

A Single Parent's Sharing

When my husband died, I was at first relieved for him that he would not have to suffer any more amputation.

He was such a strong and a very physical person, always ready to help. He took the blow of having his whole right arm amputated with admirable restraint and courage. I was fearful that he would plunge into depression. I was fearful that he would plunge into depression. I was horrified when the cancer started to spread to his other arm. He died before the second amputation. Sometimes I wonder whether I would have been strong enough for him if he had been alive.

I felt so hopeless and helpless. I wished sometimes that I had been the one to die. He was truly the better half of me. I felt so inadequate and insecure emotionally, physically and financially. I felt guilty thinking of the costs of treatments and the yearlong hospitalization. Sometimes I feel so bitter about the emotional ups and downs that we had been subjected to. At times we were so hopeful and yet this was the best result.

For a year after Paul's death, I was numb. I lulled myself into thinking that I was coping fine and that I had to carry on. However, I would erupt into a temper and violence with my two helpless and grieving children aged 5 and 10. I rationalized that I had to discipline them more as their father was not around to do so. I hated myself even more when I cooled down.

I could not understand it. I was a tomboy. As tough as they come. Yet I would find myself crying hot tears in the privacy of my room. I had many destructive thoughts. I wanted to hit out at the world for dealing me such a blow. Was I jinx? I wanted to end my miserable life so that my children could have better parenting from my in-laws. Just about anybody would be a better parent than me. I hated this feeling of self-pity and anger going round and round inside of me. I dared not talk about it as I feared being judged as mentally ill and incompetent. My family tried to rally around me but I pretended to be happy-go-lucky and cheerful. No one could get through my 7-to-7



mask, only my children were the victims of my anger and suppressed feelings. I was like a keg of gunpowder ready to explode. I had no friends. My marriage was my life.

Towards the 1st anniversary of Paul's death, I thought I was coping very well except for the angry feelings going round in my head. I felt ill. In the doctor's office, I hyperventilated and cried uncontrollably. I felt even more ashamed and disgusted with myself. I was introduced to H.E.L.P. Family Service Centre and the Beginning Experience weekend.

I was cynical, distrustful and scared. I tried very hard to cling to the macho/strong image of myself whenever the others cried. I had been alone for so long that when the team members tried to comfort me, I cringed and would shrink into myself. Over the weekend, my barriers slowly crumbled as I found healing in being able to relate my feeling with the others. I was very relieved to find that way my feelings of suicide and anger were normal. I was also encouraged to feel and identify my feelings. Being able to share with others who were going through the same journey of grief helped immensely. They were not talking down to me. We were sharing experiences not lectures on the rights and wrongs of our behavior. The weekend was a beautiful experience. I was able to go home and hug my children with joy for the first time in a long

while. It was usually with repentance before. I had found support and empathy. This is the help I need and I take one day at a time.

Three years have since passed. As I take stock of my blessings, I am grateful to God who has provided and helped my children and I through many hurdles.

My son who is nine has been through 2 Rainbow programmes. His anger with me for his father's death has since been worked out. He is independent, very naughty but also very caring of others who are in similar situations. He has a terrible temper and can be very stubborn but then you can't have everything. He can openly say to me that he misses his father very much. This is courage!

My daughter, who is 14, has gone through Spectrum. She has been taking care of her brother for the past two years, after school, whilst I am at work. She has learnt to cook a

little and is very good at finding her way around, when it suits her. She is very active in school to the detriment of her school work. At home, the phone rings non stop for her. So far, she seems quite level headed but she is quite and introvert where feeling are concerned. I have also to contend with the fact that she is teenager.

When I am depressed and these two act up on me, I whip myself for failing as a parent. It is very hard to let go of my expectations of two well behaved robots who will act on my command. I guess that is television influence. Often I know I am at fault, and have to be shaken up by my friends that these two 'monsters' are also individuals who have to make their own mistakes and learn from it, not from me. It is a very bitter pill for me to swallow that I can't cushion them from emotional pitfalls. Thank you Lord for your guiding hand, and HELP Family Service Centre. Thanks Sr. Margaret for your presence, Beginning Experience, Rainbows and Spectrum.

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