

Gail Rink: Face to Face with the Grief Others Feel

By Gail Rink, [Hospice of Santa Barbara](#) | Posted on 10/25/2008

Just because you know the answers doesn't mean you can handle the questions alone.



Members of support groups reflect one another. A piece of you is a piece of them. (iStockphoto)

My brother was murdered in 1993. John was my only sibling, younger by 3 years. Naturally, his death was a shock. I must admit, though, my grief recovery was a bigger shock. I found myself so angry at him dying! His death meant I was left alone to care for our mother! John was her favorite. I was the caregiver. Mother was an alcoholic. Dad had died in 1970.

I remember how strange it felt to understand why I was so angry, but understanding it did not take the anger away. This duality of feeling and understanding was too distracting for me. I had to reach out for help.

I joined a support group in Thousand Oaks for Survivors of Homicide. I generally benefit most from group therapy rather than talk therapy. Why? As a hospice grief counselor, I would be micromanaging the therapist. Support groups consist of many stories, many avenues to healing and points of view. I am stimulated by the input and fascinated by the power of compassionate conversation. Everyone has shared the same kind of loss; instant commonality. Everyone was

eager to stop the constant sadness; be comforting and, at the same time, understood. Everyone was listening for answers; which is where the support begins. I recall a peaceful infusion happening for me ... empathy and words created the healing companionship I sought.



I also found it challenging to listen to everyone's story. Some sessions were too much like work. I would distance myself from the conversation; preferring to witness what I was feeling and saying. This was a strange time for me. Processing my brother's death with a group of strangers was so unlike me!

And yet, week after week, I would drive south to attend.

I learned the anger I felt toward my brother for dying was unusual, not crazy.

I learned that I had difficulty expressing my anger; preferring to cry.

I gained a greater compassion for the people I serve. Recovery is possible. We are a resilient species. I am resilient without "the edge."

Members of support groups reflect one another. A piece of you is a piece of them. Sharing our humanness strengthens us. Healing returns us to the wholeness of our self.

Gail Rink is the retiring executive director of Hospice of Santa Barbara. This is the first of several articles about healing through different kinds of grief support groups. Call Hospice of Santa Barbara at 805.563.8820 for a schedule of adult and children's groups.