

# 'It's just so hard to forgive, to move on'

**Families share their stories at first Victims of Homicide conference**

**Elise Stolte, The Edmonton Journal**

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EDMONTON - His funeral was over. The flowers drooped and were thrown out. His bed, upstairs, lay empty.

"I actually felt like my head was totally black inside and I had an elastic band around it," said Joyce Farion, founder of support group Victims of Homicide. "It took probably 10 years before I felt that elastic band lift.

"Remember we went for a bike ride and I fell off the bike?" she asked, turning to her daughter, Michelle. She had lost the energy to steer. "That was soon after Scott died ... ."

Farion's 17-year-old son, Scott, was shot in the head with a stolen rifle on April 10, 1994.

In their grief, Farion and her husband, Noel, founded Victims of Homicide, which hosts its first conference today and Friday at the Fantasyland Hotel.

Farion said she hopes the conference will help victims, support workers and the general public recognize just how long it takes for someone to find peace after a loved one is violently killed.

She lost her ability to concentrate after Scott was shot. Her husband tried to keep a diary. He sat down and wrote a full page one day, then left it for a year.

When he came back, he found the writing was illegible. Now the paper is tucked away in his underwear drawer.

Fourteen years have passed, and Noel Farion still hasn't found the energy he once had, he said.

"(Scott) said that before he was 25, he was going to have five kids, and I believed him. Now we've got the two little grandchildren. They helped, a lot, when they came."

Recovering from a traumatic death, especially of a child, takes a lot longer than recovering from an illness or accident, said Jane Simington, a grief specialist who will speak at the conference on Friday. She lost her own son in a hunting accident when he was 13 and now teaches grief counsellors in Edmonton.

"Traumatic grief is definitely different -- more intense, more prolonged than the grief that happens as a part of normal human growth and development," she said.

"Any traumatic grief takes a long time to deal with. When that grief is a homicide, when you feel that somehow your loved one has been taken at the hand of another, that's a very, very deep pain."

When Simington hosts workshops for grief counsellors, she tells them the second and third years after a homicide are much more difficult than the first, because only then do family members truly realize how much the violence has shaken them.

"We're struggling in that deep, inner crisis," she said. By that time, most support resources have been removed.

Many marriages don't survive because grief makes people focus inward. Some family members develop post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, even when they didn't witness the violence directly, Simington said. When the trauma has hit hard, victims tend to repeat the story of their loss nearly verbatim. They lose the ability to process the trauma and describe it in words.

"We struggle with that 'why' question. The human psyche just cannot get its head around that," she said. "Most people don't realize how long this process is."

Joyce and Noel said they started healing by talking through their pain with other victims - a man whose daughter was murdered in an LRT station washroom and the parents of 21-year-old man stabbed outside a south-side club in a 20-person brawl.

Now, the support group has 60 to 70 people on its mailing list. Joyce leaves pamphlets with her phone number in hospital waiting rooms and gives them to the Edmonton police victims' services volunteers.

Scott was killed in the front seat of a friend's car. The youth who pulled the trigger eventually pleaded guilty to manslaughter and was sentenced to three years in jail.

At the time of the killing, he was out on parole for an earlier conviction and had an upcoming trial for three counts of armed robbery.

Two years after Scott died, the man was charged in connection to the beating death of a 45-year-old man. That charge was later thrown out when the taped prison conversations were ruled inadmissible in court.

Joyce and Noel still follow the man's movements through the prison system.

"It's just so hard to forgive, to move on," Joyce said.

"It's just not fair. Sometimes I wonder if I've ever really dealt with it."

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Listen to Joyce Farion reflect on the murder of her son. Go to Videos at [edmontonjournal.com](http://edmontonjournal.com).

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