

## **COPING WHEN A CHILD DIES**

Rosemary's son, Arthur, 9, was hit by a car while waiting on his bicycle to cross the street at the end of the driveway on Dec. 7, 1986.

The first few days I went through the motions of preparing for Arthur's funeral. Then I went through the phase of not sleeping and eating. I would wake up at night and think, "Maybe he's alive."

I went to a therapist but he didn't know what to do with me because he had not experienced the death of his child. He finally suggested Compassionate Friends where I met people who could help me with the grief process.

I had a "screaming-meemees" crying fit about four months after Arthur died. I think if any of the neighbors had heard me they would have called the police to have me committed. Then I remembered someone saying at the support group that they had this experience and when it happens you should just go with it. It really did release the pressure.

All the big days became a source of renewed pain - Christmas, Easter, Halloween, the first day of school, birthdays, death dates and to this day I go away on Mother's Day.

I began to hate going to the supermarket. If I went down the cereal aisle, I would encounter the Cheerios Arthur used to eat, and in the cookie aisle it would be the Oreos he dunked in his milk at night.

After taking a fall my doctor said, "Ro, do you understand you might have permanent paralysis." I replied, "I've been through the worst, nothing else can happen to me."

By spring I was angry. Daffodils were emerging and Arthur always brought me my first daffodil of spring. I wanted to stomp on the daffodils! But this time I dug up the daffodils and took them to Arthur at the cemetery.

Whatever the season or stage of grief the support group was there, a place to talk about your feelings, how one can break down in tears for no apparent reason, and how to respond to questions about your child.

We really have a need to talk about our children who died. My biggest fear is that people will forget my child. I really appreciate getting cards and/or phone calls near Arthur's birth and death days.

I recommend belonging to a support group as the bereaved parents become your extended family. You make a lot of friendships there with people who are sensitive to your feelings. You learn that crying is OK.

I also recommend that newly bereaved parents try to do a project in the name of your child. I bought a bookcase for the library of the middle school where Arthur would have attended and had his name put on it. Each year at Christmas or on his death anniversary I ask relatives and friends to purchase books and make donations to his library.

You may want to plant a garden in memory of your child. Do something positive in memory of your child.