

TIME

Before the ninth anniversary of my son's death I had been aware for weeks that the day was coming. When I went to bed the night before, I thought about it being the anniversary, but on the day of his death it wasn't until 11:30 in the morning that I remembered it. I couldn't believe myself. I felt quite comfortable. My son had died nine years ago that day and I wasn't miserable. This set me to thinking. What had happened in those nine years that I could reach this point?

In my years of association with bereaved parents in all stages of their grief and recovery, I have learned that the pain does get to be less as the years go on. I found that time does soften the sorrow, and that parents do find happiness and contentment again. The word "time" is always used to explain recovery, but I question that. How can the passing of days and months and years make a difference? My question is, what goes on during the passing of time that causes healing? There has to be a positive happening that causes a return of peace. I know of people who have been terribly hurt twenty or thirty years ago that have become bitter and angry people. They have had "time" and they are not healed. For them time has only created a cover over a boil that has metastasized to their whole being.

Personally, I wallowed in my destructive grief for five years after Arthur died. I tried to find escape in alcohol and pills. I was steeped in self-pity and anger and guilt. For five years I did nothing that would help me work through my grief. I didn't share my pain with others. I didn't talk out my feelings. I didn't read anything that would help me understand my grief. I pushed it down and down into my very soul. The alcohol and pills, instead of giving me the escape I sought, increased my depression. It wasn't until I stopped trying to run away and began to look at myself and my grief with a clear head that I began to heal. Time itself did nothing.

I had to go back and consciously relive the pain of Arthur's death. I had to talk out my feelings. I had to experience my feelings. I had to face the reality that my child was dead. Time didn't do it. Work; positive, constructive grief work did it. I

had to share the pain and experiences of other grieving parents. I had to help other grieving parents. I had to excise the tumor of grief that had permeated my soul. I had to let Arthur go.

Time itself does not heal, it is what use we make of that time that heals. Granted, there is a dimming of the memory of how much we hurt when our child died, just as there is a dimming of the memory of the joy we felt at his birth, but time itself does nothing. It's what we do with that time on a minute to minute, day to day, basis that heals.

Daily we must look at our emotions, at our guilt, anger and regrets. We have to ask ourselves what we want to do with them. We have to ask ourselves if hanging on to them will bring our child back. We have to work to replace our negative emotions with positive ones. We have to look at the beauty left in us in life instead of what was taken away from us. We must find good in life. We must find reasons to go on.

Time is the passing of moments lived one at a time. Our recovery depends on what we do with each moment. We cannot simply sit back and say "time will heal me". Time is simply the movement of the clock; our successful return to comfortable living is what we do while that clock is moving.