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Feeling Isolated? Stand with Us.

Trish Myers

While reading the lovely holiday newsletter, I was struck yet again by the richness and diversity of the very personal stories of parents who have lost it all, their cherished child(ren). Among the newly bereaved, the sense of shock and disorientation is so clearly described in their stories, that it nearly takes my breath away. I was there once. Your words are powerful to me. I feel as if I can touch you through your writing. In nearly every article I write, I find myself feeling moved by all of our efforts to share a bit about ourselves and our children.

Let me assure you that no matter how long it's been since the death of your child, you have the rare gift of knowing how to stand with others who share this experience. You may feel unqualified to "help" others. You may be very humble and shy about reaching out to others, or maybe writing is not comfortable for you. Please trust those of us who have spent many years on the grief journey. You are helpful every single time you stand with the community of bereaved parents. We feel your presence, even if you never go to a conference or write your child's story. We sense that you are there to help us to stay standing on our own journeys.

In the holiday issue, I recognized some of the parents whom I have met along the way through **Alive Alone**. We've never met in person, but I know their stories. It felt like a homecoming to meet again through the newsletter and to know that this parent is moving forward on his/her journey. When I saw a familiar email address, it was as if I was once again having a little visit with you. You may not recall that visit, but I certainly do. It has meant the world to me to share a few emails with many of you. It keeps me going forward, while at the same time being able to look back at the life I had with Allyson sixteen years ago. You, good listeners, will not judge me if I choose to linger again on the life I had as Allyson's Mom.

How can you stay connected to others when you are newly on this journey and the pain of social life is too gut wrenching to overcome? I understand that fully. I've been there, staying home even while my husband went out to dinner with another couple. Was I feeling isolated? Of course. Yet, I felt confident that I was acting in ways that would move me forward without destroying me. Being home was my safe zone at that time, and I did have a work life outside the home. How did I connect with others? Emailing others was a huge resource of support. I could do it at any hour. Social media was not yet born. Phone calls were helpful with a few trusted acquaintances who had lost children. I also filled in the social gaps at that time by reading many books written by bereaved parents. I would lose myself in their stories and was always amazed when I saw bits and pieces of myself, despite the different circumstances in our lives. I felt understood by the writers, in ways that my own family could not fulfill.

While reading a book, I encountered a miracle coincidence. The author had taught at Penn State, where my daughter graduated. I was able to find her email address, and we exchanged letters. She had moved to Israel and lost a son there to the violence. As we exchanged stories, I learned the incredible news that she had lived next door to a family at Penn State whose little boy grew up and became Allyson's boyfriend. It was that young man, Sherri's neighbor in the '80's, who was with Allyson when she died. Sherri and I became a gift to each other. I would never have received that gift if not for following my gut and writing to the author. God works in mysterious ways.

It's truly a small world. I'm humbled and awestruck by the power of our stories. We are all much closer together than we are far apart. That's the mission of **Alive Alone**. Kay and Rodney, founders of **Alive Alone** continue to greatly inspire me. I continue to call this space "home", a safe place to share with others. We stand by you and with you and behind you as you move forward one step at a time.