



# Journey

Newsletter of the  
National Catholic Ministry  
to the Bereaved

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## A WHITE ROSE FOR KRISTEN

CONNECTING AT THE HEART WITH THE PERSON WE LOVED

By Linda Cherek, RN, MSW, LICSW, CT

The journey through grief after the death of a loved one is a torturous and bewildering experience for most people. It is even more difficult for those who perceive that death means the complete end of the relationship with the person who was loved. The most paralyzing fear I hear from bereaved people is that their loved one will be forgotten, that his or her name will no longer be spoken. That's when grief may feel unresolvable. The grieving person is inconsolable because there is no hope.

Healthy resolution of grief comes about in part from learning to accommodate the loss into our lives. We must learn how to live without the physical presence of the person, but we can continue to love them in their absence. Bereaved people can determine how they want to stay in relationship with their departed loved one and create their own unique ways to keep them in their life and as part of their family.

My daughter died eleven years ago, but I am as much her mother today as when she was alive. Her father and I never stop thinking about her, and we have many ways we remember and celebrate the life we had with her.

Her birthday, for example, has become a holiday for the two of us. We both take the day off and spend it together. On the first birthdays in the years after she died, we would drive by the hospital where she was born and then by the house where we first lived and recall her birth and early years. Then we ate at her favorite restaurant, something we have continued to do each year. We often make a special purchase on her birthday if we come across something that reminds us of our daughter. One year, it was a huge stainless steel popcorn bowl. Kristen loved popcorn, so every time we use the bowl we think of her. On one birthday, we found a lovely framed patchwork heart that hangs in our house.

Another way we remember Kristen is with a white rose. We place one on her grave when we visit the cemetery and have one in our home on holidays. Sometimes when we are missing her a lot, we'll sit and watch home videos of her. These are all ways of staying in relationship with her.

Redefining the relationship with a deceased loved one comes about through a process of surrendering our deep emotional pain and replacing it with ways of connecting at the heart with that person. This letting go takes time, and unfortunately we live in a culture that denies death. We have a workplace that says you have three days of funeral leave after which you are supposed to get back to

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*The heart is a  
thousand-stringed  
instrument that can  
only be tuned with  
love.*

*Hafiz, Sufi Mystic*

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work and back to normal. After a death, people are so vulnerable and fragile. When they are bombarded with the expectations of being "back to normal," they will often shut down and become mired in their grief. I believe that redefining our relationship with our loved one and finding ways to integrate it into our lives is an important way to get "unstuck" from grief.

As people of faith, we believe there is life after death. Why would we not want to define and create an ongoing relationship if we believe we will see our loved one when our time on earth is done?

People often ask me if the work I do counseling the bereaved isn't terribly depressing. The exact opposite is the case — it's some of the most hopeful work I've ever done. The hope comes from the knowledge that we can continue to have a relationship with that important someone in our lives who has died. In fact, I believe a big part of the healing journey through grief is coming to the realization that we can have control over how we respond to these significant life losses.

I got involved in this type of counseling because of Kristen, and I believe she is with me as I do this work with grieving people. The angel lapel pin I wear everyday keeps Kristen close to me and reminds me of this special connection we will always share.



This article appeared in Heritage published by The Catholic Cemeteries of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis and is reprinted here with permission. The author of this article, **Linda Cherek**, is a licensed therapist certified in death education and counseling. She and her husband, John, are the parents of four children. Their oldest daughter, Kristen, died in 1993 at the age of 19. Both Linda and John Cherek are on the NCMB Board of Trustees. Cherek can be reached at [lcherek@msn.com](mailto:lcherek@msn.com).

Linda Cherek suggests these books to help people cope with the grieving process:

*How to Go on Living When Someone You Love Dies* by Dr. Therese Rando (Research Press)

*Understanding Your Grief: Ten Essential Touchstones for Finding Hope and Healing Your Heart*

and a companion book

*The Understanding Your Grief Journal* by Dr. Alan Wolfelt (Companion Press)

*Praying Our Goodbyes and Your Sorrow is My Sorrow: Hope and Strength in Times of Suffering* by Sr. Joyce Rupp (Crossroads Publishing)

*Lift Up Your Hearts: Meditations for Those Who Mourn* by Sr. Maureen O'Brien (ACTA Publishing)

*The Death of a Husband: Reflections for a Grieving Wife* by Helen Reichert Lambin (ACTA Publishing)

*The Death of a Wife: Reflections for a Grieving Husband* by Robert L. Vogt (ACTA Publishing)

*The Worst Loss: How Families Heal from the Death of a Child* by Barbara D. Rosof (Henry Holt and Company)

## DATES TO REMEMBER

**Friday, February 4 -  
Sunday, February 6, 2005**

### **Ministry of Consolation Training**

Scranton, Pennsylvania

Contact Mary Ann Paulukonis at 570-207-2213 or [Mary-Ann-Paulukonis@dioceseofscranton.org](mailto:Mary-Ann-Paulukonis@dioceseofscranton.org)

**Saturday, February 12,  
2005**

### **Bereavement Retreat**

Cincinnati, Ohio

Good Shepherd Parish

Contact Kathy Teipen at 513-489-7489 or

[TeipenKM@aol.com](mailto:TeipenKM@aol.com).

**Friday, April 8 -  
Sunday, April 10, 2005**

### **Ministry of Consolation Training**

Detroit, Michigan

Contact Cheryl Zuehlk at 586-752-6984 x120 or [czuehlk@mycomcast.com](mailto:czuehlk@mycomcast.com)

**Wednesday, April 20, 2005**

### **Living with Grief: Ethical Dilemmas at the End of Life**

HFA Teleconference

1:30-4:00 p.m. EDT

Live-via-satellite

1-800-854-3402 or

[www.hospicefoundation.org](http://www.hospicefoundation.org)

**Friday, June 24 -  
Saturday, June 25, 2005**

### **National NCMB Training & Conference**

St. Louis, Missouri

(to be confirmed)

Contact NCMB at 314-638-2638 or [NCMBereave@aol.com](mailto:NCMBereave@aol.com)