

'Will I Feel This Way Forever?'

The Answer Is 'No'

BY LINDA MOFFATT

I recently spoke with a bereaved mother whose son died three months ago. As any bereaved parent who has not had the benefit of a support group, she was agonizing over the depth of her feelings.

Was she normal, or perhaps going crazy? She went on to tell me that she cries all the time, doesn't care about her appearance, drags herself out of bed in the morning to go to work, and doesn't feel "thankful" for her other children. "Please tell me this will get better," she begged. "Please tell me I'll learn to cope."

What this woman is experiencing is normal—it feels horrible, but it is normal. What she really wants to know is, "Will I feel this way forever?" The answer is no.

The final stage of grief is generally described as either recovery, reinvestment, or reorganization. My personal favorite term is reorganization—an appropriate word when we consider the vast disorganization that occurs in our life when our child dies.

Our family relationships must shift and alter to somehow account for the space that suddenly exists. Does our middle child now become the "baby" if our youngest died? In a two-child family, does the survivor still have a sibling, or is he now an "only"? If our only child died, are we still parents?

If our marriage was troubled, is it worth saving now? Add to all of this the feelings that each family member has about the death, and the result is total confusion. Much of this may be on a subconscious level, but is there all the same.

Sorting it all out—reorganizing—takes time.

Personally, we are coping every minute with a pain that we would swear no human being could endure. We realize we must go on living, but don't know how, or even if we want to. We have an obsessive need to talk about our child and our grief—for a while it is the only reality that exists. We know we can never be our "old self" again, but no one else does. I can think of few things that could so drastically disrupt a person's life than the death of a child.

So, if reorganization is the goal, and disorganization is the starting point, what lies in between for the bereaved parent? A life of utter agony until this "reorganization" happens three or four years down the road? Again, the answer is no.

If we allow ourselves to feel what we feel, we will begin to move, ever so gradually, from beginning to end. We begin to feel better long before our life is reorganized, and I think that is what keeps us moving steadily forward. In the beginning, it might only be a brief respite from constant pain, or a feeling of being "not quite so crazy."

"Then maybe a few hours we enjoy with special friends. Then a few good days. Eventually, when someone asks how we're doing, we say, "I still have bad days." All of this probably takes place in the first year or so, but that reorganization we're moving toward remains elusive for some time to come. And the words "I am over it" will never be a part of our vocabulary.

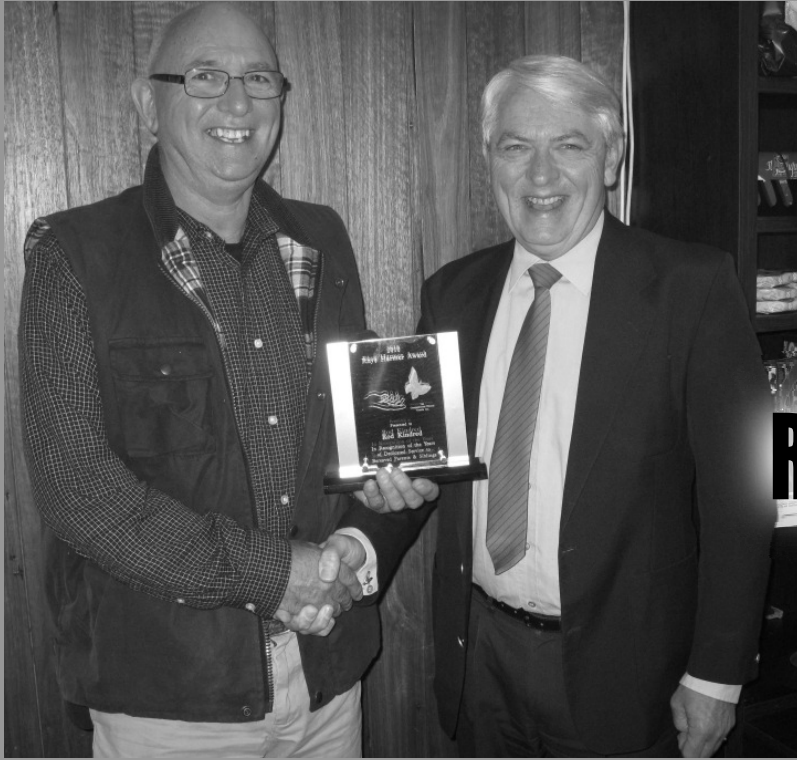
I once read that a bereaved parent must live every day of an entire calendar before he can realize the full extent of his loss. I extend that further to say that if we spend the first year learning what it is that we lost, we spend the next couple of years learning to deal with and accept what we learned the first year. Reorganization is not accomplished quickly or easily.

The mother I spoke with would undoubtedly deny that she is any better. But rather than being lost in her grief, she is beginning to at least ask about feeling better, about learning to cope. It's a teeny tiny step—she will still feel horrible and out of control for quite a while—but she is taking a step toward reorganizing her life without her child.

Finally, each person progresses down this path at his or her own pace. It can take a few years, or many years. It has little to do with the age of the child or circumstances of his death. It has more to do with our own personality, how we have handled problems in the past, and the amount of support we receive.

I have received much support in the three years since Nicholas died, and I feel that I am getting close to feeling sane again, that my life is unscrambling finally. It's not the same life I had "before"—that life was scattered in many different directions—but the reorganizing I've been doing for the past three years is shaping a new life for me. It's a different life than my old one, but it's one I think I can live with.

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Rod Kindred
2010
Rhys Harmer Award
Recipient

The Compassionate Friends Victoria Inc. is honoured to announce that the 2010 Rhys Harmer Award is to be presented to one of our Volunteers who has made an outstanding contribution to The Compassionate Friends Victoria. A person who has passionately and compassionately supported so many of our regional Victorian parents and siblings since 1997 in so many ways.

Rod Kindred first came to TCF following the death of his son Travis on 19th September 1993 aged 18. Rod initially made contact in 1994 and in 1997 attended the Relaxation Weekend. He subsequently went on to organise this event in Ballarat in 1999 and Lorne in 2000 before handing the reigns to a new team. In 1998 Rod restarted the Ballarat Support Group and led this group until 2005.

During this time Rod was the TCF representative on the Ballarat regional bereavement network. Both he and his wife Sandra were also committed to raising funds for TCF so for many years they organised an annual Shopping Trip to Melbourne where on average they raised in excess of \$1,200 per trip. In 2000 Rod joined the Board of Management as the Regional representative and served as Board Member for 3 years. He then very generously returned to the Board of Management for a further 3 years in 2006.

Rod's inspiring commitment and dedication to TCF over 11 years of service to the organisation has been profound and has enabled the community of Ballarat to have an excellent support service for the bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents in and around the area. He is a deserved recipient of the 2010 Rhys Harmer Award. Our heartfelt appreciation to Rod and his wife Sandra for her support of his various roles over the years. Rod you have made significant contributions to TCF. Thank you.

Anne Wicking (CEO)
TCF Vic. Au.