

# ALIVE ALONE: DEATH OF AN ONLY CHILD / ALL CHILDREN

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The death of a child from any cause or at any age is the most devastating experience that a parent will ever encounter in one's lifetime. Parents are supposed to die before their children or at least that is what we are conditioned to believe in our society in the United States and many other countries. When our child/children die it affects us emotionally, physically, psychologically, socially and spiritually. A child's death is so inconceivable that our friends, co-workers and family members are at a loss as to how they can assist us on the most difficult journey of our lives. This journey requires understanding and assistance from other bereaved parents like ourselves and often extra help from the professional community.

My husband, Rodney, and I reluctantly joined this group known as 'bereaved parents' in 1980 when our only child, Rhonda, died unexpectedly of a capillary collapse due to an anesthetic, which was to have been a 'routine biopsy' according to the medical professionals.

Even though I credit Compassionate Friends for saving our marriage and lives we still realized that having no surviving children made us significantly different than other bereaved parents as we would never be active parents again, never be grandparents and there would be no immediate family to celebrate holidays, special events or anyone to be our advocate as we age. Issues such as- What do we do with our children's memorabilia when our child had no siblings? Who will want any of our personal family heirlooms when there are no children? How do we make certain that our estates are managed and distributed properly according to our wishes as we age or die? Who will be there as an advocate for us when one of us is ill and needs assistance? What happens when life events, such as storms, floods, fires, tornados and hurricanes devastate our property and no one comes to our assistance? Will anyone call, send us an email, card, letter or make a visit once in awhile to provide some friendship since we have no children or grandchildren? Will we spend each significant birthday, anniversary or holiday alone or must we always be the one to initiate making certain we are not alone? These and many other unique pertinent questions haunt those of us with no surviving children.

My husband, Rodney and I created **Alive Alone** in 1988 after our only child, Rhonda, died in 1980 just prior to her sixteenth birthday. **Alive Alone, Inc.** is a non-profit, tax deductible corporation, organized for such educational and charitable purposes as will benefit bereaved parents, whose only child or all children are deceased, by providing a self-help network and publications to promote communication and healing, to assist in resolving their grief, and a means to reinvest their lives for a positive future.

We publish a periodical five times per year. Most of the material is original articles, poems, reinvestment ideas, book and music reviews that are written and/or suggested by bereaved parents now childless or by professionals for parents now childless. We wish to convey hope to the bereaved and a forum for the expression of the grief they experience as the result of the death of an only child or all of their children.

Alive Alone also networks now childless parents with others who have similar experiences. For example, If a parent had a teen die due to suicide and has no surviving children we try to locate another parent with that same experience so they may email, write or phone one another for extra support and encouragement. Alive Alone has a data base of thousands who have been or are

currently on our mailing list that are willing to assist someone more newly bereaved. This 'networking' often is a lifeline to those who feel they are sinking in the sea of grief.

Alive Alone also provides seminars for bereaved parents at national bereavement gatherings such as Bereaved Parents of USA, Compassionate Friends, Parents of Murdered Children and other similar organizations throughout the year.

There are **no** organized Alive Alone chapters as we are not chartered to do so. But, there are a few groups of parents with no surviving children who meet regularly to attend a theater , go out to eat, or just gather to provide friendship and understanding for one another either on a regular or irregular basis in certain localities of the United States.

There is a website online for parents now childless **[www.alivealone.org](http://www.alivealone.org)**