

A letter of encouragement

My Friends,

I wondered for a while whether I should call you “my fellow bereaved parents”, but then I decided that you are so much more than that. You may be bereaved parents first, but you are also on your way to becoming heroes, if you have not already reached that point. Of course, you are friends, and better friends than most. But you are still more than heroes and friends: you are also a collection of memories, you are the listeners, the faithful guardians of the spirit of your dead children. You live in their honor, you heal in their honor, you work in their honor, and yes - you even laugh in their honor.

Take a moment right now for a long, deep breath and remember a happy moment in the life you and your child or children were given to share together. Was it a birthday? Was it a Christmas ? Was it on vacation? Was it the day they were born? Was it the day you first knew you would have a baby? Take a long deep breath and remember.

So, today you have your memories - though sometimes there only are the memories of things that might have been. But you are now - for as long as your heart beats - the living memorials for your children.

What does it mean to be a living memorial?

Most of us already have a good idea about that, but many may still be looking for a way to define our calling or to enrich our mission. That’s not an easy task for grievers. Still, the search for more than mere survival is a rewarding road, and you have already begun to travel that road - or you would not be here.

In fact, one of the very best places to start your journey may be right here, in the company of others sharing your sorrow, and understanding your search for becoming a living memorial in your own way.

You will find many living memorials here, in our conference rooms and workshops. You will find tears to comfort your easy grief, you will find smiles to promise that you will feel better tomorrow or next month or next year. You will find gentle words helping you wait for your grief to grow a little softer.

You will find encouragement and understanding from bereaved parents who took whatever time was necessary to mend their broken lives. And there are always those who are well-known heroes in honor of their children, heroes who have decided on some work of love, for giving new strength and comfort to other grievers.

Being a living memorial starts with the tears you cry at first and continues with the patience you give to yourself and to the partner with whom you now share a more

solitary life. Some day soon you will be able to see how important your acceptance of grief is for healing - and for your survival as a living memorial.

Make no mistake, being a living memorial does not absolutely require a huge enterprise. Simply being the bearer of hope for other grievers, and keeping your courage alive, carries to the world a mission which honors your children. The bereaved father, the understanding mother who learn to inspire us with hope are as meaningful as the grief support professional or the workshop leader. As long as you do or plan something - anything - positive for the love of your child, you are a living memorial.

Some of us do all the work for thousands of newsletters. Many of us make telephone calls to the newly bereaved parents in our city, our county, our state. We help to prepare meetings, conferences, provide transportation, invite speakers or bake the best cookies this side of heaven. How many of us have not made cookies while softly crying, because we were making the cookies our child loved best?

The lesson of patience is perhaps also the hardest route to becoming a living memorial. This first lesson means learning to be patient with your grief. There are some bereaved parents who feel an overwhelming need to begin helping other bereaved parents almost a day after the funeral - we can all understand that.

But grief is a dictator, at least for awhile. How well we know that early grief demands that we deal only with it. This can give us an overwhelming sense of hopelessness. It makes us afraid that the pain will always be the same, tomorrow the same as today - the same pain, forever. But if we allow grief to take its time in our life, we can gradually become ready to survive and later on, to feel some hope again.

That's when we find ourselves capable of choosing new ways in which to remember, to honor, to love our children. That's when we discover the wonderful ways in which to make the children live again, in spirit and in the generosity of our heart. In time, we will enjoy being a living memorial. The important word here is IN TIME.

While I can't be here with you in body today, you can be sure that I will be with you in spirit. I wish you courage and patience, I wish you peace of mind and hope for the future. There is a little LARGO verse, which is making its round in grievers' newsletters today. It is the perfect thought for our road to becoming a living memorial:

They are with us still
Returning every day to us
The love we gave them once.

With greetings from the heart, I am yours especially today.

Sascha

Sascha is the mother of two deceased children. Eve and Nino. Sascha is the editor of LARGO ,the quarterly newsletter for bereaved parents who have endured multiple losses. She is also a poet and writer whom you see quoted in thousands of newsletters all over the world. She has done workshops and has been a keynote speaker at bereavement conferences in the United States and several foreign countries. She has written three books, Wintersun, Sorrow and the Light and also co-authored the book , Knowing Why Changes Nothing with Eve.