

Josh Pichler's 10 startups to watch

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Will region doctor shortages worsen?

Some say Medicaid expansion will strain the system even further in the Cincinnati region, while others point to offsetting factors. [Page A4]

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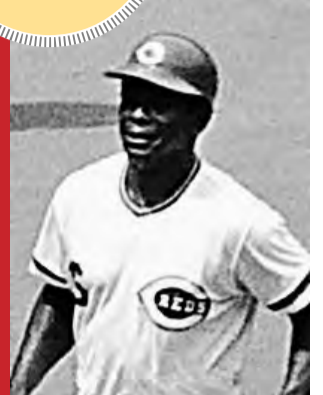


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SUNDAY, JUNE 9, 2013



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You don't have to say anything.



THE



RULES OF

It is OK to cry.

GRIEVING

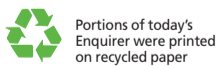
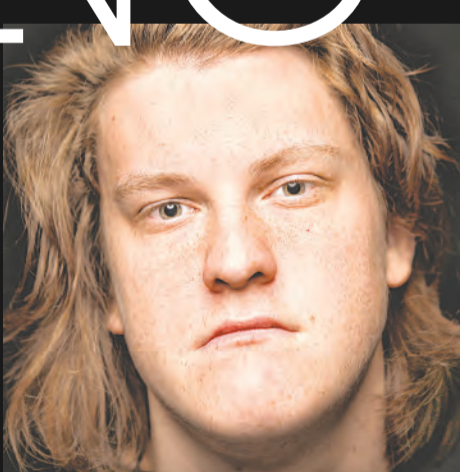


It is fine to eat pizza.



Follow these boys through a school year at Moeller as they emerge from the loss of their parents.

A special section



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THE RULES OF GRIEVING

They are still boys

Through a school year at Moeller High, a group of boys learns to grieve. Changed forever, they have lost their parents – but not themselves.

Story by John Faherty
Photos by Carrie Cochran

Phillip Bryant has only one memory of his mother and it feels like a dream. It is the morning and he is 4 years old and he is standing next to her bed. He is wearing pajamas and he is shaking her hand trying to wake her up, but he cannot.

Her hand is so cold.

Phillip is 17 now, and it is the start of his junior year at Archbishop Moeller High School. He sits in a room between the nurse's office and the chapel, attending the all-male school's grief support group. Eight boxes of pizza and two large, flat Tupperware containers holding chocolate chip cookies are ready for the boys. The cookies are baked perfectly, pulled from the oven just a touch short of done by the mother of a freshman who hadn't lost anybody. She heard about the group and wanted to do something nice. The food sits on a chair next to a conference table surrounded by boys, who never stop eating.

Phillip looks at the faces around the table. Some of the boys are friends he has known for years. Some are freshman he has never met. Each boy introduces himself and says who has died. Some have lost a friend or a grandfather, but most have lost a parent. >>



▶ Phillip Bryant finds comfort in this crucifix. He explains why it matters so much to him. Watch the video at Cincinnati.com.

The Smallwood brothers, Chuck and William, lost their dad to liver disease in 2011. Chuck keeps his hair long. William keeps his short. Both think it is important that people know their father's liver disease was genetic, not because of drinking.

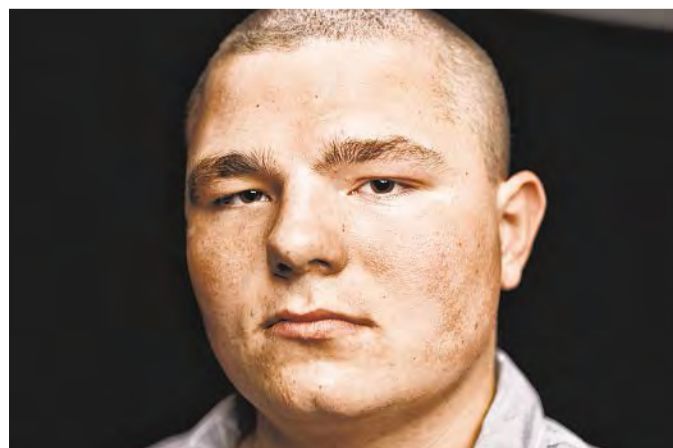
Andrew Kraus lost his father and still doesn't like to hear his name called out over the school intercom, because that's how he was summoned to the office in January 2012. His mother was there, and the news was bad.

Zach Deck's mother, Jaimie, died in 2010 when she was 32. She died suddenly, at home, after a blood clot

broke loose and entered her lungs. Zach woke that night to the sound of a panicked call from his stepfather to 911. He still cringes each time he hears a siren.

Phillip will learn their stories this year, but on this day he will keep his memory of his mother close. It is not a secret really, it is just his own. Maybe he will share it later.

Today he has other concerns. Phillip is just beginning to realize the truth of his latest loss: He is an orphan. He has no parents, no money beyond a monthly Social Security survivor's check and suddenly it feels like he has nowhere to go.



A photo of Phillip Bryant Sr., above, before the accident that would change his life. People often tell Phillip Bryant Jr., left, how much he looks like his father.

Many children have lost or will lose a parent. A full 3.5 percent of children younger than 18 will lose their mother or father, according to the Social Security Administration. As people now become parents when they are older, this number is likely to increase.

Parental death is one of the most traumatic things that can happen to a child. It increases the risk of mental health problems, including depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress symptoms. It can also mean less academic success and low self-esteem.

But children do not have to fall victim to their grief. A six-year study of 244 youths by researchers at Arizona State University shows that children who work through their emotions will heal better. That children who work in groups will realize that they are not alone and that their feelings are legitimate.



Sheila Munaf-Kanoza, left, and Pat Buckley, below, are the the leaders of the Moeller grief support group. They both have suffered losses in their own lives. Munaf-Kanoza lost her husband and Buckley her son.



The Oct. 3 meeting is the first grief group meeting of the school year. The air is still warm, the sun is bright, summer is hanging on.

Sheila Munaf-Kanoza and Pat Buckley, two women with ties to Moeller and an intimacy with grief, will lead the group. They look like moms.

Munaf-Kanoza explains the first three rules of the group: You do not have to say anything, it is OK to cry, it is fine to eat pizza. The recitation of the last rule was not necessary; all of the boys are already sitting before paper plates they have stacked with sometimes four and five pieces of pizza. The stacks are high enough to

actually lean.

Munaf-Kanoza asks the boys to hold their hands in front of them and make a fist. A tight fist. This, she says, is what grief can feel like. Then she asks them to wiggle their fingers and loosen the muscles up their arms. Their bodies relax, their hands become useful. This, she says, is what working through grief can do to your whole person. It will not be easy, she says, but it will work.

Then Munaf-Kanoza takes out an old backpack. It is filled with rocks. She tells the boys to pass the backpack around and to remove one rock each. The rocks have words on them. The boys look around. This feels a little trite, but they are good boys and do what they are told. As the bag

moves around the table, each removes a rock. Some notice the bag is now held together by duct tape. This bag has been filled with rocks before. This is not its first table.

The words taped to the rocks are difficult, the emotions are the ones they are not supposed to talk about. The boys start talking.

"I'm angry all the time." About what? "Life in general."

"I feel cheated."

Chuck says that, every time the family goes out to dinner, just him and his mother and his brother, he keeps looking at the empty chair at the table.

"Every table in the world has four chairs, and we have to sit there, a family of three," Chuck says. "You look at that chair and it feels like you are missing somebody."

Zach feels guilty when he does something wrong. "I feel guilty about the stuff I do, the stupid decisions I make," Zach says. "I feel like it would disappoint my mom."

Will, Chuck's brother, talks about guilt. He remembers his father's last weeks in October 2011. After nearly a decade of illness, his liver failure was acute. He was in hospice. "I wish I could have helped him more," Will says. "At the end, he was always thirsty, but I couldn't even give him water because he was on dialysis. There was a sink right next to him, but I couldn't even give him water."

The boys all sit very still and begin to look at their hands. They understand this type of pain and respect it. They all seem afraid to move. The room is quiet now, and Will continues.

"The last night, I held my dad's hand. He was sedated, so he was kind of out of it. But it felt like he was afraid. I kind of thought I should stay that night, but I went home. Three hours later my mother called and he had died."

But Phillip stays quiet.

Phillip's mother died in December 2001. He is not exactly sure how she died at a young age. There was a back surgery, she reacted poorly to the medicine and her heart failed.

But that was just the beginning. In 2008, Phillip's father, Phillip Bryant Sr., a roofer, was working on an elaborate structure on family property two hours outside of town. It wasn't really a home, and it wasn't really a tree house. It was 1,200 square feet, and it was up in the trees.

On Labor Day weekend in 2008, Phillip's father was working on the structure. He took a break, fell asleep, rolled from the tree house, landed on his head and broke his neck. Phillip's one parent was badly broken, but he survived as a quadriplegic.

Phillip and his father were close. The son took care of father, bandaging bedsores and helping with everything. They could not enjoy physical activities, but they could speak for hours. And they did.

Phillip's father lived for four years until the night of June 19, 2012. Phillip held his father's hand that night, after his father had died, until it began to grow cold like his mother's hand.

The standard of care for decades for children who had suffered a loss did not help. Thinking it was best, adults urged children to move past their loss as quickly as possible. Mourning was broken.

"Children have always been the forgotten grievers," said Andy McNiel, executive director of the National Alliance for Grieving Children. "The idea was that they would forget about it. That it was too much for them to handle, that they would be better off if we pretended it didn't happen. None of that was true. They may stop talking about it, but they are always thinking about it."

This, McNiel said, could make children withdraw or become angry. They might work through their feelings in unhealthy ways. Then, as adults, they might not trust people. They could become stuck in their grief.

"You hear about it all the time from adults who lost their parents when they were kids," McNiel said. "It impacted my marriage, it impacted how I raised my kids, it impacted my work. It doesn't stop."

Nov. 8 feels like fall. The high temperature will be only 52 degrees and the air is still. It is a casual dress day at Moeller. The boys wear sweat pants and T-shirts. Their hair is the kind of messy you see only at an all-boys school.

Buckley and Munafo-Kanoza tell the boys they will start in the chapel, where each boy will light a candle for the person he has lost. One by one they walk to a table in front of the altar, pick up the lighter and say whom they have lost.

"I light this candle for my dad," "I light this candle for my grandmother," "I light this candle for my best friend," "I light this candle for my dad," "I light this candle for my dad."

... They are so casual in the way they say it, there are no tears, no drama. Their loss has become part of them now. But as the first boys go back to their seats, the scope of the loss in the room becomes clear. The candles begin to cast shadows in the dark room. They boys sit and wait for the procession to end.

Then they go back to their regular meeting room and start eating pizza.

"It's good to take time to remember those who have died," Buckley says. "Sometimes when there is darkness, seeing a little bit of light is important."

On this day, math teacher James Jewell sits at the table. Buckley and Munafo-Kanoza invite teachers to the group meetings to show the students that adults have grief to work through as well. They do it for another reason, too: It is a good reminder to the teachers that some kids might seem like they are having a hard day because, in fact, they are having a hard day.

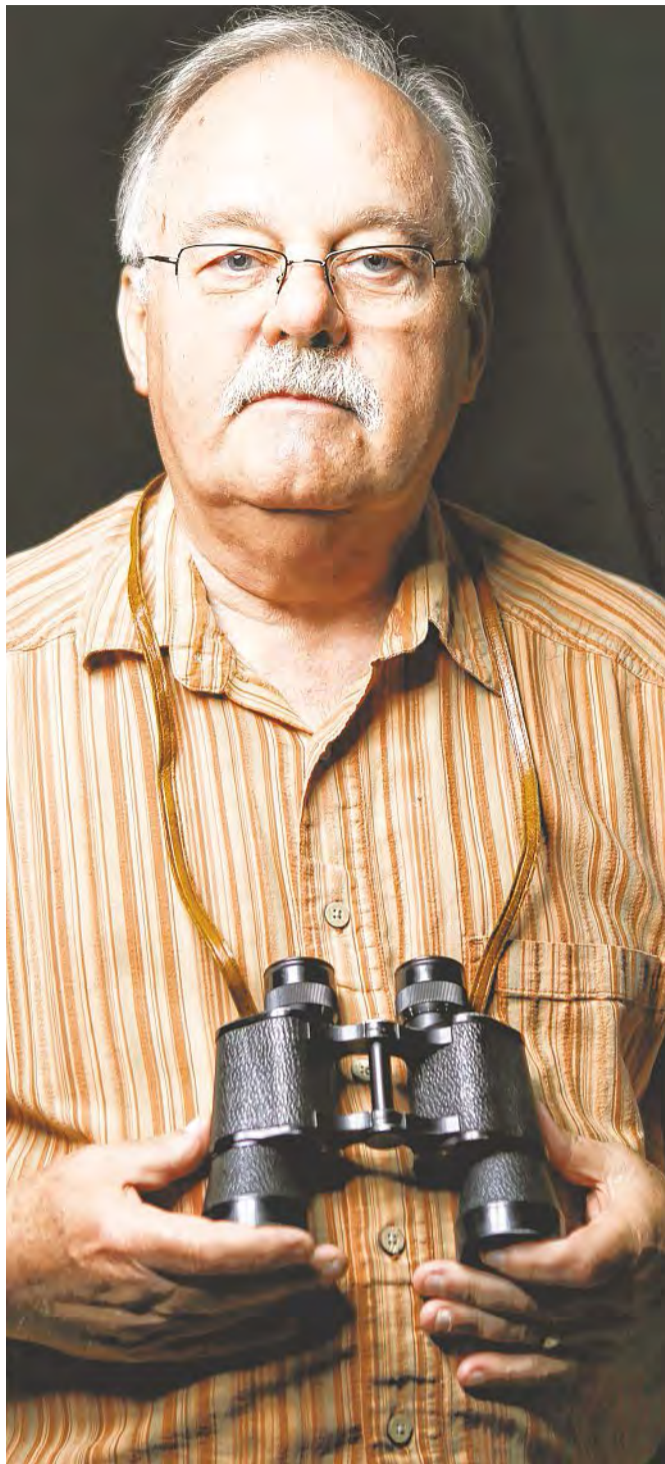
Mr. Jewell is holding a pair of binoculars. He tells the students that he grew up with seven sisters, so he and his father were close. When he was about 13 or so, he would go trapping with his father to sell the skins for money. "We grew up rural," he says to the astounded boys.

One morning, Mr. Jewell tells the group, his father mentioned, casually, how he wished he had a good pair of binoculars. So the boy saved his money from the skins, right up to the dime, and one day bought the best pair of binoculars at the local hunting shop. The store owner, Mr. Jewell remembered, offered to pay the tax on the binoculars since the boy didn't know such a thing even existed.

Mr. Jewell's father died when he was 19, and now he sat before the boys, in his 60s, telling the story, holding the binoculars, tears running down his checks. "These bring back a lot of fond memories for me," he said. "I'm crying now, but these are really good memories."

The boys sit mesmerized. An adult — a teacher, no less — sharing a story they could be telling themselves. And he remains so affected by the death of his father, who has been gone for so long. For the students sitting around the table, it feels like proof that what they are going through is real.

Zach goes first after Mr. Jewell. He shows a photo of his mother, standing in her kitchen. He has carried the photo since she died. He likes it, he says, because she looks pretty,



Moeller math teacher James Jewell holds his father's binoculars. Mr. Jewell's father died when he was 19. As a kid, he saved enough money to buy the binoculars for his father.

and because she is smiling. "Her smile was nice, but when you look closely, you can see her teeth aren't perfect. She was country."

He tells the group how he left the photo in his pocket one day when he washed his pants. The photo lost much of its luster. "Oh, man, I cried for four days," he says.

The Smallwood brothers share a radio that their dad used to listen to. He loved Kentucky basketball and Reds baseball.

Andrew speaks of a photograph. But this is not a photograph of his father; it is a photo of Andrew. Andrew's parents were long divorced. Andrew's mother was, by a wide margin, the more stable of the two parents. His father had seen hard times. Andrew said, "He loved me the same as any dad, he just made bad decisions."

Some days it seemed all the two of them could talk about was sports. On one of those days, Andrew told his father he was giving up soccer and would pursue football. His father thought this was a terrible idea. You are too small, he said. Soccer is your best sport, he said. But Andrew could not be swayed. Somehow this seemingly small deal became a big issue even though everybody knew it

should not.

After his father died, Andrew and his sister went to their dad's home to clean out his belongings. That's when he found it. "I found something in his pillowcase. It was a Cincinnati Enquirer photo from last year. My picture was in the paper playing football. He thought that was outstanding," Andrew said. "When I found that in his pillowcase, that made me feel really good. He was proud of me."

Phillip understood this story about

fathers and sons and sports. Phillip changed sports with every season. Football, basketball, baseball as a boy. He loved to see his dad at the games. After his fall from the tree house, Phillip's father could not go to games often. But they could talk about the games when Phillip came home. Now he had nobody to talk to.

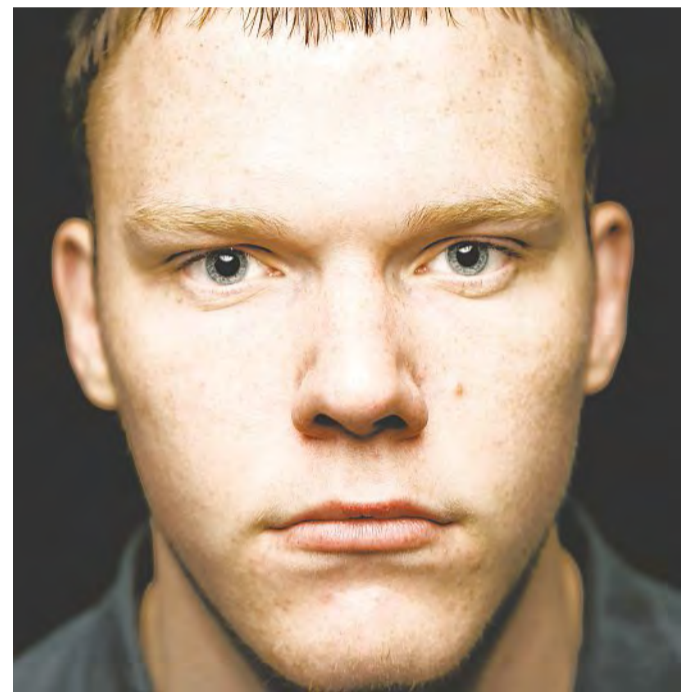
Phillip was living with his grandmother, his father's mother, but it was not working. It did not feel like family.

Archbishop Moeller High School would not seem to be a place that would be on the leading edge of changes in how people grieve. Since it opened its doors, it has stood as a traditional example of an already traditional type: the all-male Catholic high school. The school emphasizes faith, academics and athletics while forming its ideal, the Man of Moeller.

But the school's motto, "Nova bella elegit Dominus," from the book of Judges, 5:8, speaks to what may seem a surprising mission. It translates as: "The Lord has chosen new wars."

This battle was chosen on Sept. 28, 2000, when a beloved teacher collapsed in a hallway and died. Jim Crone was an institution at Moeller. He graduated in 1965, the school's second graduating class. He went to college and returned four years later to begin his teaching career. It felt like he had been there forever. His death rattled the students, so the school brought in Buckley and Munafo-Kanoza, two women familiar with grief and Moeller. They are with Companions on a Journey, which provides grief support to children, teens and adults.

Buckley and Munafo-Kanoza met one-on-one with each student who had seen their teacher fall. That was the beginning of the grief group at Moeller.



» Chuck Smallwood, top, and Will Smallwood, above, lost their father. They speak about their memories of their dad, including his love of the Reds baseball and Kentucky basketball. Watch the videos at Cincinnati.com.



▶ » Zach Deck's mother died in 2010. Zach still keeps the stuffed dog she, and his stepfather, gave him when his sister was born. Sometimes he is afraid people will forget his mother. Watch the video at Cincinnati.com.



The skies are dark and rain is falling, but the mood is ebullient at the start of the Dec. 4 meeting. Three days earlier, the Moeller football team had won the state football title, the first in 27 years for a school that prides itself on athletic accomplishment. Four of the boys sitting at the table this day were members of the team.

And perhaps equally exciting, today there are burritos. Bags of Chipotle sit on the table, and, of course, more cookies. For teenage boys, grief does not mean losing your appetite. After a few minutes of chatter and gorging, Buckley calls for attention. "OK, boys, if you could put your food down, we're going to pray."

Munafa-Kanoza takes out a stack of pink pieces of paper. Across the top, underlined, it reads: "The Griever's Holiday Bill of Rights." It in-

cludes a series of reminders that these boys are allowed to be happy or not during this season. That they are allowed to honor family traditions, begin new ones or simply withdraw if that is what they need.

The second right tells the boys that when somebody asks them how they are doing, they can tell the truth, or simply smile and say they are fine. It is their choice.

Munafa-Kanoza then tells the boys they will be making Christmas ornaments today. They are instructed to include a note to their loved one. "Tell them how you are doing. A little message. Maybe you want to say: Dad, we won state. Or I got an 'A.' Or maybe: Dad, I'm doing better."

They all start with their notes. They lean over the small pieces of paper and scrunch their faces writing notes in elfin print.

And these boys are, uniformly,

awful at arts and crafts. Their hands are quickly covered with glue, their ornaments look like globs. They are sloppy and nonsensical. But their notes to those they have lost are somehow elegant.

Chuck says: "A lot of times when I write something to my dad, I hope his life is a little bit better. He was sick every day for nine years," pausing to count the years on his fingers. "So I just wrote that I hope he is relaxing and enjoying himself."

His brother Will draws a hammer because his father was "a hard guy," a cross because of his faith and a football because he loved football. Then he explains why he added 42 stars to the ornament. "Because when he was in college, he won a Twinkie-eating contest by eating 42 Twinkies."

The room laughs.

Zach announces that he wrote "You are my sunshine" because this was the song his mother used to sing to him. Then, he goes to back to work, humming, quietly. It seems he thinks nobody else can hear him.

It is not clear if she did know, or Zach does know, the lament of that song recorded by many and made famous by Ricky Nelson, Willie Nelson and Ray Charles:

You are my sunshine,
my only sunshine,
You make me happy
when skies are gray.
You'll never know dear,
how much I love you,
Please don't take my sunshine away.
The other night dear,
as I lay sleeping,
I dreamed I held you in my arms,
When I awoke dear, I was mistaken,
And I held my head and cried.
You are my sunshine,
my only sunshine.

This will be Zach's third Christmas without his mother. It will be Will and Chuck's second Christmas without their father. It will be Andrew's first without his dad.

Phillip has been through 11 Christmases without his mother. But he had always had his father. Now his dad is gone, too.

And living with his grandmother is not a good fit. She still has not given him a key to the house, so sometimes he sits and waits for her to come home.

Other families look out for him. He tries not to wear out his welcome anywhere, so he rotates friends' homes to spend weekends. The Frey family, which had known him for years through their daughter, takes him on boating trips. He works on his car with his coach.

Phillip wants a family and thinks sometimes of asking to move in with his friend John. But he never does. It is John's last year of high school, and Phillip thinks he should have that time alone with his dad.

But Phillip stays quiet.

Sheila Munafa-Kanoza and Pat Buckley have both experienced grief and a connection to Moeller. Munafa-Kanoza's husband, Vince, died after a long illness on their son's first day at Moeller in 1993. Buckley's son Dan, a Moeller graduate, was killed outside of a St. Louis bar in 1995 after coming to the defense of a woman who was being harassed by some patrons.

The two deaths could not have been more different, but both women say they were buttressed by the support they received from the Moeller community.

They also knew firsthand the difficulty for children of mourning. Munafa-Kanoza's three children had to mourn their father. Buckley's daughter and remaining five sons had to experience the loss of their brother.

"We both knew children were grieving at Moeller," Buckley said. "Our sons were grieving at Moeller." They both knew children needed help through the process. The two women met and became close on the Rome trip in 2000 and began discussing ways to form a grief group at Moeller.

After a prayer, Munafokanoza begins the Jan. 8 meeting by asking the boys about their Christmas. It is a warm winter day, and the boys look like they would still like to be on Christmas vacation. They all say fine. It was just fine. "It was great," Zach said. "I got a pingpong table and remained ungrounded."

Some of the eight pizzas today have french fries as a topping. They went first.

Math teacher Connie Ring is with the group today. Mrs. Ring tells the story of losing her stepfather when she was 10, in a car accident.

"On his way to work," Mrs. Ring says of the crash that killed him. "Dad didn't come home." Her response was to withdraw from the world around here. To shut down emotionally. She stayed that way, she says, for 15 years. Mrs. Ring chose math because it provided right answers and wrong. When done properly there is no confusion.

The boys sit quietly and nod their heads. This makes sense to them.

Eventually, Mrs. Ring re-entered the world. Today she is married with two children and happy.

"I am so impressed by you guys," Mrs. Ring said, looking around the table. "As high school students you know you cannot go through things alone, that you need to express yourself and to feel things. You guys are walking through your new normal as teenagers."

Then the boys begin to talk. One begins about the burden he feels at home. The family dinners he feels compelled to sit through, even when he would rather, sometimes, just sit in his room. He has more things to do now at home, because his father is no longer there. And worse, nobody can teach him how to do them. "Sometimes I get angry because now I am the man of the house."

Munafokanoza stops him cold. This, she says, is not true. And it makes her a little crazy. A boy does not become the man of the house when his father dies. It is not fair, it is not right, and she hears it all the time. She asks the boys who lost their father if they had heard that now they were the man of the house. They all raise their hands, sheepishly, as if it was they who did something wrong.

"I hate it when I hear that at a funeral. Some person says to a young man: 'Now you are the man of the house,'" Munafokanoza says, gaining steam. Clearly, this sentiment was expressed to her sons when their father died. "And all of those boys, you can see their shoulders slump. You can feel the weight on them. It's not true. You are not men. You are still boys. It's too much."

Then she asks the boys how they are really doing. She wants to know where they have peace of balance.

Chuck, the long-haired Smallwood brother, says his strength is to persevere. His father fought to the end, he says, so he can too. He finds solace in music. "I feel most balanced when I am listening to music or playing the guitar," Chuck says. "I don't have to think or remember. It's just my own little spot."

Will, the short-haired brother, says he feels most balanced when he is wrestling or training. "People think it makes me feel alive because I get to



Connie Ring, a math teacher at Moeller, holds a photo of her stepfather. Her stepfather died in a car accident when she was 10, and she says that she withdrew from the world for 15 years.

inflict pain, but it's not that. I feel more pain most times. It reminds me that I am alive."

Andrew says he feels best when he goes to church or spends time with his mother or when he is running track. "It feels like my dad is running with me."

Phillip sits quietly at the table. Over the Christmas vacation, his relationship with his grandmother had deteriorated completely. Terri and Robert Frey, with three children of their own, could not stand by and watch.

"Oh, my God, I love him," Terri said. "He was changing bed sore bandages, things no teenage boy should have to do. And nobody should be without a home at Christmas."

Phillip was at the Freys' home when he learned on Christmas Eve that he needed a place to stay. Terri Frey could not stand by any longer. "I wanted him to be with family on Christmas," she said. "I wanted him to wake up on Christmas morning surrounded by love."

Terri spoke with Robert. They had three children of their own and two jobs. And so they planned to have a

long discussion. It took a couple of minutes.

Over Christmas break, Mr. and Mrs. Frey bought a futon and carved out a room for Phillip in their already crowded house. "He never had a key to his grandmother's home," Terri said. "The first thing we did when he moved in was give him a key and say: 'This house is your home.'"

They spoke to Phillip's grandmother about becoming his legal guardians. She thought it was the right idea. Then they went and spoke to administrators at Moeller and filled out paperwork.

"On the form, it says: 'Are you in danger of being homeless?' We had to check yes, and I started crying," Mrs.

Frey said, and then she cried again. "I would never let that happen."

On this day, Phillip speaks.

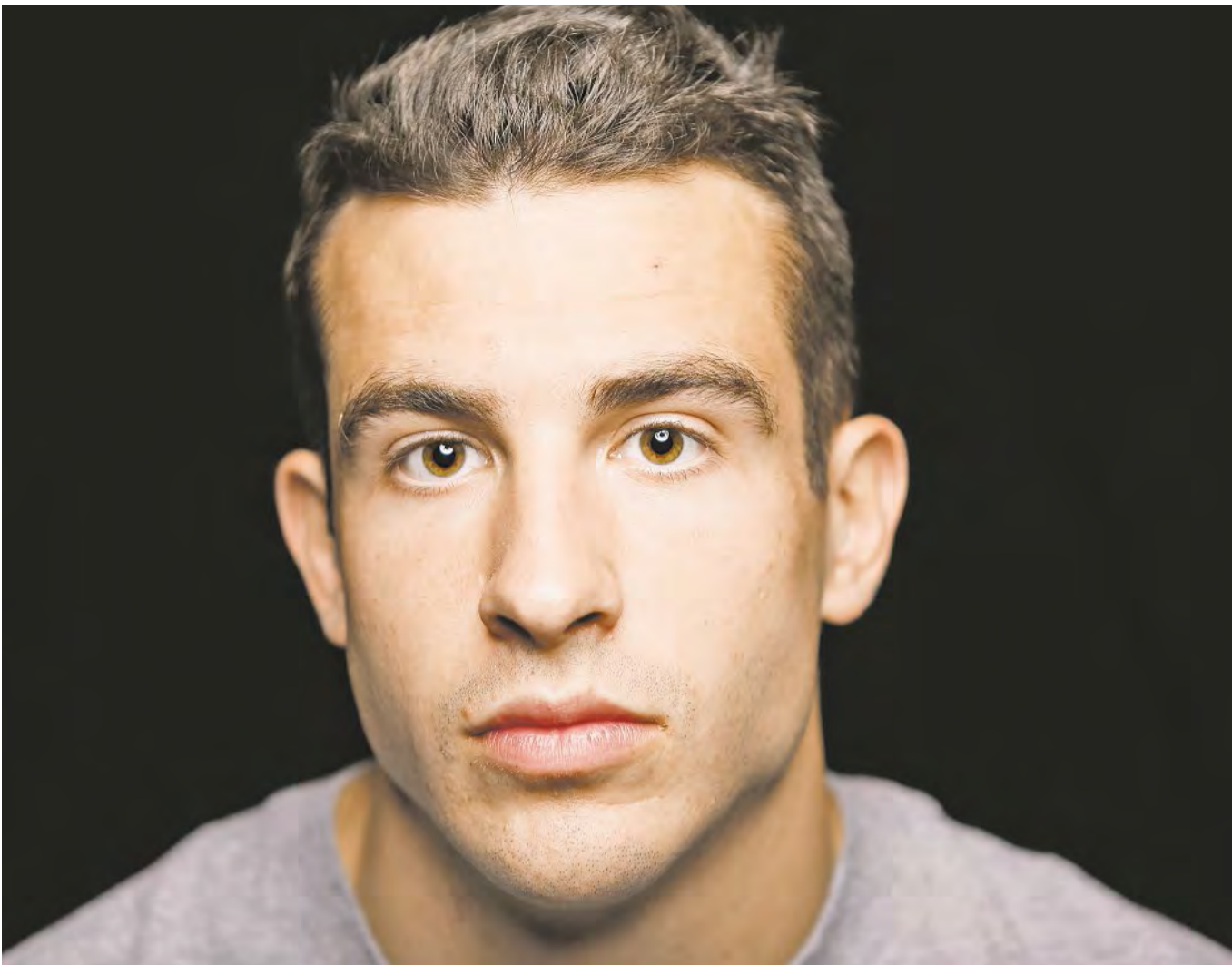
Maybe he feels it is time. Maybe the math teacher's story gets to him. Maybe he is feeling comfortable in a real home for the first time in a long time. Maybe he just has something to say.

He talks like the story has been running in his head. Like people all know the beginning and he can just start in the middle. "My dad fell when he was building a tree house. It's a big tree house, like 1,200 feet. I'd like to finish that sometime for him when I grow older," Phillip said. "It's a big tree house. Like a house in the trees."

Grieving for children has changed significantly over the past three decades. The idea that children should be protected from death replaced by the notion that children must confront their feelings. That they should talk about it and cry about it and share their experiences.

Now psychiatrists and therapists, and seemingly every person connected to the field of grief, agree that the chances for a child to grow in to a healthy and well-adjusted adult can be improved by working through the grief. It has become the standard of care.

It seems, perhaps, William Shakespeare was right in "King Henry VI," in which he wrote: "To weep is to make less the depth of grief."



▶ Andrew Kraus lost his dad in January of 2012. Andrew knows his father loved him, but it is good to be reminded. Watch the video at Cincinnati.com.



On Feb. 6, a new boy sits in the classroom. He did not lose a parent, but the death is recent and the pain is real. He does not seem to know where to look or what to say, so Buckley asks the rest of the people to give him some advice.

Phillip speaks first. "I would say to thank the people that are there for you. So many people will help, make sure you thank them right away. It's hard to remember later."

Andrew advises the new boy to keep coming to these sessions. He says it helps him. "There are so many people going through what I was going through. I could talk about it here."

Chuck warns him to be careful of "regular stuff." That, he says, is what can really knock you down. "Stuff around the house can get you," Chuck says. "A toaster or a coffee maker that they used to use, and now it's just there. Kind of a reminder that he is not using it."

Again, the room grows quiet. Some of these boys have been in these ses-

sions for half their high school years. They know when it is best to be still.

This would be the new boy's first and last meeting.

Munafa-Kanoza lets the room breathe for a moment, then she hands out paper and pens. "I want you to write you a letter, as if you are your best friend." She advises them to give themselves advice. To focus on areas they know might need improvement.

The boys look down at their paper, then at Buckley and Munafa-Kanoza, then at each other. This is a high school boy's existential crisis.

The questions begin:

"So wait, who am I?"

"Do I know everything about me? Because there is stuff even my best friend doesn't know."

Buckley settles them down. "Come on guys. This is you writing to you. You know everything."

These are good boys. They pick up their pens, lower their foreheads close to the table and begin writing.

After 10 minutes, Munafa-Kanoza asks the boys about their letters. She tells them they can say what they wrote, or they can talk about what

they were thinking when they wrote it.

Andrew goes first. "I always got my homework done before my dad died. Then I stopped. My junior year was a disaster," says Andrew, now a senior. "I'm getting back to working. I told myself to keep doing that and to believe in myself."

This is a common theme. Munafa-Kanoza asks the boys to raise their hands if they have lost their confidence since their loss. They all raise their hands. Confidence in high school is tenuous enough that losing somebody will steal it away. It is hard to get back.

Zach praises himself in his letter. He is proud of some of his changes. "I told myself - I know, funny, right? - that I started going to church. I don't cuss anymore and I'm working on being less prejudiced."

Chuck tells himself to work on his anxiety, to make better decisions, and not to try to change himself to please others.

Will sends himself a quote he had learned. "I am not shackled by fear, insecurity or doubt. I feel those emotions, drink them in and then swallow them away to the blackness of hell. I am motivated by accomplishment, not pride. Pride consumes the weak, kills their heart from within. If I fall, I will get up. If I am beaten, I will return."

Will is not eating pizza this day because he needs to make weight for wrestling. He looks up from his letter and says: "I like to look up motivational quotes online sometimes to get myself going."

Phillip is brief and to the point even with himself. His letter, he says, was simple. "I told myself to not put up a barrier around me. I do that a lot." This touches a collective nerve. All of the boys seem to be self aware enough that they are trying to protect themselves from further hurt and loss. They do not know exactly what to do about it, but they know it is true.

Munafa-Kanoza has led these

groups enough that she knows a moment when she hears one. She jumps in. "Imagine if you had put up that barrier around you with the person you lost. You would have such regrets."

One of the boys says his father died when he was in eighth grade, and when it was time to go to the funeral, the family realized that the father was the only one who knew how to tie a tie. "My uncle had to come over and tie it for me."

Buckley ends the meeting with a prayer. Munafa-Kanoza tells the boys to find a quote they like and to really read it. Then she shares her own: "Hope is faith holding out its hand in the dark."

Phillip has a stable home life now for the first time in his memory. He lives in a house with a mom and a dad. He does not call them Mom and Dad, but they have made him a home. He eats dinner with them every night. Mrs. Frey even goes to his rugby games.

At a high school rugby game, there are sometimes a total of 15 "fans." A handful of moms, some grandparents, a girlfriend or two and a couple of kids who were probably stuck at school waiting for a ride. Terri Frey watches the games with almost no understanding of what is happening. Most around her don't know either. But she is there. She feels like she needs to be.

Over the past 25 years, teen grief counseling has become an established discipline. When the Fernside Center For Grieving Children open its doors 27 years ago, it was the second child-centric grieving center in the country. It served 16 children. Last year, the center in Blue Ash helped 1,300 children grieve. And now there are more than 300 centers like it across the country.

Vicky Ott is the executive director at Fernside. She sees the work it can do. "A child that is given the opportunity to process their grief is able to begin the healing process now instead of later or even as an adult when other issues may arise. We hear from so many people, often adults volunteers at Fernside, that they wish there had been a Fernside for them when they experienced a death as a child."

When the boys meet on March 8, it feels like the school year has tilted. The day is cold, winter won't let go, but people are beginning to look forward. There is a nervous energy in the room, but the boys are still hungry.

The stacks of pizza form on plates, and the eating begins in earnest. Buckley has raised six sons of her own and tunes her voice to the right pitch to gather their attention. "Put your pizza down and bow your heads. It's time for prayer." The boys smile and do as they are told.

Munafa-Kanoza says she wants to talk about forgiveness and asks them if it is hard. Andrew's father died of a drug overdose. He says he wishes he had known more about his father's troubles. He wishes he could have helped him more.

One of the boys says he has a hard time forgiving himself for going to a basketball game when his father was in hospice. "I wished I had spent that time with him. I think maybe I thought he wasn't really going to die. But he did."

Buckley reminds the boy that he was only in eighth grade when his father died. And then she reminds him that his father was probably thrilled that his son was playing a game. "I promise you, your father would have wanted you to be playing basketball."

Chuck then discusses the sometimes-excruciating pain of losing a father who was sick. "During that time, you kind of wished he could be better. That makes me feel bad," then his voice slows. "Don't get me wrong, I was glad to help. I would be glad to do anything to have him around just one day."

After their father's death, the brothers were approached by Jim Elfers, the director of Moeller's Pastoral Ministry program. Elfers talks to all students who suffer a loss and invites them to attend the grief group.

The group becomes a brotherhood. The boys are all very different. Some of the freshman look like children. Some of the seniors look like grown men. There are cool kids and music kids and jocks and nerds. They are tied together only by their loss, and this group. But that connection matters.

They stop each other in the hall and ask how they are doing. Sometimes they sit together at lunch. Sometimes they just nod and smile. Andrew says it is enough to know there are other students going through what he is going through. He then tells the class that he is back to doing well at school. "I made second honors. I said I was going to get my grades up, and I did."

Buckley says she is proud of him, and wants to know how he did it. "Well, I kind of just started doing my homework."

Zach said coming to the group was his way of making sure he got a chance to talk about his mother. "I want people to know her," Zach said. "I don't want people to forget she was here."

Phillip begins to speak even more in this session. He says his father died of heart failure which was a result of quadriplegia. The death was not expected, he says, but it was not a sur-



Jim Elfers, above, is the director of Moeller's Pastoral Ministry program. He is one of the facilitators of the grief support group. Mr. Elfers lost friends in high school and college.

At right, Will Smallwood, foreground, participates in the grief group. He and his brother, Chuck, have participated since their father passed away.

prise. He tells the class that when he held his father's hand that night, it reminded him of his mother's hand. He says he can still feel how cold her hand was.

"I remember touching her hand and trying to wake her up. It was the coldest thing I could ever feel," Phillip said. "When I touched my dad's hand it was still warm, but it reminded me of it so much."

After the group, he said he is glad to be a member. "It's enjoyable. You can actually talk and you realize there is a brotherhood. There are people you can go talk to."

At the end of the meeting, Munafa-Kanoza tells the boys that their loss is not something they will ever get over. That, she says, is silliness. But it can and will be managed. "This death does not have to define you," she said. "But it will redefine your life."

Then she says that sometimes, when a person feels darkest, the best thing to do is to be kind to others. She hands each of the boys three pennies and tells them to put them in their right pocket. "Each day I want you to do three things that make a difference for somebody," she says. "As you do something good, I want you to move one penny over to your left pocket. I want three pennies in your left pocket every night."

Phillip stands up, puts the pennies in his right pocket, and walks out into the hallway.



Loss is difficult at any time of life. It can be particularly difficult for teenagers, who are still navigating their way, sometimes clumsily, toward adulthood. They know they need help but are sometimes reluctant to ask for it. And often, because of their youth, this is the first death they have ever known.

Fernside, which focuses on youth grief, surveyed 790 recent participants in its grief program to find out whom they lost. Thirty-five percent lost their father. Nineteen percent lost their mother and the same proportion lost a grandparent, while 13 percent lost a sibling. The remaining 14 percent lost a more distant relative, a friend or a neighbor.

Now that Fernside is helping young people, leaders next plan to turn their attention to other underserved groups. Fernside will try to reach adults with developmental disabilities, children with significant emotional or behavioral challenges and teens who are incarcerated.



John Rodenberg, Moeller head football coach and physical education/health teacher, holds a football in honor of his father. Rodenberg lost his father in the eighth grade. He has fond football memories with his father and visits him in the cemetery before the start of every season.



The April 10 meeting comes two days after Easter break. Spring has arrived. The air is warm and a little rain will fall. Munafo-Kanoza asks the boys how their time was, and if Easter was OK. All say they are fine, then they say their prayer, then they begin to eat their pizza.

The faculty member today is physical education/health teacher and varsity football coach John Rodenberg. He tells the boys that he is 48 years old, and that he lost his dad when he was in eighth grade and that some days it is still hard. Grief, Coach Rodenberg tells them, is a long road.

"Everybody puts their arm around you for the first month," Coach Rodenberg says. "And then they are gone. They still care, but people have lives to live."

He tells the boys that he was looking for his shoes when his mother drove home to tell him what had happened. He says he still gets a little panicked when he can't find his shoes. Coach Rodenberg is old school. His hair is cut close, his sentences are clipped. He is the football coach who just won the state championship, and he is sitting in the room telling these boys that he still gets a little unnerved when he cannot find his shoes. They get it.

One of the boys, who has lost his father, says that every time he comes home, he needs to find his mother. Over break, he says, he came home and his mother's car was in the driveway, but he could not find her. He checked every room in the house, but could not find her. He began to panic. He was going through the house again when he looked out a back window

and saw her, pushing his little sister on the swing. He had forgotten to check the back yard. He waved hello and then sat down and caught his breath. He didn't tell his mother the story and says he never will.

Munafo-Kanoza and Buckley had asked the boys to bring in photos of the person they lost. Some have actual photographs, some turn on their phones to retrieve them.

One of the boys, an exchange student from Japan who lost his mother, shows a photo of his family on vacation in Okinawa. "It is my whole family. My brother and my sister and my mom and dad," he says in heavily accented English. "It is nice because we look like a good family."

The boys in the group all pay particularly close attention when one of them is talking about their family. And now that they are showing photographs, they even stop eating.

Andrew shows a photo of his mother and father shortly after they were married. They were divorced when he was a baby, so there are not many photos of the two of them. Andrew is tense this day. He has a test coming up and a track meet that night. But he looks at the photo and smiles for the first time. "They look really happy," he says.

Zach shows the photo of his mother again. "My mom has the biggest smile, it was so pretty," Zach said. "But she smoked, and she was a hillbilly, so there are, if you look real close, a couple of teeth missing. I love that, it's a hillbilly smile." He passes the photo around for people to see her.

Phillip has a photo of his dad in his phone. This photo was sent to Phillip, recently and unexpectedly, by one of his father's roofer friends. "I wasn't expecting this, and I didn't even know it existed. Then I just got it. I love it."

When Zach's mother died in March 2010, he left his home in Union, Ky., and his stepfather and half sister to go live with his father in Mount Healthy. His father, Dale Deck, and his partner, Samantha, have four children between them, one of hers, one of his (Zach), and two together. Dale drove him back and forth to his school each day for the rest of the school year so Zach could stay with his friends for the remainder of the school year. That was two 60-mile round trips per day. Dale and Samantha have more rules than Zach's mother, Jaimie, did, and he bristled some. But things feel like they are coming together. "I am proud of him," Dale said. "I'm glad he got through all of this."

When Ted Smallwood died in October 2011, it was not unexpected. In fact, Ted was always very honest about how sick he was and the likelihood that he would die young. After he died, Will and Chuck's mother, Pam Smallwood, wanted the boys to talk about their feelings but feared they would not. When Mr. Elfers told her about the grief group, she had low expectations. "I said, 'Hey, if you can get them to go, great.' " The boys went and said they liked it. When she learned they were actually sharing their thoughts in the class, she began to cry. "I just can't believe it. That's such good news," Pam said. "They never talk to me about it; I think they are trying to protect me."

Andrew's mother, Gina Brown, knew Andrew would be devastated by his father's death in January 2012. Andrew always lived with her, but he loved his father. And the death was a complete surprise. "I slept on the couch for months afterward, I wanted to hear Andrew if he got up," Gina said. "Sometimes I would hear him wake up and start crying. It would break my heart." But Andrew, a fairly quiet type, never resisted talking about his feelings. She has watched him mature. She says he is more empathetic. But she misses her boy who did not know real sadness. "Fernside tells you they will be OK, but they will never be the same. That really hit me hard," Gina said. "The old Andrew is gone, he is not coming back."



» In the kitchen of the Frey home, Melissa Frey, 15, rubs the heads of her new “big brother,” Phillip Bryant, left, and her little brother, Josh. Terri Frey, right, had just woken Phillip from an afternoon nap. For a video of Phillip talking about how the last year has changed him, go to Cincinnati.com.

On May 1, as part of an annual tradition, the grief group walks from Moeller High School to the Montgomery Inn. An anonymous donor pays for the lunch.

Mr. Elfers speaks to the group for the last time of the year. He urges compassion. “You guys know as well as anybody that we really don’t know what somebody else might be carrying with them,” Mr. Elfers said. “Always build people up. Never tear people down. Be kind.”

Buckley and Munaf-Kanoza ask the six seniors in the group to stand up and explain what is next for them. One is going to Ohio State University. One is going to Miami University. One will be going to school in Colorado. One will be returning to Japan, where he says, nobody ever speaks to groups about loss.

Andrew tells the group he will be going to the University of Cincinnati and hopes to be study to become a veterinarian. Chuck says he will go to Northern Kentucky University and says he plans to become a social worker with a minor in music.

Buckley then asks the juniors in the group to stand up. “You will be the leaders next year,” Buckley tells

them. “Pay attention to the new members, especially the freshmen.”

Phillip stands, although he is not sure how he will be able to afford Moeller next year. Tuition is \$11,000, although the school has reduced that by half for him. He knows the Freys are already beginning to worry.

Mr. Elfers reminds the boys that being new can be difficult. “It can be intimidating,” Elfers said. “A simple hello, a kind word, can go a long way.”

Then the boys all sit and eat. After lunch, of course, some chocolate chip cookies. The restaurant decided to look the other way when the cookies came in because everyone understands that the cookies mattered. As the boys ate the cookies, consuming them each in two slow bites, Buckley and Munaf-Kanoza handed out notes for the boys to thank the baker. They all did sincerely.

On the walk back to school, the sun was high and bright and warm. Phillip had a rugby game the next day, and Terri Frey would be there, of course. He had a question he wanted to ask. For the first time in his life, Phillip would be buying a Mother’s Day gift. “There are so many choices,” he said. “Are chocolates all right? I think I want to buy her chocolates.” ■

HOW TO GET HELP OR OFFER HELP

If you have lost a loved one, programs are available to help people of all ages. Companions on a Journey provides grief support to children, teens and adults. Last year, Companions assisted more than 4,000 people throughout Greater Cincinnati. Information: www.companionsonajourney.org, or 513-870-9108.

If you would like to help any of the boys in this story, contact Archbishop Moeller High School President Bill Hunt at 513-791-1680, extension 1305 or BHunt@Moeller.org.

The school address is 9001 Montgomery Road, Cincinnati, OH 45242.

HOW WE TOLD THIS STORY

Last summer, reporter John Faherty approached grief counselors Sheila Munaf-Kanoza and Pat Buckley and asked if he could report on their work at Archbishop Moeller High School.

The boys and school counselor Jim Elfers were generous enough to allow Faherty to attend all of their meetings. There were no limits placed on what Faherty could or could not report. They did so in order to show grief and the difficult process of working through it.

In the story, we identify the five boys we focused on during the year and with whom we spoke outside of group. We also spoke to their parents and guardians. Other boys in the group are not identified by name.

Reach reporter John Faherty at jfaherty@enquirer.com.

Photojournalist Carrie Cochran can be emailed at ccoehran@enquirer.com.