

What We Are Going Through

Stages of Grief By: Carey Frank

My son shot himself four and a half months ago. My wife says it's been twenty weeks. I lost track of the weeks at about sixteen or seventeen. I guess she's better at remembering those details. I've always lost track of time anyway. I don't even wear a wristwatch. I can honestly say it's the worst experience I've ever gone through. It was the only time in my life that I completely lost control. I screamed for what seemed to me to be about thirty seconds. My wife says it was for five minutes. I believe her. The police came and asked their questions. They separated us so we couldn't compare stories. I knew what they were doing and just didn't care.

Witness protection came to talk with us, but I didn't want to talk with them or anyone. I took the garbage out. I was numb. I still am, though not as numb as before. I think I'm still in a state of shock. I don't cry as much as I did early on, though I've never been much of a crier. Mom yelled at me after my Father's funeral because I didn't cry. I just have to be in control of myself so I can deal with whatever is going on. When the police were here that night and wanted to ask me questions again, I kept telling them that I could function if I needed to. I believed that. I'm not so sure they did.

Being a nurse, I know the stages of grief following a loss. I still remember that from nursing school: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance, as described by Kübler-Ross. These are stages of death and dying as well as a process suffered from any loss. The special case of suicide is not included, such as the stigma of suicide, which makes grief more difficult. Also not emphasized is the idea that the emotions experienced while going through the stages may be quite intense, and have been described as being on a roller coaster. The stages don't have to go in order, and more than one can be present at a time. One can also go back to a stage that they have already come out of. Despite these shortcomings, these are stages suicide survivors will go through.

Denial was fairly quick with me, for I found the body. That image was all I could see for weeks. It was what I saw when I went to bed and it was what I saw when I woke. I hung a picture of my son in the living room so I could look at him whole. Slowly the image of him dead haunted me less and less, though at this stage it still remains quite strong. There were times when I could imagine that he was still alive. Sometimes when I was driving home I would believe he could be there and nobody would remember the horror of him gone but me. I thought that I would hug him and he would think that I was crazy because he was too macho to be hugged by his Dad. But he was not there.

Anger was with me longer. Sometimes it still surfaces. I've cursed at him I don't

know how many times for what he did. How could he be so stupid? How could he do this to his family, when he had such a high level of the concept of honor? He had talked about the concept of dishonoring his family, and how he would strive never to do that. Now there was the stigma of suicide on us all that we would carry for all our lives. What kind of parents were we? Was our family dysfunctional? What did we do to our son to make him do this? Once I got so mad at him for wasting eighteen years of my life that I was ready to throw out all the mementos we had saved. I cooled down before I did. Yet each time I yelled at him I also told him that I loved him. I still do.

There is not much to bargain with. Who can you go to in order to ask for a life back? Depression I know much better. I became depressed that night and I still am. People point out that I laugh on occasion. I used to stop myself because in some weird way that would be to dishonor his memory. I've lost energy, and interest in many things I used to enjoy. I don't read the comics anymore. I used to read them daily. Now they get me upset. There are too many whole families in the comics. Mine is broken. Sometimes I would show a comic to my son when I thought that they did something that he would do. Now it just reminds me that he won't do anything anymore. I've tried to read the comics several times since his death, but it just doesn't work for me. I've started isolating myself from people. Perhaps I'm getting too wrapped up in myself, or that it isn't worth the effort, or that I think they must be getting tired of me moping around just talking about this one subject.

Acceptance is coming slowly. I accept the fact that my son is gone. There is no choice in this matter. I am slowly accepting the idea that I can move on. After all, time keeps moving and I am part of that flow, though my son is forever frozen in time at that fateful moment. I have yet to make my peace with this. It is still too fresh. The images still flash in my mind. I still have some idea of what he would be doing now if he were alive. I am still overwhelmed by all of this, after all, it could never happen to us.