

A bereaved parent learns to cope and reaches out to others who have lost a child

by Charlotte in Kentucky

Even though I had only a high school education, I was very fortunate to find a career that I loved. I got a divorce when my son was six-months-old and for 20 years held down two jobs simultaneously as a court reporter and legal assistant. I also did some fashion modeling and TV commercials.

As my son grew we had the same interests and studied Tae-Kwon-Do and Jiu-Jitsu. We water-skiied, played golf and rode horses in Kentucky. Once our feet hit the floor we took off running and didn't stop until bed time. My son also loved to hunt and fish. I did not, but was glad that he married someone to do those things with him occasionally. One day my son went fishing alone in the wintertime on a nice sunny day. He and his wife had discovered the day before that they were going to have a baby girl. My son fell out of his boat. A total stranger threw him a rope, but the rope was too short. Not only did I have my grief to deal with after the death of my child, I was also diagnosed with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder.

Doctors wrote me prescriptions for many medications. I don't know why, but I simply refused to take medication for the first few years. After that I began to try some of them, but I just could not remember to take them. I couldn't even remember to eat when I was hungry. I lost all interest in doing anything fun, so friends stopped coming by and eventually stopped calling. That caused me to be more depressed. After a couple of years, I lost my job and that created bigger problems. Eventually I tried to commit suicide. The psychiatrist told me that if I did not find help, support and understanding that she feared that I may attempt suicide again.

I figured that I might have a better chance of finding help in church. I tried several of those, but I also developed a heart problem in addition to having a broken heart. When anyone said anything to stress me, my heart began beating over 300 BPM, and I had to be rushed to the hospital and have my heart re-started. This happened to me a lot as a result of churchgoers telling me that, "God wouldn't give me more than I could bear, and that if I just had enough faith in the Lord that I would be fine." In addition to suffering from severe depression, I was getting angry and actually begging God to let me be at their bedside when they had a bad case of the flu so that I could tell them that if they just had enough faith in the Lord that they would be fine. The lack of understanding in others was one of the hardest things for me to deal with.

After pretty much choosing to isolate myself from society for ten years, I decided to give society one more chance. I met a group of women at a church who planned for us to share our lives intimately with each other. We were to tell each other about our hardships. The woman who I was supposed to share my life with first told me about her problems - - obesity was the problem she chose to tell me about and her lifelong struggle. I did not know what it was like to be obese, but I empathized with her as much as possible. Then I told her that my only child had died and that I had been utterly devastated. She told me that I simply had depression and that depression was a choice and that I MUST simply choose NOT to be depressed! Every ounce of empathy that I had held for her drained away.

I waited awhile before I made another attempt at a social life, but I chose another

group of women and attended their meeting. One of them soon recommended that I try to become friends with someone who was bi-polar. The message seemed to be that we who suffer from PTSD or those who are bi-polar should be off in our own little manic depressive communities.

In 2004 I started telling people that I was going to produce a video to create awareness about this problem and to educate others how to help. Since I had no more idea about how to do that than I had about how to make an atomic bomb, people really began to believe that I had lost my marbles. I spent my last thirty dollars on a garage sale camcorder and began filming. In March 2006, I began showing my video to church congregations. I was sponsored as a 2007 Red Cross Hero award for my work.

In January, 2008 I was contacted by The Congressional Medal of Honor Society and told that I was actually being considered for a citizen award. I have been nominated twice for the CNN Hero award. I have not yet gotten either of these awards, but because this needs national and worldwide attention, I hope that one day I will.

I recently completed telling my story in audio form and soon will be making a video telling my story. June 2, 2008 I was awarded sole custody of a four-year-old little boy. He has Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. It is equally disturbing, if not more so, in observing the way people treat him and how they expect him to act. But it gives me all the more reason to keep fighting the fight in ridding the world of such ignorance in regards to people with mental disabilities.

Most of my work has been in educating those who live in the non-bereaved world how to help those who live in the bereaved world. Most people do not even realize that parents in particular often suffer from PTSD.

Bereaved parents report being abandoned and forgotten more than any other group of mourners. I read a newspaper story about some parents whose children have died in the war in Iraq, and that they went to the Ministry of Defense and said that their communities did not provide adequate services to the bereaved and that they must have help in coping with the deaths of their children. I believe that it is unAmerican to abandon those with the deepest wound known to mankind, and particularly parents of veterans who would never have dreamed of abandoning the wounded.

It's been estimated that eventually 700,000 veterans will need help, many with PTSD. It is way past time that this country starts helping anyone with mental disabilities. Perhaps that is a good place to start - - with the veterans and first responders to catastrophic events and law enforcement officers who witness horrific incidents - - and, of course, the children. But if others cannot learn how to help adults who can articulate what they are experiencing, how can they ever learn to help the children? We **MUST** talk about this - - and it is **WAY PAST TIME**.