



**33RD**  
National  
Conference  
Arlington,  
Virginia

JULY 2-4, 2010

## The Compassionate Friends 33<sup>rd</sup> National Conference

July 2-4, 2010, Arlington, Virginia

### Why We Come

~excerpts

Although they cannot be neatly boxed and sorted, it appeared to me that there were five major groups of people at the conference. While there is much overlap, each group came for a specific purpose.

### The Seekers

*"Hope" is a thing with feathers that perches in the soul and sings the tune without the words – and never stops – at all.*  
~Emily Dickenson

The newly bereaved comprise the largest group. They are identified by their haunted expressions and the red hearts on their nametags. "It's been eight months and I feel as if I'm sinking deeper and deeper into despair." "Will it ever get any better?" "When?" "My future is gone." "I can't talk to anyone without crying." These were typical comments on Friday of the conference.

### The Mending Ones

*In the depth of winter, I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible summer.*  
~Albert Camus

Another large contingent has moved beyond the red heart nametags but are still struggling. They smile spontaneously, but they still tear up easily.

"My husband doesn't understand why I'm still grieving." "My parents are still so depressed. I don't want to add to their burdens." "I turned a corner at last year's conference, but the justice system still sets me back." "I've come a long way, but it's still so hard at times."

This group is plowing through the necessary grief work one difficult step at a time. They know they have made progress, but the future remains

daunting. Learning how others with the same problems are coping gives them insight and hope. Their choice of workshops and sharing sessions is now focused on specific problems they are struggling with. One small nugget of wisdom can open new vistas of healing.

### The Helpers

*Don't walk in front of me; I may not follow. Don't walk behind me; I may not lead. Just walk beside me and be my friend.*  
~Albert Camus

"Jim, what workshops are you going to?" Jim and I had met at our first national conference when we both were wearing the little red hearts. We had renewed our acquaintance every July for the next seven years.

"I don't do workshops anymore, I've been to them all," he replied.

What do you do?"

"I pick up strays."

"What do you mean?"

"I just walk around until I see someone with that deer-in-the-headlights look in their eyes and I sit down and talk with them."

Do these people just need to be needed? I think not. They do this to honor their children. And they remember a time when they were struggling and without hope, and someone took the time to listen. Now, they pass it on.

### The Learners

*Get wisdom and with all they getting, get understanding.*  
~Proverb 4:7

A significant number of attendees come primarily to learn. This is where newsletter editors swap ideas and learn their trade. Many attend workshops totally unrelated to their child's death just to learn how to better help those with whom they come in contact. Others come to learn better how to educate church, lay and professional groups about the grief process following the death of a child.

### The Workers

*Work is love made visible.*  
~Kahlil Gibran

The Crystal City conference was a stunning success and it just didn't happen, but was accomplished by probably the smallest group numerically. It was the result of a year's work of the conference committee and the local chapters. They stuffed the bags, raised

~continued on page 5