

Grief defies definition, expert says

Mourning differs with each death

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who is grieving suffers through denial first, then anger, a period of genuine mourning, feelings of guilt and finally acceptance.

These stages were readily apparent in the cases of the families and friends of Candi Harms, Brook Berringer, Jake Taylor, and Richard Tierney and Paul Mackin.

Out of Harms Way

Stan and Pat Harms were not ready to lose their 18-year-old daughter Candice.

On Sept. 22, 1992, during the fall semester of her freshman year at UNL, Candi Harms was abducted and murdered by Roger Bjorklund and Scott Barney.

Stan and Pat never had a chance to say goodbye to their beloved daughter. Candi's boyfriend, Todd Sears, didn't either.

For three months they searched for the loved one they had lost without a trace. Finally they learned the truth. Almost two years later, both Bjorklund and Barney had been sentenced, and the nightmare was over.

But Candi was still gone.

Stan and Pat, enraged at the two men who had dared to destroy their daughter, were helpless to do anything but wait. Todd, in a fit of guilt and anger, took to drinking and smoking, trying to suppress the pain that swelled within him.

But things changed, and time lessened the pain. Todd later married. Stan and Pat, receiving hundreds of letters from sympathetic supporters, found ways to deal with the pain.

Life moved on.

"That's the most important thing for people to do," McCoy said. "The loss of a child is unnatural for the parents; your children are supposed to be your legacy, what you leave behind."

"It's hard to deal with losing your legacy."

She said sudden, violent deaths are often difficult because the family goes through feelings of rage first, accepting what happened but demanding vengeance for the act. That, combined with the unexpectedness of the death, makes for a serious clash of emotion.

Families of murder victims can experience violent mood swings, from anger to sadness to guilt and back again.

"Often the grieving process doesn't even begin until after there has been a conviction," McCoy said. She said she knew of one case where a man fought through his anger for years before the suspect was convicted. As soon as the trial was over, he fell into despondency for months before recovering.

"He was able to go back and do his grieving afterward, but not before,"

she said.

Moving on after there has been acceptance of the death is the most important part of dealing with a murder. The family and friends of the victim must accept that the ordeal is now, in all earthly terms, over.

For Stan, Pat and Todd, Candi's death is now over, although she will never truly be gone.

Heaven Help Her

Without her faith in God, Jan Berringer said she may never have been able to live on after her son Brook's death.

As mother of a nationally known collegiate quarterback, Jan had to face the cold fact that the media knew of her son's death before she did.

She also had to live with the fact that national media were being focused on her constantly.

But her son's death in a plane crash on April 18, 1996, days before the NFL draft, was softened by Jan's belief that Brook was taken to a better place. She comforted herself in her faith that a loving creator had taken her son from her so he could be safe.

The belief, Jan said, is what saved her from complete misery. She had no time to deal with the loss on a personal basis, as she was hounded day and night by media outlets that wanted to know just how she felt.

"In the grieving process, you need time," McCoy said. "You need privacy. You need time to think things through and you need time to cry."

"You kind of go all over the map in terms of emotion."

McCoy said because Jan did not have that time, her faith is probably what saved her.

"There's tremendous anger as well as sadness in a situation like that. Microphones in her face all the time must have made the pressure unbearable just as her world was coming apart," McCoy said.

A belief in God is often what pulls people through their grief, McCoy said.

"For people who have a religious faith, the belief that a loving God that is there to help them is often all the comfort they need," she said.

Jan used that faith to put her son's death behind her. The cameras went away, letters from across the globe poured in and she, along with her two daughters, was able to lay her son to rest beside her dead husband in Goodland, Kan.

Fostering Hope

Ann Taylor knows she is going to cry.

Every day of her life she tries to prepare for it. Every day of her children's lives, she tries to prepare for it.

But nothing helps her in the end. As a foster mother to AIDS babies, Taylor devotes her life ensuring that

her children have lives of their own, no matter how brief. Each and every one will die in the end — and despite Ann's efforts to prepare herself for the loss, when one finally passes away it hurts.

Jake died when he was 14 months old from complications from AIDS. Ann had tried to provide everything for the child, but the one thing that eluded her was the security of knowing Jake would live to adulthood.

And even though Jake was a foster child, his death hurt as much as the death of a blood relative would.

"Losing a child, whether biological or a foster child, is traumatic," McCoy said. "It's especially hard when the child is an infant because then the only way you can express your love is through caretaking."

McCoy said that even though Ann's loss was to a disease, the pain she felt was not lessened.

There is no way to prepare for death, she said, no matter how much it is expected.

McCoy said such a situation is often misunderstood by others. There is often an insensitivity present in people's attitudes that normally wouldn't be there, she said.

"People try to minimize the loss; they say, 'You knew this was going to happen,'" McCoy said.

She said Ann was going to experience this pain again and again, and learning to deal with it probably never would be easy. Ann has other foster children she is caring for, and they are all HIV-positive.

Ann said she has learned to take the days one at a time and cherishes every moment, but she knows the pain is out there, waiting.

"Even though these kids aren't hers biologically, she's chosen a tough road for herself," McCoy said. "In the future, she's left herself open for more loss and the possibility of loss."

"It is a rewarding experience, but difficult nonetheless."

Ageless Question

The Tierney family knows the pain of slowly losing a loved one.

The silent killer of cancer came for the eldest father figures of both families. First Richard Tierney and then, six years later, Paul Mackin.

Grandchildren were without their grandfathers, and children were without parents. Regardless of how they tried to ready themselves, the members of the Tierney family were crushed when the bodies of their grandfathers finally gave up.

The loss was devastating for both generations. The adults had lost the people who had accompanied them throughout life, while the children had been stripped of the kind and wise role models age can provide.

They made their peace with the loss. After all, death is a part of life, they reasoned.

California to get share of settlement

LOS ANGELES (AP) — California, which remained on the sidelines as 22 other states sued tobacco companies, will be able to share in settlement money promised by the Liggett Group, California Attorney General Dan Lungren said Thursday.

"This historic settlement is extraordinary in that California did not even have to sue Liggett in order to strike this agreement," Lungren said.

Meanwhile, the first scheduled trial in a series of state lawsuits seeking to recoup the cost of smoking-related health care was pushed back a month, and the city of San Francisco settled an individual lawsuit with Liggett.

Lungren, a Republican, has refused to join the other states in suing the tobacco industry, despite pressure from Democrats and anti-smoking activists. He has said state law prohibits California from suing.

The law exempts from liability the manufacturer of a product that "is inherently unsafe and is known to be unsafe by the ordinary consumer" and specifically mentions tobacco.

At a news conference, Lungren urged state lawmakers to repeal the law and allow California to pursue further legal action. Bills to do that are being considered in the state Assembly and Senate.

The settlement with Liggett also

gives California access to key internal tobacco documents from the company, which could provide evidence that the industry targeted minors and manipulated nicotine levels.

Asked how much money the settlement would mean for California, Lungren said: "You are probably not looking at a great deal of money. It's the best that could be done under the circumstances."

Based on Liggett's 1995 income, \$575,000 a year would be divided among the 22 state Medicaid funds and the suing Liggett smokers, Lungren said.

Lungren said the agreement would be finalized next week.

The five stages of mourning

Denial

In the first stage of grieving, the survivor fails to admit that the deceased has even passed on.



Anger

In a torrent of emotion, the survivor lashes out in an attempt to vent confusing feelings about the recent death.

Sadness

Also known as the bargaining stage, the survivor begins to grieve in earnest over the recent death.



Guilt

In this stage, the survivor begins to think he or she is at fault somehow, or perhaps there was something that could have been done to prevent the death.

Acceptance

Finally, the survivor learns to accept the fact that the loved one is gone forever. McCoy noted that not everyone reaches this stage.



SOURCE: DR. KATHLEEN MCCOY

MATT HANEV/DN

The loss was still there, however. "Often there is a realization among adults when their parents die," McCoy said. "There is a linear ladder of time they must step up. They realize when someone dies that they're next."

McCoy said the one comfort of such a loss was the ability to say goodbye and make peace with the ones who are dying. Unlike an accident or unexpected death, sick or elderly family members often are there for the person to talk to.

"With a lingering illness, people have the chance to say what they want to say," McCoy said. "They're able to express their love fully, without leaving a lot of unresolved problems."

Because of that, McCoy said, such deaths are painful, but the easiest to deal with.

"It hurts for a long time, and things bring back the pain — music, an anniversary, a holiday — but there are rarely a lot of regrets," she said.

The Tierneys have moved on, but the memories remain.

Thankfully for the family, most of the memories are good ones.

Moving On

McCoy said there are other factors in dealing with death, and how people react to the loss of loved ones depends on the circumstances involved.

Suicide, for example, involves tremendous feelings of guilt for the surviving family, she said. Often the family spends much of their grieving time feeling guilty or bargaining, thinking

things would have been different if only one thing or another had been done differently, she said.

Murder involves anger. Sudden death involves regret. Prolonged sickness can cause prolonged sadness. All deaths involve grief, she said, and the five stages are observed at one time or another.

She said people don't all grieve in the same fashion, though.

"Some people start in different stages," McCoy said. "Some are angry, then sad. Some may start at sadness and move into denial before they finally accept the death."

"Some may never accept the death."

McCoy suggested that people having problems dealing with their grief join a support group or see a counselor. There are numerous support resources everywhere, she said, and people shouldn't be quick to discount them.

Support can even be found on college campuses, she said, with most universities offering some sort of counseling.

UNL's Counseling and School of Psychology Clinic in Bancroft Hall is open for students having trouble with personal grief.

But most of all, McCoy said, time heals the pain of losing a loved one.

"The hurt lessens with time," she said. "Whether it's a parent, child or friend, somehow it's always with you. The difference is between having it dominate your life and being a part of your life."

"Death always changes who we are; it's a part of the growth process. We need to learn to accept it as such."

Dame County' headline draws ire

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — There's nothing like a dame headline to get people calling for the headline writer's head.

When Dane County voters elected women as county executive and Madison mayor for the first time ever, The Capital Times ran a bold, above-the-fold headline Wednesday proclaiming: "Dame County!"

Then came the complaints and cancellations.

One caller found the headline "tasteless, stupid and offensive." Another called it "an example of the worst form of sexism and chauvinism that I've encountered in a long time."

At least two of the more than a

dozen callers in this liberal college town canceled subscriptions to The Capital Times, circulation 22,000.

Associate City Editor Ron McCrea, who wrote the headline, said he was just aiming for a playful way to report the story.

He toyed with "On Ms. Consin!" — a play on the state song, "On Wisconsin!" "Another one was 'Femme Finale!' and of course 'Women Rule,'" but none of these looked very good when we put them on the page," he said.

Before going with the headline, he took an informal poll of women in the office, and they didn't find "Dame County!" offensive, he said.