



GriefConnections

Volume 6, Issue 10

October 2010



A Mother's Journey Who Lost Her Son to Suicide... Hurt, Grief, and Healing

Written by Lois Michaloski

Andrew was our fifth child. It did not take long to realize that he was going to challenge and stretch us, as he was constantly ill the first two and a half years of his life. There were many sleepless nights, walking and rocking him. Yet, his personality was one of gentleness and joyous exploration of his home and family.

Andrew was home schooled and I quickly realized he was *not* making progress. Testing revealed challenges. Vision therapy helped. Andrew was very smart, his drive and persistence resulted in rapid progress, which we all rejoiced in. As he grew, we had several years of his planning and his battle re-enactments and this passion led right into paint ball "wars".

As Andrew grew into puberty, he was quiet, shy and reserved. He was always generous and giving. Andrew had a great sense of humor and enjoyed making others laugh, through jokes and impersonations, which provided much joy to all of us.

As a teen, Andrew joined a volleyball team in a local school. At this time, he met a special girl, and *fell in love*. First love is a thing that changes us forever! Andrew's joy knew no limits!...but then came the break up, and his sorrow found no end.

Andrew spiraled down into a major depression. He started hurting himself in an attempt to alleviate the emotional pain he felt. We got him into counseling, and learned the signs of suicide. He spent a week in the hospital. Andrew was on medication. We listened, we prayed and we cried with him. We did all those things you find on the suicide prevention web site. After a year, we started to see the "real" Andrew, again. We thought we were past the crisis...and then...*Andrew took his own life*. Not even a hint of warning: last year, 4 days before his 16th birthday...and he was *gone*.

It is the unexpected things, that challenge and stretch us to be better and more than we ever thought we could be. Most of us have something in life we would like to change...our hair, our weight, maybe a job, or even the weather. Although we like to believe that we control life, there is much we do not control... BUT we **do** always have **choices**.

What we can control in life is the **choices we** make...*what* we learn from them, and *how* the rest of our own lives are lived. Yes ...we grieve, we have reason to be sad. But we

Phillips

FUNERAL HOME & CREMATION SERVICE

*Celebrating Life
Honoring Memories*

www.phillipsfuneralhome.com
Phone: 607-936-9212

***A Mother's Journey Who Lost Her Son to Suicide...
Hurt, Grief, and Healing***

Written by Lois Michaloski

can learn how to deal with our sorrow in a healthy way. We can be bitter and depressed... or we can ask *what* can be learned and then *chose what* to do with the answers we find.

Those who have lost someone to suicide all ask the question: *How do we recover from this shock and grief?*

I have learned that grief is not a straight path but more like a maze where you hit dead ends and have to circle back and sometimes start at the beginning again. And, that we can get lost or stuck in this maze. I have also learned, there is **no** "one, right way" to get through the maze, but there **is** a way out!!! (quote from Bob Baugher, PHD) I'd like to share some things that have helped me thru this maze. At first, I **stopped** in shock...I faced what this meant to me, I looked inside and started counting my losses. (quoted from Turning Point devotion July 13, John R. W. Scott) Some of the challenges that I faced while I stopped and counted my losses were:

- *The inability to sleep.* I would wake up startled with my heart and mind racing. When this happened, I would listen to music...no words, just soothing music. It would calm my mind and spirit. It was like pushing a pause button, allowing my mind to stop racing, and it gave me a break.
- *I isolated myself.* I wanted to be alone, but as I saw myself sinking into my own pit of depression and sorrow... I realized this was not something I could get through by myself. I chose to be honest and admit I needed help.
- *I realized I needed support.* I met with a *counselor*...someone who helped me with those questions we all face after such a tragedy. At first I re-played "the tape" in my head, trying to come out with a different ending. It was helpful to be able to talk about Andrew and the pain and to be given permission to cry. I recognized and felt my pain and let it out by talking and crying. This released unbelievable pain and sorrow, if only's, guilt, and more questions.

In my time of searching, I was blessed to meet two special ladies. Both whom had lost people to suicide. They gave me their time and love. They listened and encouraged me over many months. One of the ladies ran a support group called **Grief Share**. Each week at GriefShare we watched a video, talked, asked tough questions, encouraged and supported each other. I learned that men and women process grief differently. Women talk, but men do things. I learned to give myself and my family permission to grieve in their *own way* and at their *own speeds*.

I have a personal, relationship with GOD. I know that because GOD sent his Son, Jesus Christ to die for my sin, a gift I have accepted, I am forgiven which makes me one of God's children. Andrew's choice forced me to take a hard look at what I believe. I recognized **God as my source of help**. During my time of searching, I found when trying to pray, I didn't know what to say. I realized I was angry... at Andrew, myself, and God. I realized I needed to forgive Andrew for his final choice, myself and even God. Through this, I learned to let go of what I could not change, and to ask instead *what can I change* and then chose to move in that direction. In order to be able to move forward, I had to *let go* by choosing to forgive.

The whole Bible felt too big, and overwhelming...so I chose to read the *Psalms*...There, I found others who loved GOD and who also suffered despair and depression, like Jeremiah (20:4), Elijah (1 Kings 19:4) and Job.

In Psalms 42 (42:5,11, 7 & 43:5), the author admits his soul is “cast down within him.” But it doesn't stop there. He immediately tells himself, “hope is in God”, and he looks to the future and says, “I shall praise Him for His help.” Identifying the problem is good, but moving to God's solution ...**hope**...is better. (Turning Point) Each day I wrote out verses about praise, to help me find ways to **thank** God. Being thankful also helped me move toward hope.

“If you let your grief lead you back to God, in the end your soul will be purified, and you will come into an experience of God greater, deeper, and closer than you have ever known before.” (Grief Share day 278) For me this is true and I have learned that GOD is big enough to deal with my anger, guilt, doubts, fears, and sorrows. I have learned that no matter what ...God still loves me...HE promised to never leave or forsake me...AND I have found this to be true!!! I learned I do not walk alone, *God* walks with me!

I have learned that we cannot avoid the work of grief, but that we must walk through it in order to come out on the other side humbler and wiser, maybe even willing to reach back and help others who are in the midst of the blackness that threatens to overwhelm.

I learned the futility to the question **WHY**... even IF we think we know the answer it does not change the reality of our loss, or lessen the pain we feel. Every-time I'd ask why or look for an answer ...I'd feel myself spiraling downward into depression. I *chose* to let go of the need to know why, and to trust God to show me why when I get to heaven. I chose to look instead at **what...what do I do now???**

Reading helped me to find some of those what's. I now have a shelf full of books on grief and grieving. I have learned more about grief than I knew there was to learn. From the books, I learned strategies to handle difficult situations.

I am learning to persevere in hard things, to move toward closure. I had to identify those unhealthy things that I was holding onto and find ways to *release* them. Some of the ways I have done that are...

1. Journaling- I write, honestly- my feelings, fears, doubts, questions, and even dreams...this does 3 things for me...
 - It gets it out of my head... and out of my heart.
 - As I *re-read* I can see that I am making progress, even when it *feels* like I'm not.
 - I can see unresolved issues showing me where to keep working.
2. Sorting- I sorted through Andrew's things and gave them to someone in need. I changed his room. Changing his room was hard for me but a necessary part of accepting that he is gone.
3. Making a memory book- I made a **memory book** of Andrew's life. Using photos and school work, I created a visual memory of his life and talents. I did this because I was stuck in the hard times and struggles of his life. The process of making the book helped me find the happy memories. Releasing is not forgetting. It is the act of setting free, which allows me to cherish all those HAPPY memories.
4. Planning a reflection service. I planned a service for friends and family on the anniversary of his death. No, I wasn't sure I wanted to expose my sorrow publicly, but as God led and the idea developed, I realized there were many others thinking about the coming day and dreading it, just like I was. This knowledge helped me to reach out to others who were hurting and to see them from a different perspective. ***I found healing for myself in reaching out to others.*** On the day of the service, over 35 people came and shared

***A Mother's Journey Who Lost Her Son to Suicide...
Hurt, Grief, and Healing***

Written by Lois Michaloski

happy memories of Andrew. It was a blessing and a healing time for all who came.

Each of these things helped me out of the maze. Closure in grief is when a particular struggle, emotion, or problem either ends or gets to a place where you are free to move on from it. For some people, closure occurs over a long period of time. For others, it occurs at specific moments like the words and comfort of another person, an important memory, a letter, a visit to the grave, a Bible verse, a new understanding, or helping another person. (Grief Share Day 236)

I am learning to *listen* to my own heart to find the things that feed my soul and bring healing. I *then* choose to do those things *because* they help me to heal. For me, some of those things that helped me to heal are reading, painting, spending time with friends and family, nature, and God. Now, it also includes reaching out to help others ... just as others have helped me. There is no *one* way to get through this maze....but there ***is a way out!***

I am writing because of the last choice my son, Andrew made. It was not a choice I made, but it is a choice that has impacted my life and forces me to make choices everyday. I want to challenge you to let go of the guilt you may be carrying because someone you know, made the choice of suicide. I have lost count of the number of times I have been told "we did everything right... everything we could to "save" Andrew and yet **he** still made that choice. It is a tragic choice YES, but one that we cannot undo. Now we face the choices that we *do* have...We cannot do anything about the WHY...BUT we can choose **how** to respond. We can choose **what** the rest of our lives will be...We can choose to help others who are still struggling.

I have learned and continue to learn much from Andrew's life and death... I have learned the importance of choices. I have chosen to move on.

What does it mean to move on? (What it means to move on, Through a Season of Grief ...pg 263)

- Moving on does **not** mean- forgetting the person, not feeling the pain of the loss, or believing life is fair.
- Moving on **does** mean- experiencing less pain, the ability to treasure the good memories, realistically accepting the different aspects of this loss and forming new relationships, and doing new things.
- Moving on also means- Growing in grace and our walk with God, accepting this loss and forgiving ourselves and others, realizing that both joy and loss are a part of life and believing God is good even when life isn't.

Memorial Quote

And can it be that in a world so full and busy, the loss of one weak creature makes a void in any heart, so wide and deep that nothing but the width and depth of eternity can fill it up!

Charles Dickens

Candlelight Service of Remembrance—Sunday, November 14th



The Annual Candlelight Service of Remembrance sponsored by Phillips Funeral Home and the Grief Center of the Southern Tier is scheduled to be held on Sunday, November 14th at 4 pm at the Victory Highway Wesleyan Church in Painted Post, New York.

The service is a time for grieving individuals to honor and to remember their loved one. The holidays can be one of the most difficult times of the year for a grieving individual. The annual candlelight service is a special ceremony that is an expression of praise and thankfulness for the life of the deceased, designed to help the bereaved individual begin to let the joy of their loved one's life take the place of the hurt and pain of their death.

Local pastors and musicians are involved in the ceremony. There will be a special time during the ceremony that honors our servicemen who were lost serving our country.

In the coming weeks, please check the Phillips Funeral Home website for further information regarding the Candlelight Service of Remembrance. www.phillipsfuneralhome.com

October is Pregnancy Loss and Awareness Month

In 1988, Ronald Reagan, former president of the United States, designated the month of October as National Pregnancy and Infant Loss Awareness Month.

In the United States, over 1 million pregnancies end each year due to miscarriage, stillbirth or death of the newborn child. October is the month of the year where grieving individuals can come together with their communities to raise awareness of this devastating tragedy.



On October 15th, at 7 pm, grieving parents are encouraged to light a candle in remembrance of their infant that was lost.

Listed below are a few infant loss awareness websites:

- www.nationalshare.org
- www.mend.org
- www.october15th.com

Inservice Programs for Your Organization

Did you know that we can provide an inservice speaker for your organization? Whether you are looking for a group presentation on some aspect of grief counseling or a program on today's funeral options, we have an excellent group of speakers ready to respond. To talk about options for a workshop in your organization, please call Phillips Funeral Home at 607-936-9212 or email info@phillipsfuneralhome.com.

Email Encouragement

An organization called GriefShare supplies daily emails of encouragement for those who are going through the grieving process. To sign up online, go to:
<http://dailyemails.griefshare.org/dailyemails/>

Upcoming Events

November 14, 2010 at 4 pm— Annual Candlelight Service of Remembrance. Victory Highway Wesleyan Church in Painted Post, New York.

November 20, 2010—National Survivors of Suicide Day. Event to be held at the North Presbyterian Church in Elmira, New York. More details to follow.

Support Groups

Loss of a Spouse Support Group

Wednesdays at 6:30 pm at Victory Highway Wesleyan Church, 150 Victory Highway, Painted Post. For more information, contact Sandi Follette at the Grief Center of The Southern Tier at 607-936-9077.

Loss of a Loved One to Suicide

First and third Thursdays of each month at 7 pm at the Hand in Hand Methodist Church on Wardell Street, Elmira. For more information, contact Sandi Follette at The Grief Center of the Southern Tier at 607-936-9077.

Compassionate Friends Support Group

Last Wednesday of each month at 7 pm at Our Saviour Lutheran Church, 2872 Westinghouse Road, Horseheads. If you are interested in joining the group, contact Joann at 562-8090 or by email at jmorgan55@stny.rr.com.

Abortion

Forgiven and Set Free—a post-abortion class. For more information contact Victory Highway Wesleyan Church at 607-962-7000.

Infant Loss

The SHARE Infant Loss Bereavement Support Group meets the third Thursday of every month at 7 pm in the Clute Education Building at Arnot Ogden Medical Center and is for parents, grandparents, family and friends of persons who have lost children through miscarriage or stillbirth. Contact Maryanne Amisano at 607-562-8856 for more information.

We will only send *GriefConnections* if you want to receive it! You may unsubscribe from our newsletter anytime. Please just send an email to griefconnections@phillipsfuneralhome.com or click REPLY to this email and ask us to remove your name from our list.

GriefConnections is published monthly by Phillips Funeral Home & Cremation Service. Copyright ©2010. All rights reserved, including publication or distribution in any form, electronic or printed. For reprint permissions or suggestions for content, please email us at : griefconnections@phillipsfuneralhome.com.

Phillips

FUNERAL HOME & CREMATION SERVICE

Celebrating Life

Honoring Memories

www.phillipsfuneralhome.com

Phone: 607-936-9212