

## Linda Gill's Story

Linda Gill, registered nurse and licensed professional counselor, specializes in helping individuals and families with grief and loss. In 2002, with the help of a small group of volunteers, she launched the “Joy in the Mourning”® Center for Life Losses in Columbia, SC. The Center is a non-profit organization that exists to provide educational programs and support services that will develop leaders and offer training designed to help those who are grieving losses wherever these programs are needed. The history behind Linda's dream, her work, and her determination to make a difference in the lives of grieving people follows.

Linda Gill's work began as an intensive care nurse. Since graduating from nursing school in 1971, she has worked with people from every kind of life situation, working to save lives and help families of critically ill adults, children, and infants. She has also worked with critical family situations in maternity, pediatric, and emergency room settings. During her years as a nurse, she discovered that families needed much more help than they usually receive when a loved one is critically ill or dying. To develop skills for effectively meeting those needs, she earned a master's degree in Parent-Infant Nursing.

Linda became a Clinical Nurse Specialist in 1989, working in a hospital setting to help families who experienced the critical illness or death of an infant. In 1991, she moved to South Carolina and became the first Clinical Nurse Specialist to work exclusively with parental crisis and grief in Columbia, SC. From 1991 -1996, her work expanded to provide crisis intervention and grief support groups in hospital and community settings for families who experienced the unexpected birth of a baby with special needs or the critical illness, critical injury, or death of an infant or child. In 1995, she co-founded the South Carolina SIDS Coalition and became actively involved with families who experienced Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). She developed and began to teach educational programs for parents, day care providers, coroners, and health care providers across South Carolina about how to reduce the risk of SIDS and how to work compassionately with families who experience sleep-related infant death. By the end of 1996, she was facilitating 3 support groups for families who had experienced the death of a child from before birth through young adulthood, including the only support group for SIDS and other sleep-related-infant deaths in South Carolina.

In the mid-1990s Linda became increasingly frustrated with insurance companies and Medicare/Medicaid because they did not support or reimburse prevention programs for people struggling with the aftermath of sudden unexpected deaths like SIDS, suicide, murder, or accidents. She discovered that insurance and governmental health care providers will fund medication and psychiatric care only after people become clinically depressed or are diagnosed with a problem like Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. They will pay for emergency room, in-patient intensive care, and subsequent psychiatric hospitalization for a nearly-successful suicide attempt following the loss of a loved one. But they do not fund preventative programs as a “safety net” designed to “catch” people during the vulnerable months following a loss...programs providing education and

support services that focus on prevention and early identification of clinical depression, suicidal thinking, or other unhealthy symptoms of unresolved grief.

Because of nonexistent insurance reimbursement for preventative programs related to grief and loss, Linda lost her job in 1996. However, the foundation of the hospital that had employed her received an anonymous donation designated for bereavement support and follow-up. The hospital offered her a contract as a consultant and clinician, and her work, “Joy in the Mourning”®, was begun in which she continued to develop and provide programs and support services for families who lost infants and children.

It was during this crucial time that she first envisioned a comprehensive grief center, independent of insurance or governmental funding, that would focus on prevention by providing grief education and support programs for people, regardless of their insurance status or ability to pay for services. To gain the credentials necessary to develop such programs, she earned a master’s degree in clinical counseling in 2003, completed a clinical internship, and became independently licensed as a professional counselor in 2006. In 2002, the “Joy in the Mourning”® Center for Life losses was born. It is a non-profit organization, currently staffed by volunteers, that exists to provide educational programs and training designed to help those who are grieving losses and develop leaders to provide needed programs and support groups in their communities.

Since 2002, Linda has developed numerous educational resources and has worked to develop the Center. She wrote “Mommy, What’s ‘Died’?” The Butterfly Story, a book published in 2005 by Youthlight Publishers. The book has been used in public schools all over the United States. Some of the educational programs she has developed and taught include: (1) a program for children’s educators and parents about how to help children following the death of a loved one; (2) a “Support Group Leader Training” program to train individuals in church or community settings with skills necessary to facilitate support groups for those who have experienced various losses; (3) a 10-week Grief Recovery educational program for individuals who have experienced recent losses; (4) a program for mental health professionals, health care professionals, pastors, and pastoral counselors about how to help families following a suicide; and (5) a yearly community program concerning “How to Cope with Grief through the Holidays” for those who have lost a loved one during the previous year. At present, she wants to add professionals from various disciplines to assist in launching multiple comprehensive programs for grief and loss.

In 2007, International Christian Hospice (ICH) asked Linda to develop educational programs concerning basic grief and mourning, the needs of grieving children and their families, and the unique needs of those who experience the sudden, unexpected death or critical injury of a loved one. Over the past two years, she has taught numerous seminars in Honduras. Her training resources have been translated into Spanish and are now being used extensively, not only in Honduras, but also in Nicaragua and Guatemala. In 2009 the materials were translated into Russian and will be used by ICH in Russian-speaking countries.