

WHEN IS IT OKAY?

By Terri

A recently bereaved parent said to me the other night. "I laughed today and I felt guilty." His son was needlessly murdered just a short six months ago because the cash register his son was responsible for held no more than \$20.00

I didn't know quite how to answer him. My son was murdered just over two years ago and I still occasionally feel guilt when I revel in the joy of being in love, or the beautiful sunset, or laugh with new friends, or chuckle at one of the myriad of jokes my son's friends and I tell about him.

Because I laugh and joke and tease about what my son may or may not be doing now, others are sometimes appalled at what they perceive as my lack of respect for those no longer with us. I long ago stopped trying to explain that it is not a lack of respect for my son or anyone else. It is rather a stubborn refusal to become defined by death and an acknowledgment that my son would be making the same irreverent jokes about me. Laughter is healthy. Humor is therapy. They are simply another coping mechanism.

Some days I cannot stop crying - not necessarily on birthdays that no longer are or death days that loom.

I have no idea why. Some days I can't cry - even on those non-birthdays or horrid anniversaries. There is simply no rhyme or reason to it, just as there is no rhyme or reason to why we have to outlive our children.

When is it all right to cry? Whenever we feel like it.

When is it all right to smile and laugh? Whenever we feel like it.

When is it all right to feel guilty because we cry or laugh - never!!!

We cry because we hurt, because we are human, because we love and miss our children. If we start crying in the middle of a grocery store because we see a special on his/her favorite cereal - so what? I don't know about others, but I am long past caring what strangers think.

We laugh because we can sometimes see through the dark clouds and remember our children's laughter.

We laugh when we remember the silly things they used to do. We laugh because we can hear their voices saying, "MOMMM, you're embarrassing me again." We laugh because our children taught us how and because they would never forgive us if we stopped laughing and enjoying life.

I miss my son terribly. I will always miss my son terribly. I would gladly trade my life for his, if I had that choice. When I laugh, it does not mean I miss him less than others miss their children. When I smile at simple joys like thunderstorms, it does not mean I am "in denial" about my son's death. When I cry, it does not mean I am no longer coping.

Never be afraid to express your emotions. Never feel guilt over finding humor or joy. After all, losing a child means never again having to say you're sorry for anything you do.

Terri's son and only child, Patrick, was murdered in Mexico in May of 1996 at the age of 22.

Terri is also a single parent.