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THE PRESIDENT'S PAIN



CHRIS HUTCHINSON/Emerald

University President Dave Frohnmayer found a variety of outlets for the grief of losing close family members

We didn't ask to be born. We were. We don't want change. It comes. We want change. There is none for three rainy winters where it is always three o'clock in the afternoon. We don't want to lose. We do. (The Bulls should lose more. They don't). Parents shouldn't outlive their children. They do.

University President Dave Frohnmayer reminds me of the recently acquired notion that if one's child dies first, we deem it an aberration. Children should outlive their parents, and if they don't, the natural order of life is out of order. Historically, it wasn't so. If children made it to the age of 5, they were on their way to beating the odds. Such a historical perspective has been a component in helping President Frohnmayer "cope" with the loss of two of his five children.

"What else?" I asked. I came to his office because I wanted to know how he has managed to head a large, public institution, with its incessant demands and responsibilities affecting a significant number of people,

while living in a fish bowl and experiencing one of the greatest losses one can. Frohnmayer graciously allowed me a glimpse into a few of the factors that have provided him with sustenance.

"You can't deny grief," he says. "You can't run away from it. When the last casserole is gone, it's there. And when two people, a couple, are grieving, you can't rely on each other to meet the emotional needs of the others. You have to find it within yourself."

"Did you take a leave of absence?" Three weeks. President Frohnmayer claims to be extremely fortunate because he loves his work, which he did not seek, which makes it even better. It has sustained him through his grief. "Work has been my salvation," he offered. Because it is the kind of work that affects people's lives in important ways, much is demanded, much is at stake. So, the need for his complete engagement has made it imperative that he extend himself beyond his sadness while not ignoring its presence. There were a few times when he had to postpone labor-intensive work because he simply did not have the necessary concentration. "My staff stepped up in incredible ways and provided tremendous backup."

President Frohnmayer's first public appearance occurred 10 days after Kirsten's death. He was scheduled to give a very public speech in Portland, and because he felt the need to step back into the realm of stability, he decided to go ahead with it. But before

the onset of his address, he knew it was important to acknowledge to his audience what they already knew — that he and his family had lost another family member and were devastated. The audience's response to his candor was heartfelt and appreciated as he had given himself and them permission to interact in a very real way.

President Frohnmayer commented that being a part of the University community, and the ways in which this community has responded to his family and given so much support, have been a major factor in their ability to manage as well as they have. He wondered how others with terminally ill children and few support systems could possibly deal with any of it. "We received, at the minimum, 2,000 responses. So many people sent such wise words and shared themselves in incredible ways. Their support was an invaluable source of connection and comfort. The law school, too, was remarkable in its attention to us."

We talked of the difficulty of being patient with and giving time to people who are preoccupied by the small stuff of life — that which seems inconsequential when one is concerned with the multiple health issues confronting the lives of one's children and the toll it takes on the entire family.

In the midst of our conversation, President Frohnmayer got up, grabbed a book from a table and handed it to me. This volume is another way he and his wife Lynn have

managed to face, with seeming equilibrium, the loss of their daughters. "Fanconi Anemia — A Handbook for Families and Their Physicians," second edition by Lynn and Dave Frohnmayer.

"We have lived with the diagnosis of Fanconi Anemia since 1983. This is not how we had expected our lives to go. It has been vital for us to do something, to take action." And so the Frohnmayers created a handbook as a "result of many hours of research and consultation, and years of experience. It is written for lay people by lay people. We are not doctors, but we follow progress in FA-related science on a daily basis." They were also the pivotal force in creating the Fanconi Research Fund Inc. in Eugene, "founded to provide support to FA families and to raise money for scientific research." His and Lynn's efforts are all so that another child may not have to suffer the "grim prognosis" of Fanconi Anemia.

I asked Frohnmayer what he thought of his own mortality and if he was afraid to die. He thought for a minute and then said softly, "No, I'm not afraid to die, but I am a father, and I still have young children to take care of."

We don't want to die. We do. But before we do, may we know what it is to love and be loved.

The Frohnmayer family does.

Hannah Dillon is a columnist for the Emerald. Her work appears on alternate Fridays. Her views do not necessarily represent those of the newspaper.

Thumbs



PAYING THE EUGENE CITY COUNCIL:
 As The Register-Guard pointed out Wednesday, Eugene's city workers regularly turn in 40-hour weeks and receive no compensation. Of medium-sized cities in the region, Salem and Eugene are alone in not paying their city councils. Obviously, this is unfortunate simply because many hard workers do not receive fair compensation for hard work. In addition, it has the unfortunate effect of limiting the available pool of candidates for city posts. After all, in order to work as a council member, you must have an alternate source of income, either as a business owner or an independently wealthy individual. To allow more people from a larger number of backgrounds to participate in city politics, the council needs to be paid.



ADVERTISEMENTS FOR PRESCRIPTION DRUGS:
 Unless you keep yourself completely wrapped in a Eugene-colored haze, you've probably seen the ads for pharmaceutical products on television and in magazines. The ads encourage consumers to pester their doctors about specific drugs if the consumer has any of a vast range of symptoms. In essence, the ads encourage consumers to view drugs as an easy solution to a vast range of problems. In addition, they cause patients to demand drugs from doctors that they might otherwise not have prescribed, either because the doctor would have chosen a less expensive alternative or because he or she might not have assigned any medication at all.