

# TCF National Conference Conference Closing Speech



Sunday, July 6 2003 ~excerpts

Human grief has no easy answers. I named my first book "When There Are No Words..." because that is exactly the situation when your child dies. There are no words that help. The pain comes to stay and no matter how much people want to kiss it and make it well, grief runs on its own timetable.

Your kid... was like no other. Your grief... is like no other. And the gradual easing of your pain is not going to happen by anybody else's formula.

## SOME THINGS I'VE LEARNED

There are a few things I have learned during the past seventeen years since two of our three sons died. These are personal observations based on first, being a bereaved parent, and then drawing on a lot of conversations... and emails ... and letters that have come as a result of my books.

### 1. YOU'RE STUCK WITH THIS PAIN.



You are going to hurt real bad for a long time. And even though everybody around you is going to be wishing your pain away, you're going to go on hurting for a long time.

There will come a day when you will have longer periods between the pains but at least in my experience. When the memories do come flooding back even after seventeen years they are going to hurt just as much as the first day you got the news.

But the surprising thing is that's the way it ought to be. Even though your first thought might be, "I cannot stand this pain any longer!" your second and third thoughts would reveal to you that the unprecedented, unequalled pain that you are enduring is actually your tribute to what you have lost.

What would it say if you had a most precious person torn from your life and you continued along in your life as if nothing had happened? Pain is lousy and it hurts, but the depth of your pain testifies to the depth of your love and the significance of your loss. It hurts, but it is the appropriate response to overwhelming loss. Your tears are your tribute to one who been taken from you.

### 2. PEOPLE SAY A LOT OF DUMB STUFF.

Somehow, we expect people to have thought about the words that come out of their mouths as they gather around and try to help. Actually, very few of us ever really examine the words we say. We just sort of just open mouth and spit out some cliché that we once heard and assume that it will work.



We also start from the mistaken assumption that our job when we speak to a grieving person is to fix things, to solve their problem, to say some magic set of words that will help them "snap out of it."

The stupidity ranges all the way from "God must have needed another angel in heaven" to "You're still young - so you can have other children" to the absolutely abominable "I know exactly how you feel because my pet died."

Probably the only thing that will keep you from punching out a long-time friend who says one of those dumb things is to make yourself hear what they mean instead of what they say. People just say dumb stuff but they mean well. You have to cut them some slack even though you're the one who is in need.

You also now know... that hugs say things better than words. I find that looks and hugs are far more eloquent than any words I might put together.

### 3. TELLING YOUR STORY

Grieving people need to tell their stories more times than their friends or family members are going to be willing to hear. That is perhaps the greatest value of TCF, a group of people who are not only willing to hear your story again and again but will sincerely cry with you the twentieth time you tell that story just as they cried the first time you told it. It has become their story too. They have suffered your loss. They repeatedly provide the exact response you expected from the whole world.

### 4. WRITING SOMETIMES HELPS

There is something therapeutic about putting things on paper that really helps to focus the mind and get some of those inner feelings out where we can deal with them more effectively. Just put some words on paper that work for you, words that feel good when you read them over to yourself. Later, if your words help others when they are shared that's good too. But, for starters just dump some of what's in your mind onto paper. Read it over, work it over, bathe it in tears until it feels good.

### 5. EXERCISE.

I am not saying that exercise takes away the pain of grief. I am saying that after you rake leaves until you drop or pump that stationary bicycle that's gathering dust in the garage and after you have a quick shower and towel dry then sit down to rest, that's when your mind can get a clear fix on which parts of the hurting were emotional... and which were just from sitting too many hours, popping too many pain pills and drinking too many relaxers.



Another thing that strenuous exercise will do is get you so physically tired that your body will finally take you to sleep even while your mind is still feeling that you ought to observe an all night vigil. Sleep is as important as exercise. Neither one is easy during grief but you can make your reluctant body exercise and that can make your reluctant mind sleep.

### 6. YOU NEED TO LET PEOPLE HELP YOU.

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