

# Bethany Bereavement Support Group

## The Truth Will Set You Free

### The Hidden Grief of Adoption

When I started attending a Bethany Support Training programme, I was asked about my most significant loss. At that time, I believed my greatest loss had been the death of my parents. However, as the training proceeded and my self-awareness grew, I began to realise that the experience of giving up my first born for adoption when I was just 16, at a time when I had no support and all the decisions were made for me, was a significant loss. I always carried the memory in my heart and I often thought about my baby. However I had hidden my grief, even from myself.

At the Bethany training, I found myself in the heart of a reality, the real world of people's pain and sense of loss. This I thought to myself is real life, but in a safe caring and well organised supportive and confidential environment. I began to identify, that what I was hearing was touching me at a deeper level, a place that I had been running away from all my life. In the safety of Bethany and through the

support of a Bethany volunteer, I gradually began to look at my own life and experiences of loss. I realised when parents shared their stories of how their children had died, and the pain they were going through, I experienced the same feelings and pain that they expressed. I began to identify the reality of my pain, my unspoken loss of a baby many years ago.

When I was asked if I would consider becoming a Bethany worker/ listener, I looked forward to the opportunity to improve my listening skills and the privilege of walking with & supporting others on their journey through loss and grief. I experienced a call to work with those in crises and isolation as a result of my own troubled and painful life experience.

However, I often questioned why I was drawn to work with those experiencing bereavement? I had not experienced a significant bereavement until I was 34 through the death of my Father, and I was in my 40s when My Mother died and if I am to be truly honest, both their deaths came as a relief to me. I had a very lonely, isolated and broken childhood, with little or no support from either of my parents. However I was responsible for their care from a young age until the time of their deaths. I did love them both, but giving and expressing love was not something that came easy to either of them, as a result of their own tragic life experiences. My faith was the one thing that sustained me through my life and through the many crosses I have experienced. I am and always will be grateful to my parents for the gift of Faith they passed on to me.

My grieving for them was



strange, a sense of relief mingled with the sense of how I should be, following the loss of my parents. It was all a very superficial external experience. I never moved beyond thoughts, feelings did not exist apart from the odd tear shed when I was alone when I was overwhelmed by the strange void that I was left with. I stayed with my thoughts & my experience at a head level, I did not dare take that journey to my heart. I talked to friends and others who would listen, but always keeping it pleasant they would not get tired of listening to me. I kept busy and carried on with life, because that is what I always did when life was hard.

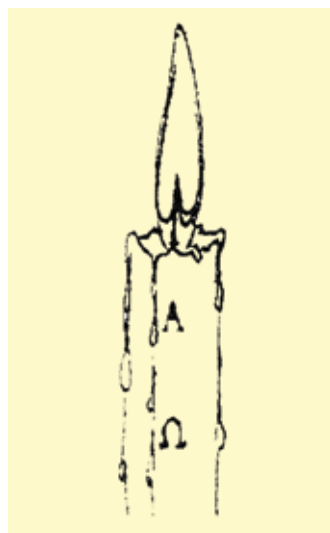
With Bethany, for the first time, I had got in touch at a deeper level, a heart level, with the pain and loss I experienced when I gave my baby up for adoption. This pain had been buried deep inside of me and as long as I kept it at a head level, I thought I was coping. Nothing could have been further from the truth! Looking back now I can see how my buried pain and silent grief had affected me over the years. It was a prison. Is it any wonder my mental health had been so bad? Now I understood the source of my depression and patterns of behaviour.

At Bethany I was able to talk about it openly. I spoke the truth of how it really had been for me.

**I did not have to censor the truth to protect anyone else.** I was encouraged to be honest. Now I understand what it means when it is said that 'the truth will set you free'. I had never expressed my loss at this level or felt it until now.

During the Bethany Course I was listened to non-judgementally. I was heard, encouraged and supported to be honest with myself. No one tried to advise me. I received genuine empathy and compassion. I found support and a safe place to explore and work through my grief. I was then able to grieve the loss of my parents, my lost childhood and my child.

This experience has helped me realise that many of us wear a mask as we journey through life. It takes courage and a safe environment to remove the mask. I did, I revealed the truth that I had buried deep inside and had been running from all my life. I will always be grateful to the people of Bethany for their support and to my parents for the faith I got from them. This has enabled me to believe and trust that God is with me always and in all circumstances.



# Annual General Meeting 2012

The 18th AGM of the Bethany Bereavement Support Group was held in the Milltown Institute, Ranelagh on the 18th of Feb. The large and enthusiastic group from all over the country were welcomed warmly by the outgoing chairperson, Winnie Keogh. Mass was celebrated by Fr. Myles O'Reilly and concluded with a service of light when the names of deceased members, their family and friends were read out and a candle was lit for each.

The guest speaker, John Quinn, was introduced and spoke movingly of the death of his wife, Olive. (see the article on page 3).

The Rathfarnham group did a workshop on an evening of prayer and remembrance using the motif of a cracked pot that leaked but watered the seeds as it did so. Smaller groups were formed to discuss the ideas presented.

The formal side of the meeting followed:

**Treasurer's report:** As the operational and value added costs do not balance and the

grant amounts are uncertain, the GEC propose to continue to collect a yearly donation from each group. Minimum amount to be €50, at your discretion.

**Secretary's report:** 11 monthly meetings were held during the year. Jim Garland joined the GEC, having been nominated and elected at the last AGM. Thanks to the 70% of parishes who returned their reports and made a donation to defray GEC costs.

**Training:** Courses took place in Clonliffe, Esker and Monkstown. New groups were formed in Renmore, Galway city, Castlegar and Kiltullagh. Geraldine Buckley completed the Monkstown course and will start a new group in Charleville Co. Cork. Winnie attended the final day of the first training course in Northern Ireland at the Dromalis Retreat centre in Larne. Bishop Farquhar was delighted with the involvement of lay people. New groups formed in Ballymena, Belfast, Glenarm and Drumbo/Carryduff.

Ray Leonard will be director of training in Swords to facilitate a group who support the suicide bereaved. Thanks to Marie

# AGM



Byrne and her team for setting up this course. Groups that trained together this year have reconvened for facilitation days after 6 months. The feedback has been very positive.

**The Bereavement weekend** in November was organised by Anne Butler and conducted by Fr. Myles. The next weekend will take place on **23rd to 25th of Nov. 2012**. Both the bereaved and new members of Bethany are encouraged to attend.

**The Newsletter** is compiled by Deirdre O Muiri. Please submit any news, stories, poetry or event announcements to [bethansupport@eircom.net](mailto:bethansupport@eircom.net).

**Website:** Thanks to Frank McCarthy for his work in developing this site as a valuable resource for those in need.

**Day of reflection:** 80 people attended Frances Hogan's talk "The Lord is with us".

**Funeral ministry:** Where Bethany and funeral teams work well together the Bethany training is useful and allows us to make early contact with the bereaved.

**Chairpersons talk:** The outgoing chairperson, Winnie Keogh thanked everyone for their help

and support during her three years in office and expressed great joy at the spread of the Bethany groups to all parts of the country. She commented on the idea of seeds being sown and coming to fruition which ran as an underlying theme throughout the AGM noting that John Quinn received a seed from an unlikely source which helped him on his journey through grief. That the Cracked Pot of the workshop leaked and felt useless but nurtured the flowering seeds. Lastly she observed that the seed of Bereavement support planted by Fr. John Murphy in 1984, was nourished by Fr. Myles, whose presence here today shows the continuity and growth over almost thirty years.

Lastly she wished the incoming chairperson, Moira Staines, every blessing for her term of office.

Fr. Myles presented Winnie with a potted camellia "which she has just the place for in her garden". Please note that a full interview with Winnie will be in the Autumn edition of the newsletter. Goodbye and thank you until then Winnie.

## The Grieving Journey CD

Personal stories, reflections, and practical suggestions for times of grief.



Cost: €3.00 (for more than 3 CDs - €2.00 postage)  
Order through GEC, contact details are on page 3.

## Book and CD Recommendations

Bethany CD (above)

Mary Brady's Book 'Time without you'

Books by our Guest Speaker – John Quinn

Letters to Olive €12.99

Moments €14.99

Where to from now – Brian Grogan SJ €15.00

Be not Afraid – Imelda Butler €15.00

Praying our Goodbyes – Joyce Rupp €13.00 Veritas



# A PERSONAL STORY

by John Quinn (Writer and Broadcaster)

*In his address to the Bethany AGM, writer and broadcaster John Quinn told a personal story – his own account of coping with the sudden death of his wife Olive in 2001. Drawing on readings from his own book “letters to olive”, Henri Nouwen’s “A letter of consolation” and “The book of consolations” (John’s own anthology of consoling words), he analysed the grieving process under various headings.*

Grief is in itself a good and natural thing. John O’Donoghue describes it as “learning to become reacquainted with someone in their new invisible form for in truth, as Master Eckhart says, the dead don’t go anywhere -----They are just invisible to us.”

ible to us.”

**Regret.** As psychologist Marie Murray says, grief embraces us with regret. If only I had said/hadn’t said this, had/ hadn’t done that. We should avoid regret but unfortunately we are human and do regret. John recalled a friend saying she had no time for “this regret stuff, If you didn’t travel the road you travelled you wouldn’t be where you are now.”

**Separation.** Nevertheless, there is the great void of separation when a loved one departs. “The absurdity of you gone”, as Christy Brown put it. Nothing can prepare for the numbness, “the unreality of reality” It is a hard and lonely road, even if untimely, “Death does not long divide”.

**Time.** “Ah yes, but sure time is a great healer” people say. “Rubbish” is John Quinn’s reply to that! Time may help you to accommodate to the new situation but it does not heal. He quoted Joan Wilson, who likened grief to a wound. It may only take the smallest thing (a photo, a song, a trinket) to reopen it. In John’s case it was finding the bill for his honeymoon! Henri Nouwen reminds that “if time does anything, it deepens our grief” He emphasises the importance of detachment, of letting go---

**Solace.** Amid all the grief there



John Quinn

is solace to be found in poetry, in letters, and above all in memory – the memory of courtship days, of “sweet love remembered” (Shakespeare), of even the most trivial incidents. The bottom line as Gordon Wilson said is love. “Love comes from that place where death cannot enter” (Nouwen)

**Gratitude.** In the midst of loss there must be gratitude – “for the way it happened and the way it was” (P, Kavanagh) John acknowledged his gratitude to Olive and to the Lord for their life together. As Mary Redmond says “the best form of grief is thanksgiving” There may be bumps on the road but they are outweighed by the blessings.

**Hope.** Ultimately, as Christians, we are entrusted with hope. John is absolutely certain of being reunited with Olive. As Edith Sitwell says “all in the end is harvest”. We need only be patient. “Just wait quietly, peacefully, joyfully. All will be well” (Nouwen)

## The Small white bird

by Sr. Rionnach

The small white bird, for those who saw,  
A heavenly messenger from God,  
From heaven sent to bring His love  
To Aoife, and to lead her home  
Or maybe strengthen us who mourn

Whence did it come and whither go  
Alighting on her coffin pure?  
Then flew like a snowflake lightly down  
To rest on grass – Symbolic rite, what mystery shown?

How understand this parting, dying  
Dread sacrifice, mysterious sign?  
Our faith alone can give it meaning  
Death is naught save in our rising,

Yet wealth of life to others given  
Donating heart and lungs- her life.  
A depth of love in this oblation  
Sacrifice of daughter’s being  
Source of joy and life ‘mid pain.

Word of love to all the world,  
And most of all to broken hearts  
Of two who, parting, strained by sorrow,  
Reunite with hope anew.

What love is there white bird, God’s spirit?  
Incarnate in us, Christ alive,  
No longer sacrifice unmeaning  
But love unbounded, endless life.



### General Executive Committee 2012

Fr. Myles O’ Reilly - **Spiritual Director**

Moira Staines - **Chairperson**

Deirdre O Muiri - **Secretary**

Ronan Hughes - **Treasurer**

Winnie Keogh - **Ex Officio**

Anne Butler, Gobnait O Grady, Maeve Mason,

Brendan Nugent, Jim Garland,

Liz Ronaldson.

### Bethany Bereavement Support Group contact details:

Bethany Bereavement Support Group,  
c/o Rathfarnham Parish Centre, Willbrook Road,  
Rathfarnham, Dublin 14.

**Bethany Phone:** 087 9905299

**Email:** bethanysupport@eircom.net

**Website:** www.bethany.ie

# A tribute to Sr. Sheila McAuliffe

A special thank you to Bethany Group Queen of Peace, Putland Road, Bray for organising and hosting a wonderful evening at which we celebrated 25 years of Sr Sheila McAuliffe's association with Bethany. Fr Myles O'Reilly celebrated Mass and inspired all present. Thank you to Sam Veale and Maureen Master-son and their team, our hosts, who made a presentation to Sr Sheila. Moira Staines Chairperson was privileged to attend and say a few words on behalf of all present to Sr Sheila and acknowledge her contribution to Bethany over the last 25 years.

In 1987 Sr. Sheila became director of training when she took over from Sr. Breeda Treacy and since then she has been totally committed to our Bethany training programme. During her first two years over 40 parishes started Bethany groups, Quite an achievement for those early years. During the 90's I remember when the training was held in Merchants Quay and the dedication Sr. Sheila gave at that time.

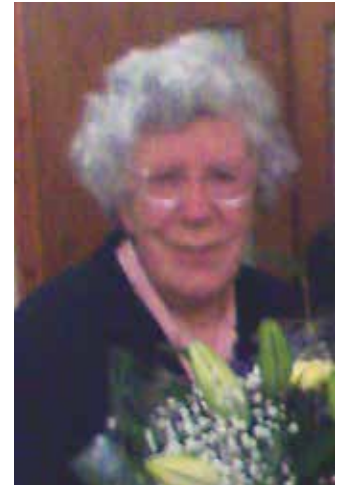
We have been enriched by the gentleness and spirituality that Sr. Sheila brings to our organisation. At every meeting we use her prayer for Bethany members and her prayer for

the bereaved is distributed on an ongoing basis to the bereaved.

I decided to Google Sr. Sheila the other evening and what appeared as the very first item was all the prayers that she had composed for the bereaved in so many situations of loss, all of them so appropriate and sensitive to those who are grieving.

In 2008 we were all shocked when Sr. Sheila became seriously ill, but the good Lord restored her to health and in no time she was back in harness and continues to conduct the final day of training. Many here tonight have been enriched and encouraged by her deep spirituality on that final day.

May Sr. Sheila be with us for many more years to be that silver thread that shines through all her work and prayer and has been so much part of Bethany over the last 25 years. We all wish her continued health that



*Sr. Sheila McAuliffe*

will enable her to continue to enrich us with all the goodness and rich spirituality that she brings to Bethany.

I will finish with a quote from John O'Donoghue's Matins from "Eternal Echoes" which sums up Sr. Sheila and which we all might aspire to be: Compassionate of heart, Gentle in word, Gracious in awareness, Courageous in thought, Generous in love.

## Email to Sr. Sheila McAuliffe

When I received Sr. Sheila's card with the Bethany design of the Alpha and Omega imbedded in the candle, I felt a sense of eternal life, from the always and forever burning of the candle.

This reinforced my message to my mother before she died when I told her we would only be apart for a short time. We will be reunited at the final judgement day when Jesus returns as our king. The prayer in time of bereavement comforted me, especially in its first line "Lord you are close to the broken hearted." This tiny

card made a huge difference in my grief so when it was time to design the headstone; I wanted this to be on it. I know my late mother and father would be comforted by this message.

I am grateful that I had a divine opportunity of meeting Sr. Sheila McAuliffe at the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Hospital in New York. Without her I would not be where I am today- much more at peace and always listening for direction from the Lord.

*From Roberta Tehan  
Sent 02 December 2011*



*The Tehan family headstone with the Bethany Candle inscribed on it.*

## News Flashes.....

### Volunteers needed



The Bethany Group is taking an information stand at the International Eucharistic Congress and will require volunteers to man the stand for 2 to 4 hours on a day that suits them. If you are able to help with this please send your name, address, email address and/ or mobile number to:

Gobnait O'Grady at **087 2052177** or

**gobnaitogrady@eircom.net**

Liz Ronaldson at **087 2392465** or

**ronaldson6@eircom.net**

You will be met at the entrance by Gobnait and given a pass for the arena.