

## **Grandparents Dealing with the Loss Of A Grandchild 12/13/2002**

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by Bev Bressler

The loss of our grandson, Caleb Joseph Souers, is as fresh today as when he was born still July 3, 1998. I am beginning to realize the loss will always be with us, as his grandparents, but the pain doesn't cut as deeply as it did. Days after his birth and death, I didn't see how the pain would ever ease up, even though caring people said it would. We had never experienced anything like this; Caleb, the son of our daughter Tricia and her husband Tim, is their first child. We were making all the usual mistakes by trying so desperately to make the pain better for her and, in fact, only added to the pain, though we didn't mean to do so.

We owe a debt of gratitude to SHARE. They held a "grandparents' meeting" and, thank the Lord, we felt the need to attend. I poured out my grief and learned that even though we wanted our daughter to be happy again, to be "her old self," Tricia had already come a far way. We also learned that our daughter was "normal" for that time in her life and even though it had been a while since Caleb's death, she still was hurting badly. Things just didn't seem like they were ever going to be normal again. It didn't help that we were saying all the wrong things like, "Pour yourself into your work, it will help"; "Life goes on"; "You'll have other children one day." Heaven help me, if only I could take those words back. Our daughter heard these phrases at her workplace and from many well-meaning people, but like them, we thought these words would help. Trust me, they didn't then and don't now. They only hurt more.

I've learned that the only words of comfort to be shared are, "I'm so sorry for your loss," along with a loving, warm hug. Let them know you are there for them. I wanted my daughter to be back to her normal self; I feared that she would never be the same. The best advice that helped this grandma was given to me when I was told that my daughter would never be the same because she was a new mom who had lost her son and had to deal with her pain every day. But she was still the sweet person I'd always known. I took these words to heart, "Your pain is that of a double-edged sword, it's cutting you both ways with the loss of your grandson and the pain of your daughter."

The double-edged sword... how powerful these words are! They explain the depth of our pain. Giving up our grandson and watching, day by day, the pain that our daughter was living with was an experience we had never had before. The helpless feeling of not being able to say or do anything that really eased her pain was killing us. Tricia and Tim attended the monthly SHARE support meetings where she was able to talk and receive the love and support we couldn't give. That hurt a little, to think as her parents, we couldn't give her what she needed. But, it's true, we couldn't. The old saying that you don't know how a person feels unless you walk in their shoes is so true. How could we know how she felt? I had never lost a child, and unless you have, you have no idea of the pain that is there. At least there is comfort in the thought that I never said those empty words, "I know how you feel." My daughter heard that often. She felt compelled to reply

with “thank you,” but inside all she wanted to do was scream, “No you don’t know how I feel, have you lost a child?”

We did tell our daughter that we love her so very much and we were feeling her pain. But, not having lost a child we realized that we didn’t really know her pain. But the pain we were feeling was tearing us apart. Giving up a grandson was like giving up my own child. Even though Caleb was born still, we held him for hours. We studied his little face, trying to forever engrave this in our hearts. It was going to have to last us the rest of our lifetimes. We watched our daughter Tricia and her husband Tim holding their son, loving him so much and wanting so desperately for him to open his eyes. My daughter told me later that when she looked at Caleb, she prayed for her son to stay. We took many pictures (we have a small album of them now) and from time to time I open the book and look at Caleb. Of course, we can’t keep the tears from flowing as we wish for him to be back with us and think of all the things that we are missing as his grandparents, like the joy of watching him grow.

We are thankful to have our daughter close to us. She and I have a special bond and do lots of mother-daughter things. This gives us time to talk about Caleb. In the beginning it wasn’t easy; I was afraid of causing her more pain by bringing up his memory at all. One day we were driving along and she was telling me how upset she was that her coworkers never asked how she was feeling or doing. They acted like nothing had ever happened, that she never had a child. She felt like they didn’t care. I told her that perhaps they were like me. No one wanted to make her sad or make her pain worse. Ever so softly, she said to me, “Mom, it hurts more when you don’t say anything.” Out of the mouths of babes, as the Lord has said, and she is my baby no matter how old she gets. My daughter herself taught me the greatest lesson in dealing with the loss of our grandson. Talk about him. Most of all, let the parents (your son or daughter) talk about their baby all they want to and as often as they feel the need. This and time are the only true factors that eventually eases the pain of loss for them (and us).

The first year without Caleb was the hardest; with every holiday, we felt the emptiness and watched our daughter face them without her child. She would see other expectant mothers and feel sad. She was glad for them, but sad it wasn’t to be for her. She would see little ones at the age her son would have been and said, “I miss him so much, Mom.” At times, we hug each other and cry even to this day and if we hear the song “Baby of Mine” or “Angel,” which we have come to think of as Caleb’s songs, we’ll cry every time.

Don’t we wish there were some words that really could make the pain easier? There are none. Time, they say, will make the pain easier. We ask, “How much time?” That isn’t easy to answer. For each one, this is as different as each person is. Only God knows how long it will take for each of us. Take the time to grieve for your child or grandchild and take one day at a time. Our daughter and her husband now have a beautiful little girl, Caitlin. We wondered if our daughter’s arms would forever be empty. Our prayers were heard. We look at our new granddaughter and can see how beautiful she is. Since brothers and sisters favor each other, I think we will see a part of Caleb in her as she

grows. However, she is definitely her own sweet little person that is truly a miracle and gift from God.

If your daughter or daughter-in-law asks, "Am I a Mom? I didn't get to keep my baby," tell her, "Yes you are and will always be a Mom. You just didn't get to practice yet." When people ask me how many grandchildren I have, I say, "Six, three granddaughters and three grandsons. One grandson is our Angel in Heaven." And you know what? This statement has let many say, "I'm so sorry." When I thank them, they begin telling me they too have lost a grandchild. Then we begin to talk and share tears. We feel better somehow that we have this bond of loss and it eases the pain for all of us for a while.

Losing my grandson changed my life as well. I don't see things like I did before or take things for granted. Caleb gave me more in his short time on earth than I had learned in my lifetime before him. He taught my family that loving one another is more important than anything. Funny, we thought we knew that, but we really didn't. In his small time of being carried within his Mom, he showed us how strong she is. This tiny five foot two inch woman, who once seemed very fragile, carried her son while knowing he wasn't going to live. But she had to give him every chance. That took such courage. I watched her everyday and I don't know how she did it. To look at her, she seemed okay, but I thought to myself, "What must she be thinking and feeling?" She doesn't think she's strong, but we know better!

From the bottom of our hearts, we thank those at SHARE for giving us words to live by and showing us how to help and support our daughter. In doing so, we were able to cope with our own loss. We've learned that things will never be the same, they can't be. Tricia is a mom who has lost her son. I hung on to the words, Someday it will be better, and for months wondered if there would be enough time in my life for that to happen. There was. From one grandparent to another, if you have experienced the loss of a grandchild, know that with each passing day, you are not alone even if it sometimes feels like it. If you feel like crying, let the tears flow. They are healing tears. Stay in touch with your son or daughter as much as you did before the loss even if it's just to say, "Hi, how are you today?" Listen a lot; it's amazing how this helps your son or daughter. We all need to talk.

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