

## WHEN WILL I HEAL?

By Sandy Fox

I often get asked after a parent has lost a child, "When will I heal from this unspeakable loss?" I knew I would never heal completely, but I searched for reasons to move on with my life until I found answers. No one has the same experience, not all people heal the same way or at the same time. You need to be patient with yourself and give yourself time to grieve, no matter how long it takes.

You may feel better one day and the next feel worse. You may begin to go through the five steps of grief (shock, anger, withdrawal, acceptance and renewal) and find yourself making progress and then retreating backwards to the beginning. It may upset you, but know that it is normal for this to happen. For example, after getting over the initial shock and anger, you get to the withdrawal stage, and then find that one day you fall back to the beginning stage. It is like climbing a mountain, getting to a certain point and then your foot slips on a rock and you fall down to the starting area. But, what you would do then, you also do in grief. You start again up the mountain and try to reach the top. Just because you start again still doesn't mean you will get to our goal, but don't stop trying. When you reach a level where you can look back and say to yourself, "I've made it past that original starting point," keep going. It is not uncommon to fall into the crevice many times and your emotions may get the better of you then. It all looks insurmountable, but I can tell you that you will survive.

One day a subtle shift occurs when you wake up. It is a beautiful morning, birds are singing, the sun is shining in the window and your spirits may soar. You know it will be a good day and you go from there. This process is slow. It can take you three months, six months, even a year or two. But, time will be your friend and you will find that eventually you will feel a little better. This doesn't mean you are healed. You will never heal from the loss of a child, nor will you ever forget the child who brightened your life so much.

You don't want to forget, and why should you? People may say to you, "It's been a year. You need to get over this. Forget about what happened." They don't understand; they have probably never had a loss this great. Your feelings may be hurt, but you need to tell them that you are doing the best you can and that even though it is a very bumpy road, you are slowly progressing and improving. Your memories of your child will keep you going, and it is okay to carry those memories with you for the rest of your life.

For myself, not a day goes by that I don't think of my daughter. When I am driving somewhere on a beautiful day, I often have to pull over to the side of the road because my grief overwhelms me. It has been twenty-one years, and I still get teary-eyed thinking of her and all the things she is missing and I am missing by not being together. When I calm down, I continue on.

You, too, will have overwhelming feelings at times, probably for the rest of your life. It is something we learn to live with and accept, for nothing will bring them back. I do know, though, she is in my heart now, and I will keep her there forever.

*Sandy has been a member of Alive Alone since her daughter died and is a regular presenter at national bereavement conferences.*

*Marcy Jeanne Lewis, Sandy's daughter, lived for 27 ½ years and died in 1994 due to an auto accident.*

*"Creating a New Normal. After the Death of a Child" and "I Have No Intention of Saying Good-Bye" are two books which Sandy has authored. These are available through Amazon, Barnes and Noble and Centering Corporation.*