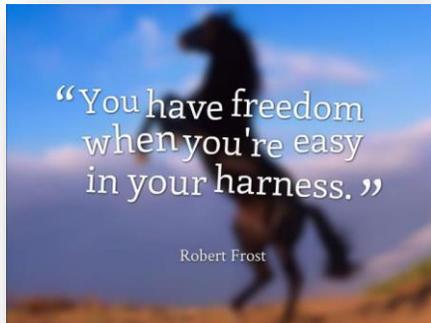


# Choosing Hope

By Annette Mennen Baldwin, In memory of her son, Todd Mennen, TCF, Katy, TX  
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Robert Frost once wrote, **“You have freedom when you’re easy in your harness.”** I believe I read that in junior high school. It had no real meaning to me at that time. But many years and many tears later, I have come to realize what Frost was referencing.



Soon I will be marking the seventh anniversary of the death of my only child, Todd Mennen. Seven years seems, perhaps to some, a milestone. But it’s not really. There are no “milestones” on this journey of grief after the death of our children. But we do change. We have no choice. We weep, we evolve, we change, we grow, we learn, we

share, we ask for help, we give help, we reach out and finally we become someone different than we once were. That is the reality of this grief.

Becoming easy in my harness was no small task, nor did it happen in magical stages with epiphanies proclaiming, “Here is a milestone, a moment you can remember for the wisdom you found.”

Wisdom doesn’t arrive with fanfare; wisdom seeps slowly into one’s mind, forming an ever-changing perspective until, at last, we have come to accept our “harness.” Our harness is the death of our child. Once we accept this fact, we move forward into the light of hope and we begin to feel hope and a different type of freedom.

Am I “easy in my harness?” Finally, I can say that I probably am most of the time. There are days when I find it chokingly restrictive and cruel in its pain. But these days are fewer as time passes.

I have found a new kind of “freedom in my harness.” It isn’t the joyful freedom from the days before my child died, but it is a freedom nonetheless. My freedom is the light of hope that shines from deep within my soul as I now hold my child in my mind and heart. My child is with me in my harness as I continue on the balance of my life’s journey. For this mother, hope is knowing that death does not restrict me from my child’s life. Death changes only the plane of our relationship, for I am his mother and he is my son.

We will love our children for all eternity. That is the freedom in our harness that comes with consciously choosing hope.