the years we have ceased taking photos and I no longer keep scrapbooks or photo albums as I feel it is a waste of time and money. Who will want them anyway when we are gone? I have witnessed children burning, shredding and disposing of their parents' photos and possessions so I figure why bother keeping these items when nieces and nephews or a person disposing of our personal items, after we are gone from this earth, most likely will not care. So I have decided to save them from this task and not take photos or make scrapbooks etc.

People fail to even think that our situation is different when we attend family reunions, class gatherings or vacation with people who have families. They often have photographers take group shots and then sell them to the participants. We always avoid purchasing them and once in awhile someone will ask if we do not want one. I simply reply that because we have no living children they would just gather dust and someday be burned so why bother with them. It usually makes the questioner do a

double take and then they apologize for asking, forgetting, that our only child is deceased.

The word 'pictures' has a total different meaning for parents with no surviving children than it does for other people. Photos of our child/children are our most prized possessions but photos after our child/children are deceased have very little meaning for us.