



A JOURNEY TOGETHER

National Newsletter of the Bereaved Parents of the USA



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We, as bereaved parents, help grieving parents and families rebuild their lives following the death of a child.

THROUGH A PINHOLE



I think I was in the first grade. The buzz around school was the upcoming solar eclipse. The girl who sat next to me stated with confidence, "The sun is going to turn black and disappear." This thought filled me with dread. "Well, it might disappear for just a little bit," the girl quipped, "and then it will turn cold and we'll all die like the dinosaurs!" Then we both started laughing. Our teacher told us to take out our milk cartons and make our special eclipse camera.

I had washed my milk carton out at home, cut the top off, and dried the inside so it that it magically could be turned into a camera with which to watch the solar eclipse. "You can't look at the eclipse," my classmates chimed in excitedly. "Your eyes will burn up and you will go blind." So we took our

milk carton and covered the open top with tin foil and taped it down. We cut a flap into the side of the carton, pulled it back and then used a straight pin to punch a hole in the foil cover. Immediately you could see the small concentrated beam of light reflecting through the pinhole onto the bottom of the carton. It wasn't the whole sun, but it was all we needed to see and experience the eclipse. Once the sun disappeared, so would our little pinhole of light. This is how you watched an eclipse in 1963, through the tiny lens of a homemade pinhole camera.

In the days after Clarke's death, this too is how I began my contest of survival. Each hour became pinpoints of light on which to focus. I couldn't look at the entire sun or the entire impact of Clarke's death. I had to take it one pinpoint at a time, focusing on that pinpoint of light long enough to get to the next hour and then the next. I only needed to see

just beyond this thought, just beyond this point.

There was no denying the truth of my circumstance. My son was killed suddenly in an auto accident, my only child. Absorbing the reality of this could only happen in measured doses. My shock armor would not allow me to see beyond the next hour. I was certain of my first pinpoint, my first mindset in dealing with this tragedy: I could not allow the moment of Clarke's death to become my focus. Not when the moments of his life were so incredibly rich and many. Not when his memory couldn't help but cause a smile. At the time, I couldn't know that thinking this way would be the beginning steps of my recovery. I didn't know the journey had just begun.

Excerpted from ...keeping Clarke by Stephanie Benbenek

...keeping Clarke can be purchased through barnesandnoble.com and amazon.com

POINT OF LIGHT (excerpt) by Randy Travis

There's a darkness that everyone must face.
It wants to take what's good and fair and lay it
all to waste.
And that darkness covers everything in sight
Until it meets a single point of light.

All it takes is a point of light,
A ray of hope in the darkest night.
If you see what's wrong,
And you try to make it right,
You will be a point of light.





RETURN TO THE GATHERING

Susan and I went to several Gatherings after Brad died until we felt we had reached a point where there was little to gain from attending another. The thought of going this year, after a five year hiatus, worried me. Frankly, I wasn't sure I wanted to re-visit those emotions, so raw in the early years on this journey, I would be confronted with at the 2011 Gathering.

Who was I kidding? It hardly takes anything as elaborate as the coming together of several hundred bereaved parents for me to be transported back to those early days. His favorite food, a certain song, a fellow who looks like him are all triggers to send me back. I didn't think I could face so many newly bereaved parents as well as the friends I made way back when without reverting to that emptiness I so vividly remember. But, good friends encouraged us to attend, so off we went, uncertain as we were, to this year's Gathering outside Washington, D.C. in Reston, VA, appropriately titled Monumental Journey of the Heart.

How glad we are we decided to make the trip. The speakers at each meal inspired us with their personal stories.



Darcie Sims took us on a roller-coaster ride making us laugh and cry as she delivered her message with homey vibrancy. When Becky Greer spoke of her extraordinary loss the proverbial pin drop could have been heard. The workshops on various topics such as, Cinema and Grief, Writing as a Healing Tool, Dads: The Forgotten Parent and Life from Loss and the evening discussion groups provided insight and growth. The after-hours informal get-togethers allowed for making new friends and renewing old friendships. Jodi Norman and her committee did a magnificent job making The Gathering a complete success.

Returning to The Gathering did, indeed, remind me of where I was years ago. The difference, now, is that I go back and smile. I smile because I remember Brad's life, not the brevity of it. I learned how to smile long ago in some unlikely places: Charleston, St. Louis, Las Vegas; all sites of BP/USA Gatherings. In the years since I have come a long way. For me, at least, it has been a monumental journey of the heart. *Richard Berman, Editor*

GRANDFATHER

M. Gerner

Once I saw a grown man cry. Now there's a man with feeling!
He was strong, able, quite well-built, gray hair, muscles, charm to the hilt.
I moved toward him slowly. "Tell me what's wrong."
The look he gave me was tear-filled and long.
"I cry for my child. My son's son has died."
So I sat beside him and two grown men cried.



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BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA

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Bereaved Parents USA National Gathering
July 28-31, 2011 Reston, Virginia

would like to take this opportunity to thank all the 2011 National Gathering attendees for joining us on our "Monumental Journey of the Heart." Without you there would be no Gathering. The Gathering Committee and the National Board of Directors hopes that you found the Gathering to be an uplifting, informative, comforting and healing experience. We hope that you took with you the knowledge that survival is possible, that you do not have to go through this alone, and that there is hope for healing as you continue on your own personal journey.

Our sincerest appreciation goes to all those who contributed to the success of the 2011 National Gathering. Without the support of so many wonderful individuals, businesses, the BP/USA Board of Directors, Chapter members, and volunteers, this event would not have been possible.

And thank you to all our Speakers, Workshop Presenters and Sharing Session Facilitators. Words cannot express our gratitude to those who have given of their time and

talents and shared their knowledge, experience and wisdom to reach out to all the par-

ents, siblings and families whose children have died too soon.

See you in Tampa!

Jodi Norman,

2011 National Gathering Chair



2011 ROY AND JUANITA PETERSON AWARD

In 1998 the Roy and Juanita Peterson Award was created to annually recognize and honor a BP/USA member who has exemplified truly dedicated service to our organization, usually at both the national and the local levels. The persons so honored are volunteers who have given extraordinary amounts of time and energy to assisting newly bereaved families in our common grief journey as well as helping with the work crucial to the operation of our organization.



This year the Roy and Juanita Peterson Award was presented to Theresa Valentine. Theresa served as group facilitator and leader of the St. Louis Chapter, where she initiated innovations which are used to this day and which have been adopted by many other chapters. Theresa served on the national BP/USA board of directors for five years as the elected "At-Large" member. In May 2010 Theresa joined 20 people from across BP/USA at our 3-day strategic planning retreat. At that retreat she brought her multi-level experience to the discussion of the problems and issues BP/USA faces now and in the future. She was one of the leaders at the retreat and a major contributor to its success. She has worked tirelessly for both the local and the national organizations to assure their effectiveness in serving bereaved parents and families. For over 20 years Theresa has used the tragedy of Sean's death to focus her talents and energies on helping hundreds of bereaved parents like herself.

2011-2012 BP/USA Board of Directors and Officers

At the Annual Meeting of Members held July 30th in Reston VA, the results of the national board election were announced. Becky Russell from Jacksonville AR was elected to her first term, replacing Donna Corrigan who completed her second term in July. Dave Alexander was elected to a second term. In addition, Theresa Valentine, Jodi Norman, and Bill Lagemann were appointed to fill out the terms of three board members who resigned over the last two years (Toni Holohan, Jill Theriault, and Diane Hunter-Copeland). Lee Ann Hutson from Montgomery County IN, and Linda Fehrmann from St. Louis MO, are returning board members. The board elected its officers for 2011-2012: Dave was re-elected President, Lee Ann was elected Vice President, Linda was elected Secretary, and Richard Berman was re-elected Treasurer. The addresses, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses for all of the board members are listed on the national web site. Please feel free to contact any member of the board for information about BP/USA or to offer suggestions for issues and programs you would like the board to consider.



EXPENSIVE LESSONS

Seeing Dean today was a reaffirmation of what I learned after Brad died. I learned about the intricacies of grief. I discovered that the death of my child was so much more than his simply not being with me; but was also the loss of all that would, now, never be. I became attuned to the needs of people in grief; not only from the death of a child, but other losses that left people floating in a sea of measureless misery.

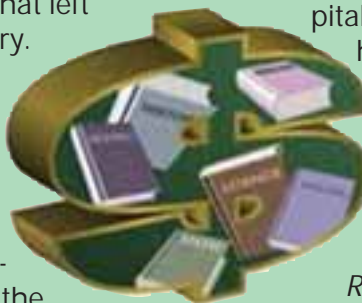
When I went to see Dean after the accident that claimed his leg he wanted, no, needed, to talk. He spoke about all the things he would not be able to do because of his loss. I let him speak without comment. As I listened I began to hear a familiar theme: "My life has changed. I'm not the

person I used to be. My dreams are gone. Will I ever feel normal again?"

That's when all I learned about grief in the five years since my son died kicked in. I realized Dean was in need of support, not from me, but, from other amputees. I made a few calls, found a support group at an orthopedic hospital nearby, and encouraged Dean to go which he has been doing ever since. That was three years ago. When I saw Dean today he was riding his new Harley-Davidson.

I truly hope it didn't take my son's death to make me a more caring, compassionate, understanding person. But, then, there it is.

Richard Berman, Editor



TRICK OR TREAT

The night is dim
And the pumpkins grin
At children on the porch.
The doorbell rings
"Trick or treat," they sing
My heart burns like a torch.
The Dracula's face
And a princess in lace
Are peering in at me.
How I'd love to ask
"May I lift your mask?"
And hiding, there you'd be!
You'd get such a kick
From that silly trick,
But disguised, you must stay.
In the wind that blows
My heart still knows,
You're playing October charades.

Kathie Slier, Tulsa OK



We cannot die because our children die. I should not love less because the one I loved is gone, but more should I love because my heart knows the suffering of others.

Written for Helen Hayes by Mrs. I Frantz

DOVES OF HOPE

A dule of lovely snow white doves,
Soaring in the sky above,
Released in honor of our daughters and sons,
Who now reside in Heaven.

Messengers of joy, love, and peace,
Help us find the peace we seek,
Symbols of triumph of life over death,
A hope we believe until our last breath.

As we watch the doves in flight,
Although tears may blur our sight,
We send our love and gratitude,
To our children beyond a sky of blue.

Fly doves, above the clouds on high,
Our love for our children will never die,
We celebrate their love and life,
Until the day we reunite.

Claire Ann Stevenson





PRACTICAL ADVICE

Get Started Writing



Writing can be one of the best tools for getting you past the tough places on this journey. Here are a few suggestions to get you started.

- Write out what out what happened. Make this as detailed as you can. Take your time. Tears may flow. It's OK.
- What emotions are you experiencing today? When you look back at what you wrote you'll be surprised how far you've come.
- What have you found to be most helpful for your healing? By writing it down you'll learn what worked and what didn't and why.
- What do you wish society knew about dealing with grief? Can you find the words to make the world understand?
- What has been most difficult for you? Putting it on paper can soften the hurt.

Don't worry about style or form, grammar or spelling. Those can be fixed later if you ever decide to go back and formalize your writings. For now, get your raw emotions written down. The writing will help you heal.

Evolving Through Grief

by Roe Ziccarello From ebook

When you start to feel your sanity slip, do whatever positive thing you can think of to hold on: pray, meditate, go get a full body massage at a spa, scream at a starlit sky, take a trip to a new place, stare at sunsets, lay in an open field and watch the clouds drift, or do all of these things at once: Just do something for you! And don't feel guilty about being selfish about it. You can't do anything for others if you don't take care of yourself first. You can't be loving to others if you aren't loving to yourself first. Then, when you start to feel a sense of renewal, think about extending the love you still want to express for your child in a way that will benefit others.

Find Hope

Each of us can find hope in "what was." Remember your loved one by recalling a moment when you felt he or she truly expressed love. Visualize the gestures, hear the words, and feel the loving touch. Relive the experience using all your senses. Hope is rekindled by your spirit within. Your relationship with your child is different, but you still have one. Nurture your optimism by reminding yourself that love and life are eternal.

by Nan Zastrow from Hitch Your Hope to a Star (Used with permission of The Centering Corp.)

A THOUGHT



I give you this one thought to keep. I am with you still - I do not sleep.
 I am a thousand winds that blow, I am the diamond glints on snow.
 I am the sunlight on ripened grain, I am the gentle autumn rain.
 When you awaken in the morning hush, I am the swift, uplifting rush
 Of quiet birds in circled flight. I am the soft stars that shine at night.
 Do not think of me as gone. I am with you still – in each new dawn.





BOOK REVIEWS



Hitch Your Hope to a Star

Nan Zastrow

Grief Illustrated Press, 2011

Often, grief books written by bereaved parents are personal stories of loss and eventual renewal. Nan Zastrow does that, but in the telling provides practical advice on how to start living again. She instructs that friendships, both lost and gained after the death of our child, provide personal growth; that retelling stories of our lives are ways to keep the spirit of the past alive; that seeking hope in "simple things reminds us that good thought and times will return." Included is a remarkable chapter on secondary losses such as: financial instability, strained family relationships, challenges to one's faith, feelings of helplessness, health issues and lack of self-confidence.

Towards the end of this thin volume of twenty-one short chapters Ms. Zastrow waxes philosophical, but it is in the very usable techniques for growth that make this a valuable tool for everyone on this journey.

Comfort

Ann Hood

W.W.Norton & Co., 2008

Ann Hood's follow-up to her novel *The Knitting Circle* is a factual account of life after her daughter dies suddenly at age five. She tells us, in beautiful prose, about her little girl, Grace, and about the emptiness that invaded their lives.

Ann talks about how she loses her faith while her husband's remains strong. She tells us how learning to knit gives her focus. She explains how impossible it was to write about Grace's life and death until time had created an interlude.

Regardless of where you are on the grief journey you will recognize the emotions, raw and bare, that Ms. Hood so deftly describes.

Tears are the safety valve of the heart when too much pressure is laid on it.

Albert Smith

WHEN TOMORROW STARTS WITHOUT ME

When tomorrow starts without me, and I'm not there to see,
If the sun should rise and find your eyes, all filled with tears for me,

I wish so much you wouldn't cry, the way you did today,
While thinking of the many things we didn't get to say.

I know how much you love me, as much as I love you,
And each time that you think of me, I know you'll miss me too.

But when tomorrow starts without me, please try to understand
That an angel came and called my name and took me by the hand

And said my place was ready in Heaven far above,
And that I'd have to leave behind, all those things I dearly love.

But as I turned to walk away, a tear fell from my eye,
For all my life, I'd always thought, I didn't want to die.

I had so much to live for, so much yet to do,
It seemed almost impossible, that I was leaving you.

I thought of all the yesterdays, the good ones and the bad,
I thought of all the love we shared, and all the fun we had.

If I could relive yesterday, just even for a while,
I'd say goodbye and kiss you, and maybe see you smile.

But then I fully realized, that could never be,
For emptiness and memories, would take the place of me.

And when I thought of worldly things, I might miss come tomorrow,
I thought of you, and when I did, my heart was filled with sorrow.

But when I walked through Heaven's gates, I felt so much at home.
When God looked down and smiled at me, from his great golden throne.

He said, "This is eternity, and all I've promised you.
Today your life on Earth is past, and here it starts anew".

"I promise no tomorrow, but today will always last,
And since each day's the same day, there's no longing for the past".

"But you have been so faithful, so trusting and so true,
Though there were times you did some things, you know you shouldn't do".

"But you have been forgiven, and now at last you're free,
So won't you take my hand now and share My life with Me".

So when tomorrow starts without me, don't think we're far apart,
For every time you think of me, I'm right here in your heart.

--by Erica Shea Liupaeter



— DID YOU KNOW THEY WERE BEREAVED PARENTS? —



Helen Hayes, one of only two women to receive all four prestigious entertainment awards: a Tony, Oscar, Emmy and Grammy, was the “first lady” of stage and screen throughout most of the 20th century. Encouraged by her mother, Helen began performing at an early age and ‘wowed’ Broadway with her “beauty and girlish actuality” playing, at age seventeen, a much younger Pollyanna.

She seemed to have the dream life; fame, fortune and family. She and her husband, Charlie MacArthur, raised two children: Mary (who had a short career on stage), and James (who starred as Danny on Hawaii Five-O). After winning the Oscar for her role in Madelon, she returned to Broadway to portray Queen Victoria, the role for which she is most remembered.

Then tragedy struck. Mary, who had appeared on stage with her mom, contracted polio and died. The MacArthur’s were devastated. Charlie turned to drink and died not long after; many say from a broken heart. Helen returned to acting, knowing that staying busy with work could help her get past the all encompassing sadness. Also Miss Hayes established the Mary MacArthur Fund to assist her friend, Jonas Salk, in raising awareness and financial support to advance his efforts to find a cure for polio.

Helen Hayes honored the life of her daughter by continuing to act and her humanitarian work. Delighting audiences well into her senior years, she won an Oscar for her supporting role in Airport. “I gratefully was able to throw myself into constructive activity and the work I did allowed me release, carrying me over the abyss, back to the land of the living. Being needed saved my sanity. Then the theatre, as always, came to my rescue,” Helen wrote in *On Reflection*, her autobiography.

Perhaps her most important role was helping find the cure for polio and thereby saving uncountable parents from the grief she endured.

BEST MAN

Last night Susan and I went to a wedding; a lovely black tie affair with all the usual components. When the best man, in his mid twenties, spoke about the groom he talked about having known him for over twenty years. The best man told wonderful stories. He was both touching and funny. So happy.

While listening I couldn’t help but think how heart-breaking it was that no one would ever talk about Brad in that way; no best man would ever reminisce humorous anecdotes about growing up with their best friend. Then I realized I was wrong.

Brad died in his twenty-first year. His best and closest friend since kindergarten spoke at his funeral. He told wonderful stories. He was touching and funny. So sad.

Richard Berman, Editor

Remembrance

Remembrance is a golden chain
Death tries to break,
but all in vain.

To have, to love, and then to part
Is the greatest sorrow of one’s heart.
The years may wipe out many things
But some they wipe out never.
Like memories of those happy times
When we were all together.

Author Unknown



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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA

CREDO

We are the parents whose children have died. We are the grandparents who have buried grandchildren. We are the siblings whose brothers and sisters no longer walk with us through life. We come together as Bereaved Parents of the USA to provide a haven where all bereaved families can meet and share our long and arduous grief journeys. We attend monthly gatherings whenever we can and for as long as we believe necessary. We share our fears, confusion, anger, guilt, frustrations, emptiness and feelings of hopelessness so that hope can be found anew. As we accept, support, comfort and encourage each other, we demonstrate to each other that survival is possible. Together we celebrate the lives of our children, share the joys and triumphs as well as the love that will never fade. Together we learn how little it matters where we live, what our color or our affluence is or what faith we uphold as we confront the tragedies of our children's deaths. Together, strengthened by the bonds we forge at our gatherings, we offer what we have learned to each other and to every more recently bereaved family. We are the Bereaved Parents of the USA. We welcome you.