



# Angel Whispers

## Support for Fathers

### *A Father's Grief*

*It must be very difficult  
To be a man in grief,  
Since "men don't cry"  
and "men are strong"  
No tears can bring relief.  
It must be very difficult  
To stand up to the test,  
And field the calls and visitors  
So she can get some rest.  
They always ask if she's all right  
And what she's going through.  
But seldom take his hand and ask,  
"My friend, but how are you?"  
He hears her crying in the night  
And thinks his heart will break.  
He dries her tears and comforts her,  
But "stays strong" for her sake.  
It must be very difficult  
To start each day anew.  
And try to be so very brave-  
He lost his baby too.*

*By Eileen Knight Hagemester*



**Families First Society**  
FORT SASKATCHEWAN

# *Fathers Grieve Too*

*By Lori-Ann Huot*

The loss of a baby has a profound impact on a parent – sadly the grief that many fathers feel often goes unnoticed. There seems to be little recognition of the fact that fathers experience feelings associated with lost dreams, loneliness, failure and the loss of their identity. Society generally seems more concerned for the well-being of the mother as men are usually expected, or expect from themselves, to be the strong and supportive partner in the relationship. As a result, their grief is ignored or minimized as they are expected to heal much quicker.

Grief is an individual and unique experience regardless of gender. However, men are not given permission to express the range of emotions that women are. Men are generally less open to talk about their feelings of hurt and loss than women, however these feelings are present and need to be recognized.

The physical nature of pregnancy may contribute to the gender differences in society as women directly experience the loss as the baby is physically connected to them – many women feel as though they lose a part of themselves when a baby dies. The women's physical changes after the loss are constant reminders of the baby that was lost.

Men, by nature, are “fixers”; they want to be able to fix anything that is broken. However a broken heart from the loss of a baby cannot be fixed, and this can be very difficult for a man to accept. Some dads may feel the pressure to resolve their partner's grief and may suggest that a new baby may “fix” the grief, however their partner may not be ready for this. A subsequent pregnancy can provide some healing and may fill an emptiness in your arms and your

heart, however another baby could never replace the baby that was lost.

Many men cope with their grief with attempts to keep busy; many men return to work quickly as a result. Deborah Davis (1996) states five methods of how men may avoid their grief. They include:

- silence – not expressing one's feelings;
- secrecy – expressing one's emotions only in private;
- anger – becoming easily frustrated instead of expressing feelings of hurt and sadness;
- addiction – altering one's emotions through the abuse of substances like alcohol and drugs;
- action – making oneself busy with work or hobbies.

If a woman is devastated by her own grief, her bereaved partner may feel as though he has nobody he can talk to, which may lead him to put his own feelings on hold. Family, friends and colleagues may overlook a father's grief and may not offer support – men tend not to have the same social networks as women do instead relying on their partner for emotional support. Many fathers are overwhelmed with concern for their partners and may avoid talking about their own feelings in order to protect their partners.

Losing a baby is one of the most difficult experiences for a couple to endure. Communication in the relationship is critical in order to be able to integrate the loss of the baby into a couple's lives and journey through the grief effectively.

After my husband and I lost Loren, I felt as though he was able to move on quickly and that upset me. Once I shared how I was feeling with him, he was able to express to me that he was,

# Men Do Cry

by Ken Falk

in fact, grieving, but he was trying to be strong for me. We made a commitment to each other that we would no longer hide our feelings from each other and that we would walk this path together, supporting each other. Our marriage was strengthened through our experience.

It's important for men and women to listen to their partners and to respect each other's differences in the journey, recognizing that their partner's needs and feelings may not always be the same as their own and that each person will have their own unique way of expressing their emotions. These differences do not indicate that one partner feels the loss more or less intensely than the other.

Your tears flow within your heart,  
Mine flow down my cheeks.  
Your anger lies with thoughts and  
movements,  
Mine gallops ahead for all the see.  
Your despair shows in your now-dull  
eyes,  
Mine shows in line after written line.  
You grieve over the death of your son,  
I grieve over the death of my baby.  
But we're still the same, still one,  
Only we grieve at different times  
Over different memories and at  
different lengths.  
Yet we both realize  
The death of our child.

~ Pam Burden

(From the Compassionate Friends,  
Oak Brook, Illinois.)

I heard quite often "men don't cry"  
though no one ever told me why.  
So when I fell and skinned a knee,  
no one came to comfort me.

And when some bully-boy at school  
would pull a prank so mean and cruel,  
I'd quickly learn to turn and quip,  
"It doesn't hurt," and bite my lip.

So as I grew to reasoned years,  
I learned to stifle any tears.  
Though "Be a big boy" it began,  
quite soon I learned to "Be a man."

And I could play that stoic role  
while storm and tempest wracked my  
soul.

No pain or setback, could there be  
could wrest one single tear from me.

Then one long night, I stood nearby  
and helplessly watched my son die.  
And quickly found, to my surprise,  
that all that tearless talk was lies.

And still I cry, and have no shame.  
I cannot play that "big boy" game.  
And openly, without remorse,  
I let my sorrow take its course.

So those of you who can't abide  
a man you've seen, who's often cried,  
reach out to him with all your heart  
as one whose life's been torn apart.

For men DO cry when they can see  
their loss of immortality.  
And tears will come in endless streams  
when mindless fate destroys their  
dreams.

# *Myth of Silence*

by Rob Steiner

The modern image of a man has certainly evolved from our culture. More and more we have seen an enigma on how a 'man' is supposed to behave. Long gone is the image of yesteryears of man off to work and wife stays at home tending to household duties and mothering the children. Fatherhood seemed to be somewhat more of a hat or a role that men put on. Children approached dad as they would approach a boss or manager. Social rules were more defined, clear cut; it was well known how children were to behave around parents, how women were to behave in front of men and in retrospect how men behave towards women and children.

Over the years, we have literally seen an evolution, a shifting of social expectations between men and women. More women have gone out into the work force and became co-workers with fellow men. We have seen more men participating and being active in the home. However, there is still a paradigm that has not followed the tide as closely, despite the age of information that has been passed down. There is a stereotype that plagues men despite our modernization. To this very day, tears are still considered a sign of weakness. Still prevalent is the myth of the 'strong silent type'.

Media continues to show successful, masculine, virile heroes as anyone who is able to face any situation head on with either rational or excessive violent passion. All we need to consider are past blockbusters as the

Rambo and Rocky series, the popular Schwarzenegger films, Braveheart and more recently 300. However, submitting to such a stereotype may also cause conflict, not only within us, but with our significant other.

When grieving the loss of your child, it is natural for men to want to "keep it together" for the sake of our partner. And that is certainly a plausible cause. However, grief is patient, and if left unattended, will rear her embrace soon enough. In fact, it is reported that the average man usually experiences the severe pangs of grief 6 months after the initial event. This is partly due to our setting aside our own feelings to take care and protect the mother of our bereaved child/ren. This is okay, as we are instinctively hardwired to protect our family in such a manner. But heed the warning: do not ignore the grief. In fact, I would encourage embracing it as quickly as possible.

To accept your loss is not about trying to block it out of your mind. Instead, it has to do with realizing the loss will change your world, and that you're still meant to have a whole and healthy life in this new and different world. It is just that the new world is composed of a new "normal", one without your little one(s). You can identify all your losses in your brain, but true grieving requires you to use your heart.

To be silent may be golden, but to stay silent may be costly. Love's natural tendency is to flow outwardly with expressions such as smiles, kisses, touch and comfort. Grief is also one that has a natural nature, one of sorrow, loneliness and isolation. But the healing process is the giving a voice to and crying through sorrow and pain. A man needn't feel ashamed of the tears shed, for every tear that I have

shed for the loss of our little girl was the result of my love for our little Zoe. What father doesn't share a special place for his daughter? A tear shed before your partner serves to confirm that she is not alone in her grief and sorrow. It also demonstrates that this is just not a bad dream to awaken from, but a reality that you are willing to walk through with her.

Indeed, a man's courage and strength is not measured by how strong and silent he remains, but his strength is measured by the compassion and tears he is able to share.

The shortest verse found in the Bible is located in John 11 verse 35 where only two words are written, "Jesus wept". Whether you believe that He is real or fiction is immaterial, the fact is that entire civilizations, laws, and moral compasses and teachings were formed based on this man.

Certainly, if he was able to shed a tear, I can to.

*Written with love in memory of Zoe Reta Mary Steiner, born with angel wings on August 4, 2006.*

*Rob is one of our volunteers. If you would like to correspond with him about father's grief, you may email him at [rsedmonton@shaw.ca](mailto:rsedmonton@shaw.ca).*

---

## *Male and Female*

*by Kristen Johson Ingram*

Male and female are obviously God's plan for the earth. Everything from plants to human beings are interdependent with the other gender. But when you live with the pain and sorrow of losing a child, it's easy to forget. Our marriage came close to breaking up because we grieved in silence, isolated from each other. Only when we came together to express our anger and sorrow to each other did we begin to heal and become one flesh again.

*\*From Always Precious in Our Memory, 1997.*

---

*How quietly you  
tiptoed into our world.  
Softly, only a moment  
you stayed  
but what an imprint  
your footprints have left  
upon our hearts.*

*~Unknown~*

Love bears all things,  
believes all things,  
hopes all things, endures all  
things,  
Love  
never ends.

Suppressed grief suffocates,  
it rages within the breast,  
and is forced to multiply its  
strength.

*~Ovid~*

# *Dear Daddy*

*by Noel Emkjer & Angel Kristen Angelica*

I know I touched your life so deep  
I wish I hadn't made you weep  
Like a beautiful rainbow,  
I had to fly away  
My time with you was brief,  
I was not meant to stay.

Thank you for giving me life  
and for loving me  
I know how much you wish to hold me,  
have a baby the world can see  
But know that I am with you always  
In the comforting warmth of the sun's rays.

I'm in the stars  
and the waves of the ocean blue  
You are my daddy and I love you  
Listen as my voice whispers  
to you on the breeze  
My song will take flight among the trees.

This Father's Day even though we're apart  
I'm really with you, snug in your heart  
I'm your little girl, I'll be with you forever  
I'm your angel girl and I have the best daddy ever!



## *Angel Whispers*

*Angel Whispers supports parents who have lost a baby  
during pregnancy or shortly after birth.*

*For meeting information, or to receive our newsletter or a special care package, please  
call 780.998.5595, ext. 225.*

*You can also reach us by email at [angelwhispers@familiesfirstsociety.ca](mailto:angelwhispers@familiesfirstsociety.ca)  
or visit our website at [www.angelwhispers.ca/angelwhispers](http://www.angelwhispers.ca/angelwhispers).*