

'Our Child's Memory'

When a child dies, the 'conspiracy of silence' begins. For some, it begins immediately and for others, years after the death. In some families, the child's name isn't mentioned for fear that the parents will become more upset. Haven't we all heard that before? Death makes people so uncomfortable that they don't mention the child's name because they want to protect themselves from having to think the unthinkable. I can understand their feelings, but at times I find myself resenting these people because I ache so much to hear Kristen's name.

Many of us fear that our child will be forgotten. As the years go by, more and more 'forget' Kristen's birthday and mentioning her during holidays and other special days partly because she is not here physically. They may feel that out-of-sight means out-of-mind. It doesn't work that way! In order **to keep our children 'alive,' we search for ways to impress upon ourselves and others that our child's life was very special and unique and that we will NEVER forget them!**

Because our grief journeys are so unique as well, so are our ways of preserving our child's memory. This process can be an integral way of coping with a child's death. **We would all love not to have to 'just remember' ~ we want them here NOW!** But since that is not our reality, our only alternative is to keep their memory alive in our hearts and minds.

In my life, being able to talk about Kristen openly was the beginning of this process. Despite others' uncomfortableness, I felt empowered to express my feelings whenever necessary. I was not going to allow others to tell me to 'get a grip on things' just because they felt uneasy. In order to 'survive,' we all have to find our own way that works for us.

Along with talking about Kristen, **another way I cherish her memory is through 'love messages.'** I have attached a special meaning to a dove that sits on a telephone wire outside our house ~ **Kristen's spirit is near.** Many may call these 'messages' bizarre, but if they mean something to me, then it doesn't matter what others think!

Many of you have found or are in the process of finding ways to keep your child 'alive.' There is no one way to do that. Some families plant a tree, have Masses or other rituals offered, award scholarships in their child's name, do volunteer work, write songs or poems, or a variety of other creative and inspirational ways.

To 'outsiders,' we should just 'accept' reality and go on with our lives, but to us, going on with our lives in our NEW reality means keeping our children 'alive' in our hearts and minds forever.

Deb Lee Gould, Director
FOD Family Support Group
September 1991