

GRIEVING PROCESS

Challenge of living

When mourning requires some therapy

By Mona Grigg
special writer

IT'S BEEN suggested that there may be as many ways to grieve as there are ways to die. Grief comes unbidden, uninvited, a process both painful and necessary.

"Grief is a coping process as personal and unique to each person as life and death," says Dr. John Kanine, a psychotherapist and grief counselor at Maximum Living in Birmingham, "but sometimes it gets out of hand and needs to be brought under control. The more we understand about the processes of grief, the more we are able to control it."

Kanine, a grief counselor for eight area funeral homes, stresses that grieving is a normal and necessary process, but too often feelings of guilt, hostility or abandonment get in the way, keeping the mourner from creating a healthy outlet.

AND, KANINE SAYS, bereavement (the period marking acute loss) knows no predictable time limits. After a violent or instant death, bereavement time is much longer.

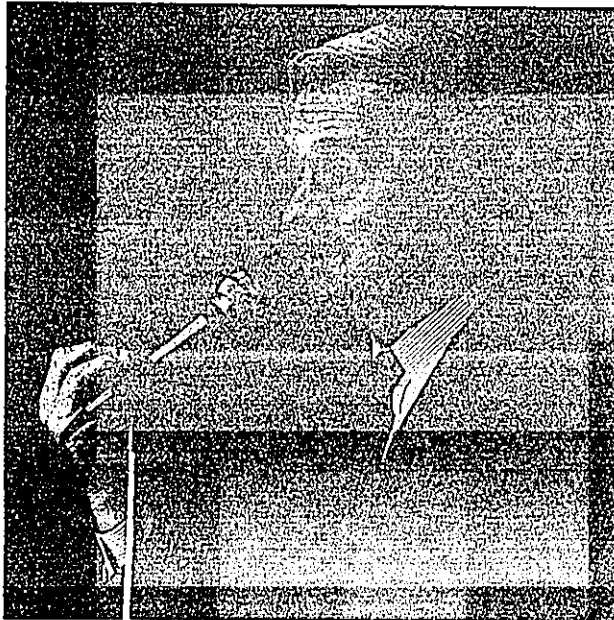
"We don't have time to adjust to the death as we would with, say, a death from cancer. Things have been left unfinished. We need time to resolve them."

During a long-term illness leading to death, the grieving process often begins as the illness progresses. Kanine calls it "anticipatory grieving." But that's not to say it's the end of it. Grieving sometimes has a "wave effect," Kanine says. It eases and advances, eases and advances — and when the mourner understands that, the advances can be prepared for and accepted.

In private counseling and in his seminars, Kanine teaches that there are four stages to grief:

- **Numbness** — This sensation, where nothing seems real, can last from a few hours to a few days.

- **Searching** — The period for doubts, even anger, it is often accompanied by vivid dreams and hallucina-



STEVE FECHT/staff photographer

tory images. This stage can last from several weeks to many months.

- **Disorientation** — Marks the beginning of the growth period. We know we have to move ahead, yet the only way to remember is to look back. We feel pulled in all directions. Feelings of worthlessness surface, insomnia occurs, we feel a bit off balance.

- **Resolution** — We create a niche for the person who has left, then go on with our lives.

KANINE, WHO WROTE his dissertation and later a book on the grieving process, knows whereof he speaks. In one terrible two-year period, he and his wife lost four family

members, including their infant daughter.

"Learning to cope with those deaths, one right after another, was the catalyst for my work as a grief counselor," he says. "There seemed to be the right steps and wrong steps and when I figured out which steps were needed for growth, I realized those same applications could be used by others."

Kanine's book, "The Challenge of Living," outlines those steps in five chapters, with the tone of the book following the stages of grief. The first two chapters, on death awareness, are serious — almost somber. The later chapters, on the steps toward emotional growth, become livelier,

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even light-hearted, as the mourner steps from the shadows into the light.

Kanine sometimes works with school systems, helping to teach children about death and grieving. He worked with a particular group of second graders recently only to be called in a few months later to help them cope, this time for real, when a favorite teacher died.

Though grief therapists sense a real need for early childhood education, the schools are uneasy about offering courses having to do with death, Kanine says. "They're not entirely convinced that it's a subject educators should be concerned with."

GRIEF THERAPY IS, in fact, a fairly recent concept, coming into its own only after publication in 1977 of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross' landmark book, "On Death and Dying."

Even the funeral directors had to be convinced that it was worthwhile program for their clients.

"When I first developed my own program, I was turned down by several funeral directors who thought the whole idea was frivolous," Kanine says, laughing. "Now I see those same directors doing a turnaround, offering grief counseling as an integral part of their packages."

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New statutory will is easy to follow

ARE WILLS REALLY for everyone? Surely the very rich should have one. And parents involved in second and third marriages should have one. And people with favorite charities and favorite dogs and cats should have a will.

But what about a person with one

spouse, a couple of kids, and not much more to claim than a car, a TV and household of financed furniture?

State Rep. Perry Bullard (D-Ann Arbor), sponsor of Public Act 61 of 1986 creating the Michigan Statutory Will, believes the new, easy-to-follow form will appeal to those very families — mid-to-low income fami-

lies and individuals with uncomplicated estates.

"WE ALL HAVE A right to decide who is to receive our property when we die," Bullard said, "... the benefits of a will are not limited to people