

FOCUS Bereavement Group ~ October 24, 2002
“That Goblin Guilt”

from When Good-Bye Is Forever: Learning to Live Again After the Loss of a Child
by John Bramblett

One of the most formidable issues facing us in the early hours following the death of a child is the inevitable battle with the “if onlys” that play themselves out in our troubled minds. They immediately torment us with the possibilities of what might have been – things that, had they been done differently, might have averted the death. ~ page 94

Reflecting on the times we had successfully eluded death or serious injury – usually without even knowing it – doesn’t take away the pain of the tragedy. It does help to put the “if onlys” in perspective. ~ page 95

While the desire for accountability is not bad in itself, we must accept our limitations. We cannot control the events that impact our lives all the time. ~ page 96

The resolution of speculative guilt can often be aided by external circumstances. Often there are professionals – doctors, nurses, and other specialists – who will reassure us that the disease or illness would have run the same course regardless of the timing of the diagnosis or the role we played in the treatment of the dead child. We are open to this type of reassurance because we are conditioned to defer to the judgment of the professionals whose job it is to assess the pathology of the illness and probably, too, because we long to be free of the guilt. ~ page 98

If you feel this way [a negative tailspin], focus on positive ways to redirect some of the energy that might otherwise be wasted in the pursuit of this type of speculative guilt. ~ page 97

Before we hand down this guilty verdict on ourselves, we should ask ourselves one final series of questions: Did we love our child? Did our overall relationship with our child find its basis in that love? Will cultivating our guilt heal the wounds that afflict us or bring us back our child? Will guilt speed the healing that we and those around us need, or will it stop our first faltering efforts in that direction? ~ page 99

While I missed that last opportunity, I have worked very hard at focusing my thoughts on the other, gentler moments we did have together in his tow years and four months. I fill part of the void he left behind with that positive approach, not with time spent regretting what I did or didn’t do on the day of his death. ~ page 105