

## *Professionally Speaking...*

by Denise M. Paul MA, CT, CPLC

### **My Grief is My Friend**

The moment that your baby died you became a different person. Mothers have shared that they've become people that they don't even like because of the bitterness, anger, and desperation that they feel in the months and years after their baby's death. Their grief has been described as "a shadow darkening every interaction" and "an underlying sadness and bitterness that follows me everywhere." These feelings were so honestly shared on a Facebook page called *About the Baby – Philadelphia Pregnancy and Infant Loss Support*. By the way, everyone who is reading this article is welcome to join this group.

The pain is profound and unbearable, but it is an important part of the grieving process. Feeling the pain of the loss is one of the tasks of mourning, along with accepting the reality of the death, adjusting to a life without your baby, and keeping your baby's memory alive. It sounds counterintuitive to say that feeling the pain is a good and necessary component of healing because it makes you so sad. However, unless you honor your sadness, you will not grieve well.

*In order to live well and love well  
you must grieve well.*

Several years ago, I had a conversation with a woman who lost her 10 year old son from a tragic accident. I'll never forget what she said about her grief. "My grief is my friend" was the statement that she made a few years after his death. She explained that if she did not feel her grief, it would feel like she had forgotten her precious son. She learned to find a place within herself to hold her grief. She tucked the pain of her son's death right next to her side and carried it with her wherever she went. The ache that she always felt became her friend; the pain was part of the fabric of her life. With every step that she took she carried her son. On the outside, she smiled and seemed to enjoy life. I would venture to say that she really did enjoy life, but she did so while holding her grief – her friend.

At first, the grief is very heavy and cumbersome to carry. It weighs you down and seems to interfere with everything that you try to do in a normal day. As the months and years go by you get more accustomed to navigating your life while still holding onto your grief.

In her book, *It's OK That You're Not OK*, author Megan Devine speaks about the difference between solving pain and tending to it. If we can change our frame of mind to realize that our grief will never be solved, but it must be tended to. We must learn to live with our pain. This author says, "Some things cannot be fixed. They can only be carried." We are moving forward as opposed to "moving on." You can move forward while carrying the very special pain of the loss of your precious baby. The goal is to integrate this loss into your life rather than overcome it.

Megan Devine says it perfectly:

*"Grief is not a problem to be solved: it's an experience to be carried. The work here is to find - and receive - support and comfort that helps you live with your reality."*