



# Camp Hope



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*Time does not heal all wounds.*

It takes a deliberate act of courage to let the heart heal, especially when someone is suffering from the loss of a loved one. Stanley Todd, Chaplain and Bereavement Coordinator for Hospice of South Georgia, saw first hand the effects of loss in the lives of children. Before the courage to act was even possible, he believed that some measure of hope had to be restored. With Camp Hope, a daylong camp for children suffering from grief, Stanley has made repairing hope an important part of his mission.

by **Teri R. Williams**  
photos by **Amos Moses**  
and provided by  
**Camp Hope**

Many times a child has lived through a slow progression of daily decline in the life of a loved one. Other times they are thrust into an experience with death by an unexpected loss through an accident, suicide, or even murder. Stanley was familiar with the effects of grief on families through his work with Hospice. Grief is a difficult enough emotion to process,

but for children it is often complicated even further by sudden trauma. The impact of a horrific loss in the mind of a child cannot simply be ignored. It has to be deliberately navigated for a child to work through the process of healing and restoring their lives.

As an advocate of social change, Rebecca Solnit makes a significant statement about hope in her book *Hope in the Dark*: "...hope is not like a lottery ticket you can sit on the sofa and clutch, feeling lucky...hope is an ax you break down doors with in an emergency" (pg. 5). Processing grief and helping to heal the broken hearts of children presents a significant challenge that Stanley believes should not be ignored. In September of 2009 Hospice of South Georgia offered an "ax" that resulted in a daylong camp called Camp Hope for grieving children ages five to seventeen.

"The success of Camp Hope is a joint effort," said Stanley. "It is the hard work of all the staff and volunteers that make

the day so special and meaningful." Stanley gives all the credit and a special thanks to the Hospice Board, Administration, and all the Staff for "giving their complete support. Without the effort of these people, the dream of Camp Hope would never be realized."



Stanley Todd, Chaplain and Bereavement Coordinator for Hospice of South Georgia





Although the Chaplain of Hospice of South Georgia considers himself a small part in making Camp Hope a success, he graciously allowed me to interview him to help me understand both his own experience with Camp Hope and the work itself.

Stanley Todd was a child when he moved to Wayne County in 1960. Since childhood he believes he has “sensed a call” on his life. Passion for people in need of hope burned in his heart and filled him with purpose. Although he knew his purpose, what he could not know ahead of time was where or to whom that calling would take him.

Stanley graduated from Brewton Parker College with a Bachelors of Pastoral Studies in 1992. He also received Clinical Pastoral Education through the Baptist hospital in Jacksonville, Florida. The questions of “where” and “to whom” were not as difficult as he thought. He began pastoring wherever the opportunity and his heart led him. His first church was in Glennville. A few years later, he returned to Jesup, the place he had always called home, to pastor Gardi Baptist Church. One day someone asked if he would be interested in working with hospice. In 2004 Stanley accepted the opportunity to work with Hospice of South Georgia while continuing to serve as a bivocational minister. In 2006 Stanley began to work full-time with the organization.

When a physician recommends a patient for hospice care and that person meets guidelines, it is both a blessing and a merciless realization that time with the loved one may be limited. Guidelines





for Medicare and Medicaid funding require that Hospice send a certified Chaplain for at least one initial visit to make an initial assessment of the patient's needs. "We visit and minister to those who have been told that according to a doctor's best determination, they'll most likely die within a six month's period of time," said Stanley. "But some live much longer than that."

The majority of patients receive care in the home, "but we do take care of patients in the hospital and nursing home," said Stanley. "We're in the process of building the administrative part of the Hospice of South Georgia facility. We plan to have rooms for an in-patient facility, as soon as possible. Hospice of South Georgia serves a multi-county area, but it is the only non-profit hospice provider that is home-based in Wayne County," he added.

"A lot of the patients are dear friends and family we've known most of our lives, which makes the job even more challenging at times. Hospice works through a team approach," said Stanley. "It's an interdisciplinary approach to healthcare and we're holistic in what we do. We want to make sure every concern that person may have is ministered to: the emotional, psychological, and social matters that exist. We've bought diapers, offered limited assistance with utility bills, and erected rails and porches; we meet the need of the home and don't refuse anyone the right to hospice care because of their inability to pay."

Stanley's first visit is to assess areas of



In between activities there are two hour-long sessions. "Children are divided by age into groups and encouraged to express their emotions. That gives them a lot of peace in and of itself" said Stanley. "We offer ways to help but we don't have all the answers."







concern and need for support. “Hospice ministers to every faith and every religion.” Stanley also tries to determine if the patient is at peace with death and dying so that “if there’s any unsettling issues in that area, we can help that person work through them and allow them to continue to live life to its fullest.” Sometimes the person needs Stanley to contact a particular pastor or church for them. “But some enter into that time of life without a whole lot of spiritual support,” said Stanley. “Others have already been involved in their faith for years and so we just provide additional support.” He’s there to do whatever is necessary to provide spiritual and personal support for the person and their family. “We also try to interpret family dynamics and unresolved issues that might give them concern or a sense of hopelessness,” said Stanley.

In his book *Dying Well* Dr. Ira Byock describes the relationship that often develops between terminally ill patients

and their caregivers:

As a physician, being present as someone is dying tears the boundaries between the personal and professional realms of my being. The experience of a patient dying challenges me to accept a more intimate, and yet more deeply respectful, relationship with that person. I do not know how it could be otherwise.

Like others whose work takes them into the homes of those who are going through a difficult period of time, Stanley becomes connected to those he serves. How could it be otherwise? He visits many at least once a week although only required to visit once a month. At times he may be with the family two or three times a week according to the needs and diagnosis.

In the dual role of Chaplain and

Bereavement Coordinator, he also provides bereavement care for thirteen months after the death of a patient. Every month is different but in the previous month, sixteen of his patients died. Stanley will follow up with all of those families. Neither his work nor his compassion will end with death. Part of this follow up is offered through a grief support group meeting for adults at the Hospice of South Georgia office every Tuesday night at 6:00.

Over the years Stanley has seen firsthand the great need for help for children who have suffered the loss of a loved one. Camp Hope was formed to offer children help in how to deal with and manage grief. “Children need to grieve just like adults,” said Stanley. “And if that grief is not dealt with it will manifest in ways that are unhealthy; in their schoolwork, their play, or through anger with other kids or their parents. When it’s not managed, the child has to endure intense suffering that causes a lot of grief in itself.”



When a child's grief is left unmanaged it results in a continuation of pain that has nowhere to go. "You have to pay attention to it," said Stanley. "Some children will allow their grief to be noticed and allow it be talked about. Others will hide their emotions because they feel like they'll be made fun of or ostracized or judged." Camp Hope was Stanley's way of offering a child a way to open the door of their pain so hope could begin to come in. "Camp Hope puts children in a safe environment with other children who are going through the loss of a loved one so they feel more comfortable sharing with one another," said Stanley.

On the morning of the camp, kids and their parents or guardians gather at McDonalds for breakfast and registration. Each year the Wayne County Transit Authority has graciously provided transportation to the campsite. In 2009 Camp Hope was held at the Flying Eagle Ranch in Wayne County. The second year it was held at Blithe Island near Brunswick, Georgia. In 2011 the camp was once again at the Flying Eagle Ranch and was attended by thirty-four children.

The 2012 Camp Hope will be held on Saturday, September 8th at a place in Appling County that's been rebuilt for things like retreats, homecomings, and camps. There is no charge for a child to attend. About eighteen to twenty people will help facilitate Camp Hope. Sometimes parents think that if they send their child to a grief camp, all they're going to do is get all worked up and cry all day long. "But they don't. It's a great day of fun," said Stanley. The daylong event is filled with horseback riding, fishing, big slides, games, arts and crafts, a memorial activity, and music therapy.

In between activities there are two hour-long sessions. "Children are divided by age into groups and encouraged to express their emotions. That gives them a lot of peace in and of itself" said Stanley. "We offer ways to help but we don't have all the answers. Children talk about what they've experienced. All of our staff is trained in grief counseling. At times the therapy can become intense." Many activities are used to help the children learn how to vent frustrations and gain peace.

Because the camp is the work of a nonprofit organization and held without cost to the children, it does take volunteers in the community to make it happen. Some volunteer time and others give financially to make it a success. "There's always a great lunch provided by volunteers," said Stanley. (Note: All volunteers are required to go through background checks and training.)

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Although the world is full of  
suffering, it is full also  
of the *overcoming* of it.

-Helen Keller



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Camp Hope is an opportunity for healing and hope. It is a time when children are empowered to hold onto the good things in their lives and to manage well those things that are too much for them to bear alone. Camp Hope gives children a chance to release their grief and to rebuild safe towers of hope in their souls. Although it is easy to see that Stanley Todd is a gentle man, the ax he wields is a powerful act of love. Thanks to Camp Hope and all those who work to make it a success, grieving children can find their way safely back from the darkness of loss into the simplicity of just being a child again.



in a healthy way. “To resolve something means that you’ve taken care of it. It’s no longer an issue. It’s like its over with,” said Stanley. “Instead of resolution, it should be seen as a need for reconciliation. Loss is not something to ‘get over’ but rather to manage in order to move on.

“It’s such an emotional moving day because you get caught up in these children’s lives and then see them leave at the end of the day with a little glimmer of hope that they didn’t have before,” said Stanley. “That gives you such a sense of fullness and satisfaction, that you’ve helped them know that there’s hope, that this hurt won’t always be as bad as it is today and that someone really cares.”

The success of the camp is evident in the response from teachers and family members. “Teachers will say they notice different behavioral patterns after the camp,” said Stanley. “I had a teacher come up to me and say that one student began participating in the classroom after attending Camp Hope.”

The last session of the day is a time for interaction with the parents. While the children are enjoying an outside activity, counselors are able to share with parents things that might be helpful for them to know about their children. “It’s heartrending to hear parent’s talk about the tragic things their

children witnessed,” said Stanley. Some of the children are witnesses of murder or suicide.

Before they leave parents are given age appropriate materials, such as coloring books for younger children by Dr. Allan Wolfett who is “a great grief educator,” said Stanley. Months after the camp has ended the staff of Camp Hope will continue to hear from parents who tell them, “We will never forget that day.”

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*For more information or to make a donation for Camp Hope please contact Hospice of South Georgia at 912-588-0080.*