

MennoExpressions

A Publication of First Mennonite Church of Indianapolis, Indiana

Volume XXI, No. 4

April 6, 2008

Touched by Loss

Snapshots of Grief

By Beth Lehman

My family's photo albums are bright, full of laughing faces bunched around the table, icing coated grins and cars loaded for adventure, but that isn't the whole picture. We don't take photos at funerals or hospitals even though these pictures of our darker times are vivid and enduring. Here are a few snapshots missing from my albums.

1.

A sixth grader at my maternal grandmother's funeral, I huddled in the hall with the other kids in wrinkled church clothes who didn't know what to do on the uneven emotional terrain of grown-ups so distressed and unavailable. Our whispers held something dark but not quite scary. "In that casket over there, in the blue dress," I insisted, "is Sleeping Beauty." "No," said another kid, more pragmatic and not related, "that's your grandmother, and she is dead."

2. As family, we sat in the second row of the chapel for Grandpa Morrow's funeral. My college-aged self with my high school sister, so little touched by loss and grief. We couldn't pin our feelings to the day. We suffered with our sniffing mother and sad-faced uncle. We grieved for imagined pain our beloved Snickle Fritz felt when his tight chest dropped him to a tiled floor. We mourned a past that we were surely leaving behind, the faces of great aunts and uncles whose names we could not remember and whose funerals we would not attend. A rush of heritage slipping by while we were poised for the future. And in the surge of sadness we laughed. During the quiet of the service some insignificant miscue or rhyme set us shaking, the whole pew swaying with our suppressed celebration of life.

3.

The crocuses are blooming in the memory garden next door. A husband with no wife turns the soil to edge a bed, and this marks a change of season. Enough time has passed that when I greet this neighbor now with a mid-westernly, "Hi, how are you?" it is no longer code for despair that in my mind says, "Hi, how are you possibly coping with the death of your wife? Are you really okay? I don't know how I would ever be." And now that it is spring, when I see the three children in the yard I no longer feel stabbed by a breath-stealing pain that is not exactly my own, but is so close it is my heart.

Drawing by Janice Lindstrom

4.

A crisp autumn walk ruined. My four year old is not dealing with death directly, but she is coping with loss. The losses of small items—a sticker from the gymnastics teacher, a smooth stone, a washed away seashell, a shiny barrette—are grieved with tears dripping from the chin and loud, full-bodied moaning. Thus, walking home from the park, wet-faced and sobbing, she clutches the bright colors of fall to her aching chest and laments into the wind that, "If these leaves blow away, I'll never, ever, ever, find another leaf as beautiful as these." While we walk, I watch. She cannot be consoled. Her preschool teacher has advised me that grownups can do too much to keep children happy. It doesn't work and isn't healthy. It isn't healthy to be happy all the time. So I watch, much grieved, as my little daughter practices for a life that will inevitably and gloriously include loss and death, and there is something so tragically beautiful in her grasping at life that I almost want a picture of it in my photo album on the shelf.

Books to read with young children regarding death:

The Tenth Best Thing About Barney by Judith Viorst

A child eulogizes his pet cat and considers what becomes of Barney after death.

The Fall of Freddie the Leaf by Leo Buscaligia

Freddie, a maple leaf, experiences the changing seasons and learns that death is part of life.

Tough Boris by Mem Fox and Kathryn Brown

Even a tough pirate cries when his parrot dies.

In My Heart by Molly Bang

This is not about death but separation. Words and images show how people can be in our hearts when not physically with us.

A Nurse's Perspective on Grief

By Kris Kaufman

Editor's Desk

We so often see silence as something that needs to be filled up or broken. We do violence to silence, treating it as a deficiency and giving words our admiration.

But silence isn't really something that can be broken. It's more like a river that connects us to what others are suffering. In this issue, which grew from the grief we feel at the loss of Andrew Smith and Valerie Shankland, the writers suggest that in the depths of silence lies great comfort and healing.

If silence is so powerful, wouldn't it make sense, then, to cultivate our capacity for it even when grief isn't around? In relationships and in solitude? In nature and in church? But in a word-oriented society, how do we do that? How do we open ourselves to trust that silence that resonates beyond the last word? *SMW*

Touched by Valerie Shankland

By Catherine Swanson

Some funerals make the whole day go gray; others make you want to go out and live a better life. The memorial service for Valerie Shankland on Valentine's Day fell into the latter category for me.

I didn't know Valerie very well. Yes, we had spoken a few times, and in my desire to connect with more people in the First Mennonite community, she was on my radar. However, the chance to become well acquainted with Valerie did not happen.

Some people might look at this as a great missed opportunity, and after hearing the testimonies of those at the memorial service, I believe it was. But Valerie's passing has given me—and all of us, really—another great opportunity: the chance to look at our own actions and ask ourselves if we are living in a way that will encourage others to live better lives, and (just as importantly) are we living in a way that will allow others to laugh and grow.

None of us say goodbye to a loved one, great friend or role model without sadness. But how many times do we also smile as we remember that person's determination, forthrightness, sense of responsibility and humor?

I came away from this memorial service without a chance to fully experience Valerie's most salient and beloved personality. But I came away feeling more well placed in the First Mennonite community and the world at large. My commitment to live by the Light of Christ's Love had gotten an infusion. I didn't need a Valentine's Day card. I believe that Valerie reached out through this moment and gave me a nudge in the direction I am supposed to go.

Can we ask any more of a person's legacy than this? I don't think so.

Life is a series of losses, and everything about our own personal history plays into how we as individuals handle loss and the grieving process. Being present at the moment of another's wrenching loss can be extremely uncomfortable. I believe this discomfort stems from the most basic fear of "that could be me." None of us welcomes that feeling of anguish and physical shock we all have when the loss comes, and being in the presence of another's pain is difficult.

What can one say or do in the face of another's devastation? I think we all wish we could SAY something or DO something. While words and actions may be helpful, I believe that BEING present is what is most important. It is also the most difficult thing to do. It is so tempting to utter the words, "It will be okay," or to imply that things have worked out for the best. That is not likely to be what the grieving individual wants or needs to hear. How long can you sit quietly with someone when your own discomfort is pushing you to fill the silence or calm the crying?

Working in the field of pediatric oncology for nearly twenty years, I have had many occasions to be present at moments of grief. The diagnosis of cancer for a child causes great grief. The family grieves for the loss of the life they lived before the diagnosis, for possible physical pain and body changes for the child and the potential ultimate loss of that child. All of these components are present when a diagnosis is given. How each family manifests that grief varies widely. Coming from a rather staid, controlled German background, I have had to work at being comfortable with families who grieve openly and loudly and with many who display a physical response to stress.

Early in my nursing career I became quite attached to a young girl and her mother who stayed at the hospital for several months. We were able to send the patient back to a community hospital for further recovery where she unfortunately arrested and was brought back to us on life support and unresponsive. I was working on the floor when she died in the ICU, and I was summoned by her family. I was an emotional mess, and, not wanting the family to see me this way, repeatedly refused my co-workers' attempts to send me to them. I was eventually coerced into going, whereupon arriving at the bedside, I fell weeping into the mother's arms. We cried and talked and even chuckled a few times over memories of caring for this child. I was able to attend her funeral and bring closure to this sad event. Months later, a card arrived from the child's mother, stating how much it had meant to her to see me as a health care provider grieve so openly and deeply over the loss of her daughter. I came to a new level of understanding and comfort in how to be present.

I find that I am much more available to my patients and families when I am comfortable with my own feelings and beliefs concerning death and grief. I could not discuss end of life issues or share openly in their grief and loss if I were not able to deal with my own feelings about it. My belief in the risen Christ is central to the way I cope, and I am most comfortable relating to others with a similar belief system. However, in the highly emotionally charged times immediately surrounding death and loss, I'm not comfortable sharing my faith beliefs with families. Instead, I feel what's needed is that I enter their grief.

MennoExpressions 2008

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced without written consent from the editor.

Editorial Board: John Boyce, Kenda Resler Friend, Paul Hartman, John Hofstetter, Beth Lehman, Mary Liechty, Paul Shankland, Alison Schumacher

Editor: Shari Miller Wagner

MennoExpressions is published five times a year by First Mennonite Church, appearing bi-monthly on the first Sunday, October-June. Any correspondence should be sent to the editor at 4601 Knollton Rd., Indianapolis, IN 46228, U.S.A. Email: fmc@indymenno.org

The Fabric of Our Church Family

By Robin Jones

Since coming to FMC eighteen months ago, I have spent time reflecting on the difference between this congregation and others I've known. For the first time, I feel you've woven me completely into the fabric of the church family. Over the long, bleak winter, images of what this fabric looks like have slowly emerged.

I've known churches and other groups like this—tightly-woven, seemingly perfect. I wanted to weave myself into them but could never find a way in. They looked great—smooth, flawless, with each strand in place—but it took a sharp needle, flawless thread and great skill to integrate something new. At coffee hour, I would bounce from group to group, never finding my place.

This is what I found at FMC. From a distance it looks similar to others. When I get close, I see and feel the difference. The fabric is woven well, but each bit of yarn has numerous stray ends. Every loose thread, every unraveling gives someone the opportunity to grab hold. No homogeneity, no perfection. Loss, grief, quirks and needs offer frayed ends where a new person can fit in. Fellowship hour is the twisting of the loose strands.

During Valerie Shankland's funeral, a new picture sprung to mind. What happens when a hole appear? Sometimes the changes are a gentle unraveling, but sometimes they can be instant and brutal. How do we keep the fabric from falling apart? We can't fill the hole. It's too big to reweave and the person is too important to be forgotten. We accept the loss and reinforce everyone touched by it. We surround them and strengthen them and support them. We preserve grief as part of our fabric.

A Call for Stories that Surprise Us

When *MennoExpressions* asked Paul Shankland what theme we might use as a way of honoring the memory of his wife, Valerie, he said that so many interesting stories came out at her memorial service that he thought she would like the idea of that event triggering a celebration of stories. Instead of waiting for funerals in order to learn interesting and remarkable things about people in the congregation, it would be nice to learn some of those things while they're still alive! So, to this end, please send *MennoExpressions* one or more surprising anecdotes about some person at FMC (of any age), something about this person that we might not otherwise learn until his or her memorial service (if it was as personal a service as Valerie's was). These stories should help us, as a church family, to value and understand each other better. You can e-mail these stories to sharimwagner@aol.com or you can put them in her church mailbox.

Heart and Soul . . . **Remembering Valerie**

By Laurel Gerbrandt

The last time I saw Valerie, she was standing in the doorway of her home. Her hair was golden in the warm rays of the early afternoon sun. Her whole being seemed to glow in the light streaming in from the large south windows in her cozy living room. She looked just like an angel. She took a wobbly step forward to pull me into a tight squeeze as she thanked me for coming. She was never short on thank yous. But I remember this clearly because, although *I* had hugged *her* many times, *she* had never reached for me.

I had spent a couple of hours with her that Wednesday. She was wearing her bright pink sweater. I loved it when she wore that one. It seemed to announce to the world her secret colors—soft, joyful and full of hope. It was one of the true colors of her being, but rarely was it evident to others.

Valerie was better known for her brutal cynicism. Her honest opinions ripped holes in the comfortable blankets of formality which we as Mennonites tend to wrap ourselves up in like security blankets. “Why mince words?” her attitude said so loudly and clearly. “Tell it like it is! Be real . . . Duh!!”

Do you know Maxine, the crabby old lady on those greeting cards? I will never see one of those cards and not think of my dear friend Valerie. It was her to a “T.” Sometimes, when she’d finished one of her cynical soliloquies, I would tell her she was starting to sound like Maxine again and she would just laugh! The truth was, though, she was refreshingly funny in a sort of unorthodox way. Like the time she announced in church she had two tickets for *The Home Show* which she “needed like another hold in the head.” Or her disdain for Paul, the writer of the book of Acts, who told women in the Church to behave like second or third rate citizens. She had no patience for that sort of thinking, the sort that kept anyone from doing or being all that God intended for them. Her radical approach to Christianity was evident in her private protest of Lent. She had no use for it. “We are living in the age of Salvation. Why would we choose to mourn when we have the opportunity to rejoice?”

And such was her outlook on all of life. You can’t always choose your circumstances, but you can always choose your attitude. The Serenity Prayer was a prayer she lived by. It requests serenity to accept what we cannot change, the courage to change what we can and the wisdom to know the difference. The difficulties of life which she faced daily were nothing more than opportunities for her to practice her true grit. She faced her rocky path with gutsy courage and the determination of a die-hard warrior. She used every nugget of wisdom she had gathered in her life experiences to help others in theirs. I am told she had been an energetic woman, organizing and leading events, teaching and being involved in everything. Having diabetes and a birth defect leaving her with no hand on one arm and only three partially usable fingers on the other might have led her to take the easy road, one without extra challenges. But Valerie chose to reach out

Valerie Shankland
April 13, 19 -February 8, 2008

for life with heart and soul. When she was only fourteen, she started teaching ballet in her own School of Dance. At sixteen, she won first place in the National Ballet Competition. Later in life, after conquering her own addictions, she became an addictions counselor, leading many through the 12 Step Program which she herself had internalized, living it out every day of her own life. Her creative passion led her to overcome physical limitations again as she took up a paint brush and produced beautiful words of art. One that particularly touched me was one she did of herself and Paul. It was a watercolor of nothing but the bottom of their legs and feet. It was as if she was looking down at their feet standing together on a path. To me it spoke of walking the road of life together, about loyalty and friendship, commitment and love.

By the time I got to know Valerie, she had lost most of her ability to stay physically active. When I met her in her late 60s, she had been battling diabetes for nearly 60 years. She had had a stroke and several heart surgeries. She had injured a foot. Yet she rode her exercise bike faithfully, took her insulin and ate the recommended diet which included lavish helpings of fiercely positive thinking. (When a friend of hers announced one day that he, too, had been diagnosed with diabetes, she piped up loud and clear, “Congratulations! You have been diagnosed with a healthy disease!” By which she meant: “This disease will force you to become more healthy.”) The teacher in her was determined to have a say in things, pummeling the bad and praising the good. She was really good at both of those. Perhaps some people were so shocked at her pummeling abilities that they did not stick around to investigate her talents in the art of praise. And it did require investigating because, while her pummeling was done loudly in the earshot of all, praise was done mostly in private.

Meditation and prayer were as much a part of Valerie’s daily routine as her morning cup of coffee. She was adamant when it came to gratitude. She cherished the “diamonds” she discovered in her life, holding on to them tightly, calling them out and naming them daily. She found it was always a prerequisite to true joy. For Christmas 2005, she gave me her favorite book on the subject. It was Sarah Ban Breathnach’s, *Simple Abundance, A Daybook of Comfort and Joy*. I have read it every year since then. It is one of the most positive, empowering books I have ever read. Breathnach writes of learning to enjoy the simple comforts of life, of being kind to

See **Remembering Valerie**, p. 5

Memories of Andrew

By Sue Turner

My first memory of Andrew was at Methodist Hospital where I was recovering from a broken leg. On that January evening, Karen West and Cort came to see me. They had just come from visiting Aigner and baby Andrew. Karen was beaming and Cort looked so proud.

I would see Andrew off and on throughout the next few years when he visited FMC with his grandparents, aunt and cousins. My most recent experience was during last year's Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays. I had the privilege of spending both of these days with the West/Dwyer family. I arrived a little early to help with meal preparation. The aroma of holiday dishes already permeated the air, and the house was buzzing with children's voices and adult conversation.

I particularly remember the children. They were having such fun. It brought back memories for me of when I was a child. The highlight of the holidays was spending time with my cousins Kali, Charlie, Andrew and, at Christmas, Penelope. Now these children were having such a good time running from one end of the house to the other. Adults tried to get them to steer clear of the kitchen, but that idea was ignored. Andrew was having so much fun with his cousins. Watching him laugh and play made me realize how much he looked like his daddy when he was a little boy. I mentioned something about this to Karen, his grandmother, and she said there were a lot of similarities.

Then it came time to eat, and the children were asked to join the adults in prayer. This again stirred up a lot of memories for me. As a child, it was so hard to take time to eat; playing was so much more important! The adult coaxing won; the children were promised that they could play after they ate. It also was consoling that Andrew and Charlie could sit together at the children's table. After a few bites of food and sitting long enough to satisfy their parents, the cousins were off and running.

Memories like these are so important for families when a loved one passes on, especially a child. I am again reminded of when I lost a nephew suddenly on June 29, 1989. He was only thirteen years old. Death is not supposed to happen to a child.

In my family, almost any time we gather together we remember Ross. We talk about memories of him. At special family events his picture is often displayed. Loved ones like Andrew and Ross are ALWAYS part of the family, no matter how many years have passed.

From Andrew's memorial service:

"Andrew loved cars, planes, trains and "planecops" (helicopters). He loved playing video games with Daddy and baking cakes with Mommy. He was a child that was always on the go and never too tired to play. He was also a great protective big brother."

Andrew Smith
January 18, 2005-February 17, 2008

Remembering Valerie, *cont. from p. 4*

ourselves, finding the artist within ourselves and learning to trust in the light of God's Spirit to lead us into an authentic life. Along with the book, Valerie gave me a gratitude journal as suggested by the author. By writing down five things each night for which she was grateful, she said she could not help but feel blessed.

As we regularly spent time together having lunch or sipping tea or coffee, scrapbooking photos of our families and our lives, we shared the stories of our past and present. The hardships and joys of my life became hers and hers became mine. As a counselor and a teacher, she had many wise thoughts to share, encouraging my dreams and offering an empathetic ear to my troubles. My burdens were her burdens, and I have since learned of more than once when she went to battle for me without my knowledge. She was an incredibly loyal friend.

That Wednesday before I left, we sat together in silence, Valerie on the couch and I on a chair with my back to the warmth of January sunbeams as I quietly inhaled my medicine. She asked me, "Does it hurt?" "No," I assured her, "it just makes me feel a little lightheaded and tired afterwards." She nodded and was silent. I wondered what she was thinking, knowing she was probably concerned about me. I was touched by the quietness she allowed to enter the room with us, which, rather than distancing us, seemed to convey a profound trust. I felt such a sense of happiness sitting there with her. I felt the power of a friendship so real she had entrusted me with a glimpse of her truest colors which included golden hues of gratitude, soft blues of empathy and tenderness, the radiant red of loyalty and protectiveness and the bright pink of joy and hope. It was a beautiful vision I would have never seen had we not become so close. It was a gift for which I was truly thankful. I will always remember the overwhelming sense of peace I felt that afternoon. It was as if there was with us in that room a piece of heaven itself.

A Pastor Faces Grief

By Ryan Ahlgrim

I was a young pastor in my twenties when the first person in my first congregation died. A fellow in the congregation who was about the same age as myself, wanting to give an appropriate condolence to the family, asked me in a whisper, “What should you say to the family?”

Over twenty years later, I’m still not sure what the answer is to that question. But here are some of my stumbling suggestions:

Silent presence. When Job lost his wealth, his children and his health, three of his friends decided to go to him together to console and comfort him. The Old Testament story is poignant as it describes what happened next: “When they saw him from a distance, they did not recognize him, and they raised their voices and wept aloud; they tore their robes and threw dust in the air upon their heads. They sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great.”

When we meet people in grief, our tendency is to want to say something positive, to break the terrible silence and suffering. If this is the first thing we do, it’s probably a mistake. We cannot say what is appropriate until we have entered into the person’s grief, feeling it and sharing it. Our silence acknowledges the seriousness and legitimacy of the grief. Silence also acknowledges that, in the mist of great tragedy, our platitudes of faith sound hollow and false. There are no easy answers or quick replies to tragic sorrow.

Our presence, even without words, demonstrates our courage to face the suffering with the one in grief. It also silently expresses our love and concern. Years later, the one who grieved will forget the words that were spoken by those who passed by, but will remember the friends who sat in the ash heap in silence.

Touch. Those in grief are sometimes treated as lepers. We are afraid to extend a sign of physical intimacy. We wonder if they would prefer to be left alone or would be offended by our intimacy. But I believe we must be completely human with those who grieve, and that means we must have the courage to reach out and take a hand or touch a shoulder or—for friends—give a hug. Sometimes I have given a hug when a hug was not wanted or felt awkward. One needs to use one’s best senses in this area. But I would rather err on the side of showing warmth than on the side of being cold.

Support through prayer. We frequently tell people who are facing difficulties or grief, “I will keep you in prayer.” This is a wonderful thing to say, but only if we mean it, and only if the other believes we mean it. This is a solemn commitment we are making, and we must follow it up with earnest, daily prayer. Saying we will pray—and then not praying—is much worse than not having said anything. Bring the person into God’s presence each day in your prayers. This increases your own compassion for the person and opens up God’s guidance for how you might be a ministering angel. In addition, prayer opens up realities we do not understand, spiritual influences to help the one in need.

Express God’s love and hope, not answers. After we have sat in silence, sharing and understanding the grief, after we

See **A Pastor Faces Grief**, p. 7

The Support of a Church Family

By Tyler Sawatzky

My father, Erick Sawatzky, passed away in December after a ten-year struggle with Parkinson’s and Multiple System Atrophy. His entire working life was spent in service to the Church. In his younger, stronger, healthier days, he was always one of the first to participate if someone in the congregation needed a new roof, or a new garage, or a funny song for a particular occasion.

As a family, we benefited from this mutual aid, not only when we needed a new garage, but also when we were preparing to move from Regina to Saskatoon and our house would not sell. A number of people from the congregation bought our house so that we could purchase a new home in Saskatoon. Not only did they lose a pastor, they gained a mortgage payment, something I did not understand at the time.

I grew up taking the concept of mutual aid for granted, but in the aftermath of my father’s death, it has become front and center in my thought—and grief—processes. Mutual aid is not something limited to “garage raising” and yard cleanup. Mutual aid is about a larger sense of community. It is about relationships.

Not many at First Mennonite knew my father, and yet the outpouring of support and concern from the congregation during the course of my father’s long illness has overwhelmed me. When my dad’s health took a turn for the worse in early December, church friends helped me with the decision as to whether or not to fly to Canada. At the time of my father’s death, one church member took Angela to the airport and there was a rush of emails and phone calls. Then came the cards, and they kept coming, and they are still coming occasionally. A number of people even made the effort to attend the memorial service in Goshen just two weeks ago—a full three months after my father’s passing. These are just a few of the acts of kindness that have made me aware of how privileged I am to be part of such a caring community.

Shortly after losing his grandson, Keith Dwyer stood up in church and shared very simply what I had been feeling for months—community is what church is all about. Karen and Keith felt it. I felt it. I hope that Paul Shankland and Alison Schumacher and Sam Carpenter felt it. I honestly have never felt more in the hands of God than while feeling the support of this church. The mutual aid we’ve given and been blessed to receive through FMC has helped me really understand the example my dad set for me all his life.

How can we as a congregation express our care for those dealing with sorrow? Don’t take things for granted. Be an active participant in the church community. It doesn’t have to be a grand gesture, just a few words. Continue to ask questions about ill loved ones, even if the person doesn’t know how to answer. Show an interest. Attend the funerals of people you don’t know if only to show support for the loved ones you do know. Send cards and emails. Say hello. Fostering the tradition of mutual aid is one of the greatest gifts we can give each other and future generations. My father’s life and death showed me that the amount of effort put in is miniscule compared to the amount of support received.

Those people who bought our house in Regina in 1981 so we could be free to move? Thirty-six years later, they traveled 500 miles to be at my father’s funeral in Winnipeg to help us say good-bye.

Death and Grief In Ambivalent Relationships

By Paul N. Hartman

When counseling clients talk with me about how they think they will feel when a person towards whom they feel rage (and love which they may or may not acknowledge) dies, I often caution them to consider that it may be a confusing and difficult experience. Of course, death and grief are never really easy, as we as human beings feel many emotions when we lose a person who was important to us at one time in our lives. The irony is that we have to work harder to figure out what we think and feel, and how to manage such thoughts and feelings, when the person who dies is an object of love and rage, or of “hate” if that word is more fitting than “rage.” It certainly doesn’t seem fair that a relationship that gave us so much trouble when the person was living continues to be a struggle even after the person has died. We can’t just feel what we feel, instead we end up fighting and arguing within ourselves about what we actually feel towards the person, and about whether it is acceptable to feel what we feel, much as we did when the person was alive.

Comments from clients to the effect that “I won’t miss him when he is gone,” or “I feel nothing about her and I won’t go to her funeral” are rather common. The part that people seem to miss is that if we have such a mix of negative and positive energy and intensity towards a person when they are still living, we will probably feel much the same way when we have memories about the person after his or her death. The duel of competing emotions will continue within us after the person is gone, and we will probably continue to feel much of the shame and anger we struggled with during the person’s life, as well as during the time the person was dying.

The following statements are observations or principles that I think are relevant to death and grief in ambivalent relationships:

1. If you feel love and rage towards a person who has been important in your life, such as a family member, do everything you can while the person is still alive to improve the relationship with that person, at least if the other person is at all receptive to your overtures.
2. If the other person is not receptive to your attempts to make things better between you, search for other ways to find healing and forgiveness within yourself, to understand what you feel, and to find relief from the shame—undeserved or not—that you feel within yourself.
3. When a person towards whom you feel ambivalent is dying, monitor your expectations and hopes carefully. In general, people die much the same way as they lived their lives. Miracles that involve wonderful healing experiences of contriteness and forgiveness do occur when people are dying, but it is also true that people say mean, ugly and hurtful things when they are dying. Don’t set yourself up to expect an apology from a dying person who is unable or unwilling to give it.
4. Ask people you trust for support and understanding when you are dealing with a death that is confusing and complicated. Being honest with yourself and others will give

you some relief. Furthermore, many more people will understand your feelings than you might at first imagine.

5. After a person towards whom you felt ambivalent has died, don’t expect that everything will resolve itself simply because he or she has died. You may feel worse after the person is gone because the guilt and shame of feeling rage towards a person who is gone may seem petty and mean-spirited. Further, you may think that you should have done more while the person was alive to fix the relationship. These thoughts and feelings may not have much basis in terms of anything that you could have done to heal the relationship, but they are common anyway.

6. A psychiatrist who was a co-worker of mine early in my career once said, “Ambivalence is the enemy of good mental health.” The more you are able to understand your feelings about an ambivalent relationship and experience some resolution and healing, the healthier you will be in general and the more intimacy and love you will find in your other relationships.

Death is final, but the memories and feelings we have about those who have died we carry with us every day for the rest of our lives. Some of our memories are warm and loving, others are cold and angry, and still others are a mix of loving and angry. The memories which are a mix are the most difficult to live with and recalling these experiences or people is sometimes confusing and painful. I think the antidote is a willingness to talk about these relationships until we feel some sense of peace and healing.

A Pastor Faces Grief *cont. from p. 6*

have extended a comforting hand or a warm embrace; after we have made our own inner commitment to keep this person in God’s presence through prayer; now we are ready to give expression to our own genuine faith. We do not give answers to why death has happened or tragedy occurred; we do not claim this is God’s will; we do not presume to be God or to understand the meaning of the universe. Rather, we share what we have experienced to be true: God loves us. We do not express pious sentiments or talk about harps and clouds—don’t demean God’s mystery with silliness. Instead we affirm that we are persuaded that neither life nor death, neither principalities nor powers, neither height nor depth nor anything else in all creation can separate us from the love of God. Jesus’ ministry of love to the outcasts and his crucifixion and resurrection are divine signs of hope—that God has the last word in this universe.

Expressing our Christian hope to those in grief, without actually believing it, makes our faith a sham. But not expressing our faith, out of timidity or a false sense of religious tolerance and pluralism, is a shame. We have a faith that heals a wounded world and sets us on God’s path. Share it, offer it, as you would the best medicine.

I have made many mistakes over the years as I have sought, or failed, to offer comfort and condolence to those in grief. I’m still learning. But we must not feel that the wellbeing of those in sorrow depends on us. We’re just a tiny part of God’s healing work. Keep it simple, keep it genuine, and God will use you.

By Andrew Mishler

My Father's Chili

By Mark Sherer

My dad's fiery chili was unusual in Goshen, IN, during the 60s and 70s. Most people made chili that resembled tomato soup with ground beef and beans. At our house a huge cast iron pot held a couple of gallons of wonderful, spicy ingredients that my sister, brother and I enjoyed for days.

One day after school, I saw a bag of bright red, dried, flaked chili peppers sitting next to the stove. Taped to this football sized bag was a note from my mom that said, "Lon, use these for your chili." Now, Mom had picked up the unfamiliar chili peppers at the co-op earlier that day and meant for some of the hot chilies to be used, but when Dad saw the note he thought Mom meant the whole bag.

So into the pot went all the dried peppers, several pounds of ground beef, onions, home-canned tomatoes, beans, and the hot spices that Dad normally used.

Each of us managed to get a bowl down that night and paid for it the next day. We should have dumped that chili down the drain or dug a hole and buried it in the backyard, but Mom said throwing away all that food was a sin so we went to work trying to tame that wild chili.

First, a half gallon of tomato juice: nothing. More ground beef, more beans. The next day, it was hotter, and we had more of it. "Put a raw potato in it, that will absorb the hot spice," someone said. (Note: a raw potato will absorb salt from liquid that is too salty, but it has no effect on hot spice.) Someone suggested unsweetened chocolate, so into the pot went a whole bar of baking chocolate. By the third day, we were still eating this stuff. My sister was dining at a friend's house, I couldn't taste anything at breakfast and my brother decided he was a vegetarian.

On the fourth day, I told some of my macho teenage buddies that we had some chili that was so hot that they couldn't eat it. Unfortunately, I was right, so on day five we still had a gallon left, hot as ever. Finally, Mom took pity on us. The last remnants went into four one quart containers and into the freezer.

Now our dilemma was, what to do with this toxic stuff? About a month later, our church announced a chili pitch in dinner. Every family was asked to bring a couple of quarts of chili to church one Saturday when all the chili would be combined into one huge vat and then shared by everyone. College Mennonite Church never tried this again.

Mark Sherer's Chili

Olive oil	1 Anaheim chili, roasted, diced
1 lb. chorizo sausage	1 jalapeno pepper
1 lb. ground beef	2 28 oz. cans tomatoes
1 lb. ground turkey	14 oz. can beef broth
2 large onions diced	2 tsp. salt
2 cloves garlic minced	6 oz. can tomato sauce
¼ cup chili powder	¼ cup masa harina
1 Tbs. cumin	2 Tbs. Worcestershire
1 tsp. paprika	juice of ½ lime
4 oz. can green chilis	
1 red bell pepper	
1 poblano chili, roasted, diced	

Anyone who has ever read *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini knows full well that the book cannot possibly be summed up in one word. The story takes the reader on a roller coaster ride from the first page to the last, with the main character narrating his life story and his many experiences. So, naturally, the movie based on the book, released in December 2007, has essentially the same emotional effect. Grief along with friendship, love, betrayal and sacrifice highlight what the story tries to convey.

The film begins in 1960 Afghanistan by introducing Amir, the son of a rich Afghan businessman, and his best friend, Hassan, who is also his servant. Amir's childhood has been hard on him as he tries to live up to his father's expectations. Being judged by others so often frustrates Amir, and Hassan offers his only way from escaping this reality. The friendship between the two could not be closer until one day it is severed when Amir betrays Hassan in his time of need. From that point on, the movie takes an abrupt turn, with Hassan's eventual dismissal as the servant of Amir's family, and Amir and his father's escape to the United States after Russia begins bombing Afghanistan. Amir lives out the next few years growing into adulthood and getting married, until one day an old friend calls him, asking him to return to his homeland for a very important reason.

However, a summary like that does not come close to showing the immense amount of drama and emotion involved in the film. While the movie does switch back and forth between using English and subtitles, nothing is lost in effect. In fact, the realism of the Afghans speaking Dari only adds to the film. The children who play Amir and Hassan in their youth perform well beyond their years, even acting better than their adult counterparts. The cinematography and music are superb as well, the latter even earning an Academy Award nomination.

What separates *The Kite Runner* from other book-to-movie films is the almost flawless transition of the emotion conveyed in the book to the big screen. Tragedies seem to follow Amir throughout his entire life, and the grief that he experiences as told in the book is translated almost perfectly into the movie. The concept of non-violence is alluded to many times, and Amir's dependency on God to get him through his tribulations is evident throughout the story. Racial differences are also approached, and Hosseini seems to believe in equality throughout the world, as evidenced by his writing. All in all, the film is an eye-opening experience to behold and is a direct compliment to the book's powerful writing.

In a large Dutch oven, cook onion in olive oil until tender. Add sausage, cook until no longer pink. Remove to separate bowl. Cook turkey until no longer pink. Add garlic. Cook two minutes. Remove turkey. Add ground beef and cook till done. Add chili peppers. Cook a couple of minutes, and then put turkey back in and add chili powder, paprika and cumin. Fry gently for about 2 min. Add beef broth. Put sausage back in. Add the rest of ingredients. Cover and simmer for 2 hours, stirring occasionally. Add salt, hot pepper sauce, etc. to taste. (Tip: use the best quality chili powder you can find. Everything else is just a bonus.) My chili varies for each batch, depending on what I have on hand. One more thing: everyone needs a secret ingredient, be it chocolate, brandy, liquid smoke—something that makes your chili unique.