

# Grief recovery quicker with group help

By Marie McGee  
staff writer

The young, aspiring clergyman was in his seminary training when his wife died. The Rev. Robert Weikert recalls how devastated he was following his 28-year-old wife's unexpected death. Two ministers attempted to help the young seminarian. One missed the mark when he preached a funeral sermon on the resurrection — timely, but not particularly consoling. The other sat in silence with the grieving husband. He knew there wasn't much he could say to the young husband and friend who had lost his wife.

Weikert struggled alone — working out his grief almost instinctively. An internship assignment placed him near his parents in a small town near Rochester, N.Y.

There, he walked in the woods a lot, going back to roots. One of the ways he unconsciously worked out his frustrations was by helping friends build a house.

"I didn't realize it at the time, but the physical exertion helped relieve the frustration I was feeling."

"All the time, I had an inkling that I needed something, but I didn't know what," he said.

Eventually, the young Episcopal minister came to the Detroit area. Assignments as chaplain at Detroit's Mt. Carmel Mercy Hospital and as pastoral consultant/ethicist at the University of Michigan Medical School's Department of Family Practice led to the creation of a support group he called "New Beginnings."

"New Beginnings" stemmed from some data he collected while serving as hospital chaplain. He also read and consulted with others who during these years were studying the results of unresolved grief.

One astonishing fact was that those who resolved their grief in a support

group required 49 percent less doctor's care in the period following their loss than those who hadn't received this kind of support.

SOMETHING ELSE he learned as hospital chaplain was that 81 percent of the patients he visited had lost something or someone significant before entering the illness. The loss could be such things as the death of a family member or loss of job. At Mt. Carmel, the percentage, which had suffered a loss was 91 percent.

"The premise I arrived at in establishing New Beginnings is that by helping people to grieve openly, we can

help to keep them physically healthy. In the 17 years that have passed since the wife's death, Weikert has started several support programs for persons who, like himself, have experienced difficult grief. Five others are in the formative stages.

One of these is a new group that will start in June at St. Matthew's United Methodist Church.

"We meet in churches," he explained, "because it's the quiet space and it's important to see life going on — the choir practicing, kids running up and down the hallways. We need a lot of reminders."

But the group has no religious connection, he said. The course presents the process of grief and means for healthy recovery. The first session outlines this process of recovery. The second deals with the importance of story-telling and remembering in the grieving process. A third session is taught by Galesburg physician Dr. James Porges, who outlines the physical effects of grief.

THE FOURTH SESSION addresses the ways grief can lead to negative or positive results, and the resources of faith and community which give persons strength. The fifth session helps participants identify how their values have changed since the loss of a loved one. The sixth session prepares partici-

pants to build an ongoing support network.

The program, Weikert explained, combines a number of radical, psychological and spiritual resources in such a way as to lead to recovery and the rediscovery of the wholeness of life.

"We are strong advocates of meditation, instead of medication," he added.

Weikert says that many people don't allow themselves to express their loss fully.

"They feel they should be over it, or they think they are crazy when they still grieve years later."

"That's why story-telling and recalling memories is an important part of getting well. When people share their stories, they find they are not crazy. They learn that others have experienced the same thing. It's very crucial."

THE FOLLOW-UP SUPPORT group is mostly conversational, Weikert said. "It lets the people take the ball. We give them the chance to grieve, protest and the power to become well."

Weikert also said that he has discovered another interesting but unexplainable phenomenon and that is that people often go through a re-grieving process every five years.

"If you don't grieve overtly, then you'll grieve covertly," he said, "and if you're grieving two other or three things — like a job loss or having to move — that can be a killer."

## 3 storytellers will appear at UM-D

The enchantment of storytelling will unfold during presentations by three gifted tellers at the second Storytelling Festival Saturday, May 12 on the University of Michigan-Detroit campus.

Gamble Rogers, Jackie Torrence and Michael Parent will perform the age-old art in a morning session, complete with workshops and lunch, and an evening performance.

These masters of the rich tradition have appeared nationwide in community, educational and theatrical settings. They will make their story presentations during the morning sessions at the Henry Ford Estate-Fair Lane, a 56-room baronial mansion.

ROGERS, A successful folk singer as well as a storyteller, blends humor in tales of his boyhood visits to Nacoochee Valley, Ga., with commentary and exaggeration to produce such trademark stories as "The Great Maitland Turkey Farm Massacre."

"The Storyteller" from High Point N.C., Torrence has the regal bearing of an African queen and a repertoire ranging from Uncle Remus to Appala-

chian Mountain tales. She is featured instructor at the National School of Storytelling and has appeared frequently on television shows such as ABC's "Kids Are People Too."

Parent lives in Charlottesville, Va., but his more than 180 stories from sources including Aesop's Fables, folk tales from Africa, French Canada, Haiti and Asia, and regional American folklore.

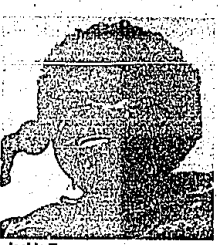
The bearded teller whose tools are a guitar and a face with a kaleidoscope of expressions, is at home in front of an audience. Dressed in his characteristic hat, he combines musical and juggling skills along with his many original stories.

THE STORYTELLERS practice an art form which has been experiencing a revival.

Festival organizer Greta Lipson, an associate professor of education in the Division of Education at UM-D, incorporates storytelling in classes she teaches in children's literature. Her first formal encounter with the art came five years ago when she attend-




Gamble Rogers



Jackie Torrence

ed the country's largest national festival in Jacobboro, Tenn. This is the second year that Lipson is bringing this art form to the area.

Advance registration for the morning program is required because of limited enrollment. It will begin at 8:30 a.m. The \$25 cost includes the story presentations, workshops, coffee break and lunch. Participants will be able to



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