

# Grandparents: Forgotten Grievers?

By June Cerza Kolf

I was leading a grief support group, as I have been doing for the past eight years. This particular group was an unusual mix of losses. Although each group takes on a character of its own, this one's flavor was definitely variety. I struggled to find the right words to soothe the hearts of parents, two grandmothers, a granddaughter, a sibling, and a wife, all at the same time.

We had been meeting for several weeks and I had become well acquainted with a couple who were grieving the death of their teenaged son. The boy's grandmother, who was visiting from out of town as the parents struggled to adjust to their loss, attended each of meetings with them. Each week the parents poured out their pain as the grandmother patted them lovingly and daintily dabbed at her own eyes.

At first, I thought how wonderful it was that she was able to be with them and how blessed they were to have her to lean on in their own time of need. I became cognizant of the importance of loving families in desperate situations. One evening this grandmother spoke to us directly from her heart, however, and opened my eyes to *her* pain, as a grieving grandparent.

This grandmother, Ann, had suffered the death of her grandson. Because I am a grandmother myself, I know the love felt for a grandchild is unlike any other. It is a pure and unselfish love that makes your heart feel perpetually like the first time you fell in love. When Ann lost her grandson, she suffered a heart-wrenching wound, but in addition to her own pain, she had to watch and feel the pain of her daughter and son-in-law in their roles as grieving parents. As much as she wanted to and tried to comfort them, there was no way she could bring back their son. All of this resulted in a "double whammy"; pain upon pain multiplying each day she endured her own grief and had to watch helplessly as her children suffered their personal loss.

By watching this family, I came to understand that when a child dies we all grieve for the parents, but often we forget the grandparents, who can feel left out. We forget they are experiencing that double whammy, trying to work through *their* grief with little or no support of their own.

The support a grieving person receives can make a great difference in the grief process. Grandparents should not be embarrassed to attend grief support groups or seek help to aid themselves through the role of forgotten griever.

