ANNIVERSARY REACTION

It doesn't make any difference if it's the first or the twenty-first anniversary of your child's death, you will react to it. You'll be consciously aware that the date is approaching. Strangely, sometimes you'll be deeply disturbed for weeks before the actual date. Other times the fact that an anniversary is nearing, won't seem to bother you much at all. The only thing consistent is that there will be an anniversary, and that you WILL react.

Don't be surprised if you begin reliving the weeks and days before your child's anniversary. In the early years of your grief you may relive her death day minute by minute. It can be extremely painful, but after some anniversaries pass, the details of the day become less vivid and less painful.

For years after Arthur was killed I'd begin my anniversary reaction around Easter. Easter Sunday, 1971 was the last holiday we were together as a complete family. For years Easter Sunday was the starting date for reliving that terrible Friday and the days following. Generally though, the farther I get from Arthur's death date, the less painful it is.

Special circumstances or events can make it painful, even years later. For example, on the eleventh anniversary, I was also grieving the death of my granddaughter. At that time Emily hadn't been dead a year yet. I saw the pain my daughter was experiencing and because I couldn't "kiss it and make it better' for MY child, I hurt even more.

There will be times when a coming anniversary will fill you with fear and pain. Other years it will come with just a ripple in your heart. Accept the varying degrees of pain as normal. Be kind to yourself. You may need of a lot of tender loving care at that time. For the times that you don't hurt deeply, be thankful that some of the pain is gone.

As the years go on you will continue to wonder what your child would look like or what she might be doing at this age, This kind of thing will remain with you until you die. When other young people you know are doing things your child will never do, You may have strong feelings of pain or regret. Let your feelings happen.

Observe the anniversary in some real way. Make plans with family members or special friends to observe the day. Go to dinner. Let off balloons to your child in heaven. Tie messages of love on them. Place fresh flowers to her grave. Think of your own ways to mark the day. If the tears flow, let them. Remember, love never goes away. Your tears attest to that.