

## The First Time

"It's a support group for parents who have lost a child. You don't have to say a thing," my sister tried to reassure me. I didn't have the energy to make up an excuse, so I let her lead me to the car.

As we drove, I felt sick to my stomach. My mind raced through all the scenarios I expected to find. I dreaded seeing a room full of people who resembled the hollow shell I saw in the mirror. Walking from the car to the brilliantly lit room, I held the arm of my sister and tried to breathe. I had a new mantra: "I don't have to say a word."

Entering the room, I felt my tears, always so close to the surface, spilling over. I didn't make a sound as they ran down my cheeks, and through the watery cloud, I saw figures approach and reach out. With a series of deep hugs and quiet whispers, I was guided to a chair.

"We're sorry for the reason you are here, but we're glad you've found us." Someone handed me a bottle of water and a bundle of tissues. As I sat in my chair and waited for the meeting to begin, I peeked up to notice the room filling. One woman across from me caught my eye and I quickly looked down. Please don't look at me, I thought. No one look at me.

The meeting began and I allowed myself to glance at the parents that were there. Some smiled at others openly. How could this be? How could they smile? A wooden butterfly was being passed around and parents were introducing themselves, telling whom they had lost and how. It was all too much. I didn't belong here. I am NOT one of them! I have NOT lost my son!

The sobs exploded, uncontrollably from deep within, and I quickly covered my face with my hands. How can I tell them? I'm so ashamed. They'll think I was a horrible mother. You don't have to say a word, I reminded myself. I regained my composure. I'll just pass the butterfly. Three more... Two more... It's almost time. I don't feel well... Now, I held the butterfly and, as I turned it over and over in my hand, I heard myself speak...

"My name is Sara. My son, Shawn, was just 15 years old when he took his life. It's been 11 days." I gasped for a deep breath and passed the butterfly. The group split up into smaller groups in order to more intimately share personal stories about the children we had lost. I'll just sit and listen, I thought. That will be okay.

One by one, parents told their truths about their precious children that had once been.

They had walked where I walk today. I listened closely. And then... I didn't want to remain quiet anymore. I began to tell my story. It flowed out in bursts like the tears from my eyes. I purged the hurt and guilt and shared the love I felt for my baby boy. I allowed the agony of my soul to be visible to these strangers and, as I finished, I saw the love in their eyes as they nodded their heads in understanding.

On the drive home, my sister asked, "So, what do you think?"

"I'll go again," I whispered. And, I have.

By Sara Moore

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## EverAshley Music

Alan Pedersen is an Award winning songwriter and successful recording artist and has turned the focus of his music and message toward helping the bereaved



find hope and healing as they navigate the valley of grief. Alan's only daughter Ashley was killed in an automobile accident. This tragedy would take his life in a direction he never imagined and the pain and journey toward finding joy again have been the subject matter for three highly acclaimed CD's of original songs. He is involved in many grief groups and has sung for us at the Waterbury TCF. He has contact information on his website and will play events in any town or for a group. His website is: <http://www.everashleymusic.com/home.html>. He has sung for The Waterbury TCF group.



Flowers are the spirits of children whose footsteps have passed from the earth, but reappear each year to gladden the pathway of those now living.

Cowlitz Indian Legend