

LONG-TERM REACTIONS

It is now 29 years since the accident. I remarried in 1970 and now have two daughters of 18 and 20 and we are, I think, a very happy family. On my dressing table I still have photographs of Joy, Julie and Diccon. One or two friends have asked my wife, Gina, how she puts up with them. She replies that they are a part of my past and are no threat to the present. My affections are not split between Joy and her, and she is no more jealous of them than she would be if I had photos of my parents there.

For a long time after the accident, when talking to people about Joy and Gina, I would find that I sometimes used the name Joy when talking of Gina, or Gina when talking of Joy. It still happens occasionally even now. It was if the brain has a little pigeon-hole labelled 'Wife' with two names in it and hasn't quite learned which one to use on which occasion with certainty!

In the years immediately after the accident I would occasionally have dreams in which Joy figured. The interesting thing is that in each dream the situation in which she appeared made her more and more 'distant', or unobtainable, and the circumstances harder for us to be together than the previous ones. Again it was as if the mind was working out in its own way that she was no longer there. The interval between dreams lengthened and the distance between us in each dream increased until they came to an end.

I don't know to what extent this is a result of the accident or a natural aspect of growing older, but I find that my emotions are much closer to the surface than they used to be. I find that romantically moving scenes, and images of cruelty, unkindness or similar suffering, particularly of children, cause tears to flow very easily. I cry far more easily than anyone else in the family. I believe this is at least partially due to the accident because I believe that those who have experienced the pain of bereavement or other tragedy can more easily imagine that same pain in others.

But there is one very powerful and positive, lasting result of that tragedy. Having lost everything once, I now appreciate to an intense degree that which I now have. It is difficult for others to accept that I appreciate

my wife, and children, and family life more than they do, but I suspect that all those who have lost something very dear to them – be it health, happiness or their freedom – appreciate those things much more when they get them back. I am also more tolerant and understanding of others in their troubles and have more self confidence. I am not one of those who believe that their tragedy was 'the will of God'. It was an

accident, no more, no less. But I am the better for it, and as I value my family more than anything else, it is possible that they too have benefited from those experiences and will be well placed to bring up happy families of their own. My family is what I wish to be judged by in this life, not wealth, position or possession. I think I have been enormously lucky since that terrible evening 29 years ago in Dorset.

CENTRES FOR BEREAVEMENT RESEARCH

Utrecht Centre for Bereavement Research and Intervention

The Centre was founded in 1992 at the University of Utrecht in The Netherlands with the general aim of furthering the scientific study of bereavement and disseminating knowledge to the applied field. Core members are Margaret Stroebe, Jan van den Bout, Wolfgang Stroebe and Henk Schut. Specific goals include:

- Building up a research programme at the University based on a cognitive stress perspective following Lazarus and Folkman, and specifically to test predictions from the Dual Process Model of Coping with Loss developed at the Centre (described in the Report on the International Conference on Grief and Bereavement in Contemporary Society, *Bereavement Care*, 1994; 3: 32).
- Applying research results to society through the team's well-established connections with professional societies and national associations.
- Furthering the worldwide exchange of results with other bereavement researchers by setting up an International Network of Bereavement Researchers and Professionals. This will include a directory of researchers, reference sources, newsletter, organisation meetings and establishment of international collaboration and is an interim step towards establishing a Society of Bereavement Researchers, as none already exists.

An International Board of Consultants, scientists working in the bereavement/trauma area, has been established to give advice on the research programme, act as international representatives on the Network and explore the possibilities of collaborative research. These include

Colin Murray Parkes of the University of London (senior consultant); Robert Hansson of the University of Tulsa, USA; Dale Lund of the University of Utah, USA; James Pennebaker of the Southern Methodist University of Dallas, USA; Beverley Raphael, University of Queensland, Australia; and Bernard Rimé of the University of Louvain la Neuve, Belgium.

Research plans

Work is continuing on two longitudinal data sets, the Utrecht and Tübingen Studies of Bereavement, comparing the two data sets and presenting the results at conferences and in scientific journals.

Three new empirical studies are in progress:

- The Diary Study: an examination of the effects of communication of grief experiences of widows and widowers through the use of diaries. The study tests the theoretical model and a new bereavement coping scale, both of which have been developed by members of the Centre.
- The Family Grief Study: a study of interactive patterns of coping in bereaved parents, which also tests aspects of the theoretical model and coping scale. A pilot investigation involving interviews with a number of bereaved parents (both partners) has been completed.
- The Myths about Bereavement Study: an empirical study of assumptions held by researchers, health-care professionals and laypersons (including the bereaved) about coping with loss.

Further details, including a list of the Centre's publications, are available from the University of Utrecht, Department of Psychology, PO Box 80.140, 3508 TC Utrecht, The Netherlands.