

# FIVE YEARS AFTER CHILD- LOSS: EVOLUTION OF GRIEF

By: Dave Roberts



I am presenting a workshop at The Compassionate Friends national conference next month entitled: “The Bereaved Parent- Five Years Later.” Linda Findlay of Mourning Discoveries and I originally developed the idea for this workshop to discuss the needs of the later grief experiences of bereaved parents.

We chose five years, because for many of us, it takes that long to adjust to a world without the physical presence of our children. Linda and I first presented this workshop at the Bereaved Parents of the USA national conference in New York in 2009, and it appeared to be very well received.

During my early grief (two-and-one half years) following the death of my daughter Jeannine in March of 2003, I experienced shock, disorientation and doubt about my ability to ever experience joy in my life again. As I have progressed in my journey, I have developed many of my own personal observations:

I still experience milestone events (e.g., death anniversary dates, birthdays) just as intensely as I did during my early grief. I am able to cope with them better because I know how to manage them better. I am also aware of what does not work for me and am ok with that.

I have discovered the difference between entitlement and gratitude. During my early grief, I questioned why Jeannine had to die, and why any parent had to endure that unbearable pain. I am now resolved to be grateful for who I have in my life in the present moment.

My definitions of relationships are redefined. This applies not only to my relationships with my friends and colleagues but with Jeannine as well. Jeannine has made her presence known to me in a variety of ways since her death. Our relationship has also transcended to others in my life as well. Accepting that relationships are eternal has helped me incorporate the better parts of Jeannine into my life and to develop more quality relationships.

Our grief journeys are not about closure; they are about adjustment and staying connected. I have gradually adjusted to the physical absence of Jeannine. That adjustment has been made easier by the comfort that I take in knowing that she will always be with me and that she continues to guide me in my redefined world. I have also come to the conclusion that not everyone will support our continued connections to our children because of their perceptions that grief is a time-limited process. Rather than allow myself to get frustrated, I simply find individuals and groups who support my continued connections to Jeannine.

If you take two steps forward and one backwards, you still made progress. Some days in our later grief journeys may be better than others. Experiencing a bad day does not mean we have regressed in our ability to adjust to our forever-changed circumstances. It simply means that we are missing the physical presence of our children at that particular moment. Remember, joy and pain exist separately during our lifelong journeys; there may be days when the pain that we experience teaches us something more about our grief. It is better to grieve by remembering rather than grieve to forget.

“Love is something eternal; the aspect may change but not the essence.  
”– Vincent Van Gogh