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*At times our own light goes out and is rekindled
by a spark from another person.
Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude
Of those who have lighted the flame within us.
-Albert Schweitzer*

Since my month of anniversary day and birthday has passed, I have been re-reading messages and cards people have sent to me. Family members, friends and co-workers have all been a true sense of comfort and support. We talk about Adam and laugh and cry all the time. I am very fortunate that way. With each passing year it means more and more that others still recognize and acknowledge the life of my son.

Another source of support has been my support group. The purpose of a support group is to give you a sense that you are not alone in your grief. Even though family and friends are feeling the sorrow of the loss, it is comforting to be with others who have had similar experiences. By sharing the intense feelings, vocalizing them and venting you are validating yours and others feelings. Those experiencing grief and who are mourning often feel misunderstood.

My first experience with a support group was a scary event. An acquaintance of mine had also lost a child and she invited me several times to attend. I kept putting her off coming up with one excuse after another. Finally, I gave in because I felt bad about her always asking. It was the single most important thing I did for myself. She was the spark I needed to be rekindled. I realized I was not handling some things well and some things not at all. I got to see first hand how grief could consume every aspect of my life. I learned how to cope with the lonely times in crowded rooms. I was given advice on handling work. Trying to understand that close family around me were grieving too and their way did not have to be my way.

It has been 4-1/2 years now and I still attend every Monday night unless I am out of town. These women have become my friends as well as fellow grievers. We rely on each other and help each other not only with grief issues but all sorts of things.

There are several types of support groups. Some are on the Internet and others are available through churches and clinics. A support group can be as simple as coffee with a friend once in awhile or as complicated as a formal meeting with a facilitator. The group I am with started out in a formal setting and when it changed location we decided we couldn't be without each other so we meet on our own at a coffee house.

It really doesn't matter the length of time it has been since your loved one passed. It can be a scary feeling but rest assured that the people in the group felt the same way their first time. Issues occur and re-occur as time goes on. We had a woman that came to our meeting 6 years after her daughter passed. She felt she finally needed to grieve.

Another plus of a support group is that if you are not comfortable or find that a certain group is not for you, there is no obligation to stay. You can always find another or start one of your own.

My hope for all is that you find a way to share your experience with someone who will listen and you can trust.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you who have ignited the flame within me.