



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.

A THIRTY DOLLAR PUMP

The other day I went to buy an air pump for my bicycle. I didn't need anything more than a basic pump and figured it should cost about fifteen bucks. There's no Walmart or the like near me so I went to the local bicycle shop with their \$2500 bikes and high tech riding gear. The owner of the store showed me pumps with wonderful features and prices to match. He was a good salesman, however, and sized me up as a, well..., a cheapskate and to avoid losing a sale completely, pulled a \$30 pump off the shelf. He showed me its two features: a built in gauge, and an interchangeable nozzle. Then he looked me in the eye and said, "You deserve a \$30 pump." He was right. I bought it and wasn't sorry when I put it to use. That got me to thinking.

After our son died I found happiness too rich for my taste. The overwhelming sadness that engulfed me left no room for even a moderately gleeful moment. I felt that I didn't deserve to be happy. What right did I have to smile or laugh while my son lay buried in his grave and I hadn't found a way to save him?



Slowly the omnipresent melancholy lifted. I began to sense that remaining sad forever served no one and no purpose. I had a life to live. Family and friends were entitled to someone better than the doleful zombie I'd become. Those who had walked this path before

me, my BP/USA support group, showed me the light. They helped me understand "I deserved to be happy." Although this lesson took somewhat longer to sink in than that learned by my \$30 purchase, when it did and I put it to use, I knew they were right.

If you are still mired down in intense sadness, especially if you are a dad beating yourself up over not preventing this awful tragedy that has happened to your family, take heart. The time is coming when you will want to be happy again. I hope that day comes soon. You deserve some happiness.

Richard Berman, BP/USA Baltimore



WE LASH OURSELVES (*If Only* is the Whip)

Don't forsake your future for the memory of the past

If only I had not bought him that motorcycle...
If only I had not let her cross the street alone...
If only I had not let him drive when he was so tired...
If only I had (had not) allowed the surgery...
If only I had waited for the paramedics...
If only I had not waited for the ambulance...
If only I was an all-knowing, all-powerful god,
I would not have allowed my child to die.
Alas, I am only human.
How long will I punish myself for being so?

Theresa Hutchinson, Norman, OK

There is an alchemy in sorrow. It can be transmitted into wisdom which, if it does not bring joy, can yet bring happiness.

Pearl S. Buck



THE PONYTAIL

How blessed I was to have such a caring and thoughtful teenage daughter. When at fifteen she wanted to cut her beautiful long hair I asked her if I could have her ponytail. I didn't know then why I wanted to save her ponytail. The reasons, of course, are crystal clear now.

Although many, many years have passed since our daughter died, there are times, not as often now, that I open the *Isabel* drawer in my

dresser. In it is her baby book and the tiny, red brocaded Japanese slippers she wore as a toddler. Next to them are the autograph books she filled during her school years with messages from family, friends, teachers, principals and even celebrities. Then there are the cards and letters she sent to us the last year of her life. Last, but certainly not least, is her ponytail. Could I ever have dreamed what it would mean to me some

day!

I touch it and always kiss the shiny curl on the very end. No question about it, even after all these years, I do feel sad sometimes and the tears appear, but I'm so glad I kept that ponytail. It belonged to Isabel and I cherish the memories of those days.

Gloria Carton, BP/USA Baltimore



Messages of Hope

The new me, the one that arose from the ashes of my life, views every experience quite differently than that viewed by the fellow I used to be. I found I was unable to write about that metamorphosis in the early years after our son's death. I didn't understand the changes. Trying to write about what I didn't understand was an empty effort. I was still too close to the raw emotions. A poet knows how to write with a weeping pen. I, alas, am not a poet.

Writing, however, is great therapy. And writing for the benefit of others helps the writer as well as the reader. All of our children who have died were special and precious and loved. In time I began to understand that telling other bereaved parents about my son did not help them. When I need to talk about Brad I do so in group at our BP/USA meetings. Although you, my fellow travelers on this journey, may be interested in knowing a little about my child, what you really want to know is how I got past or through all those roadblocks on the road to redesigning me. The pieces I write, I hope, do just that.

If you would like to share the lessons you've learned while traveling the grief hi-way, then consider joining me in a workshop I'll be hosting at The Gathering that will help you turn your experiences of life into messages of hope. You'll be better for it. So will we.

Richard Berman, Editor

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BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA

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FATHER'S DAY REVISITED

Now I can look back upon that first Father's Day, the first after the death of our son, Jeff. I was a mess, a man without hope, with little or no reason to continue living, deep in my own depressive grief. I could not share any joy with others.

I look back now, wondering how I could have treated my wife and children as I did while they were trying to celebrate in my honor. Inside I was crying out, "What are these useless gifts? Don't you know the only gift I want is to have my son back?"

But it was the love, caring, under-



standing and nurturing of those loved ones which has brought me so far from that first Father's Day. Now I can enjoy the joy of others. I can laugh once again. There is a life worth living.

For all those fathers for whom this is the first Father's Day without your child, have the best day that you can, with the understanding other fathers are with you on this day. One day, you too will be able to revisit this first Father's Day.

*Paul Kinney, BP/USA
Louisville, KY*

I Know

You don't need to say you're sorry.
It's written in your face.
I know you share my sadness
By the warmth of your embrace.

Don't try to justify the "why"
Or "how" this came to be;
Or explain away the mystery
Of death's reality.

Just know that more than any words
The thing I hold most dear
Is the friendship in your hand shake
And your hug and that you're here.

*Bruce Conley
Columbia, MO*

My Dad is a Survivor

by Kaye Des'Ormeaux

My dad is a survivor
which is no surprise to me.
He's always been a lighthouse
that helps you cross a stormy sea.
I walk with my dad each day
to lift him when he's down.
I wipe the tears he hides from others.
He cries when no one's around.
I watch him sit up late at night
with my picture in his hand.
He cries when he grieves alone
and tries to understand.
My dad is like a tower of strength.
He's the greatest of them all!
But there are times he needs to cry.
Please be there when tears fall.
Hold his hand or pat his shoulder
And tell him it's okay.
Be his strength when he is sad.
Help him mourn in his own way.
I watch over my precious dad
from the Heavens up above.
I'm so proud that he's a survivor.
I can still feel his love!

A FATHER'S GRIEF

by Ron Howard

In silent disbelief
I read those granite words
that tell a soldier's tale
and how valiantly he served.

Monuments to freedom
standing straight and tall
they represent men willing
to sacrifice it all.

I stand as tears fill my eyes
and pain chokes out my heart
so proud that you were willing
to go and do your part.

And though I do have pride
in the battles that you won
it gives me little comfort
for I have lost my son.

Rest peacefully my son,
your battles now are through.
Look down on me from Heaven
and remember I love you.



“Monumental Journey of the Heart”

2011 BP/USA National Gathering

Reston Sheraton Hotel

Reston, VA

July 28-31, 2011



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

***Thursday Evening “Kick Off” Program:
Concert by Singer, Songwriter & Bereaved Parent,
Cindy Bullens***

***Award Winning Documentary
“Space Between Breaths”
presented by Rosemary Smith***

Featured Speakers:

***Mitch Carmody, Becky Greer, Drs. Gloria & Heidi Horsley,
Dave Roberts, Darcie Sims, Rosemary Smith, & Ron Villano***

Awesome Entertainment:

***Alan Pedersen providing Inspirational Music
Bereaved Sibling, Jordan Herskowitz and his one-man play,
“Growing Up Jordy Pordy”***

Sibling Program for ages 9 to adult!

Don't Miss the June 1st Early Registration Discount Deadline!!

For more information and/or to register go to the Bereaved Parents of the USA website at:
www.bereavedparentsusa.org.

Book your hotel reservation on our personalized website:

www.starwoodmeeting.com/Book/Bereavedparents

***June 1st is the deadline to submit Memorial Sponsorship Pages ~
You don't want to miss out!***

Check the website for submission instructions.

For questions or more information contact Jodi Norman at 703-910-6277
Or Linda Harkness at 703-530-6496 or email: **bpusa.nova@yahoo.com**

A FATHER'S PRAYER

I am a man, God, and I have been taught that I should be strong and show no weakness. My wife needs me to be strong; I cannot and I must not be weak and lean on her. It is only with You that I can be honest, Lord, and even with You I am ashamed to admit it, but I want to cry. I can feel the tears securely dammed up behind eyes that want to burst. There is a voice in me that shouts, BE STRONG! BE A MAN! SHOW NO WEAKNESS! SHED NO TEARS! But there is another voice inside that speaks softly and somehow I feel it is Your voice. Is it You Who tells me that I am also a feeling human being who can cry if I need to? Is it Your voice that tells me that maybe my wife needs the tenderness of my tears more than she needs the strength of my muscles? You are right, Lord, as always. My wife needs to see my grief. She needs to feel the dampness of my tears and know the aching of my heart. Then, just as we became one to create this life, we become one in our grief which mourns this death. I think I understand. It is in sharing the awful pain of my grief that I become an even stronger man. It is in sharing my tears that I share my true strength. Oh, God, help me to communicate my deepest and most sensitive feelings to my wife so that we may become whole together.

Norman Hagley, Palestine, TX

To Parents who have Held on Tight to Each Other

Here's to you.
To what you've done.
Stayed together.
Supported each other.
Been Happy. Been Sad.
Made something of yourselves.
Grew up.
Changed.
Defied the odds.
Be proud of that.
Proud of you.
In love with each other.
Still.
Always.

Grief is like weeding in a garden in the summer.
You have to do it over and over...
until the season changes.

Fay Harden, Tuscaloosa, AL

DID YOU KNOW THEY WERE BEREAVED PARENTS?

Her approach to life could be summed up, "If it happened to me, I put it in a song." Loretta Lynn wrote and recorded songs about life; often the darker and more trying side of life. *Don't Come Home A'Drinking, The Pill, One's on the Way and The Home You're Tearing* about everyday problems to everyday people, country singers to take on taboo subjects in financial success.

Loretta Lynn's demanding work schedule and old son, Jack Benny Lynn, left her awash in went back to work. Songs after Jack's death *Stranger, Making Believe* and *Peace in the Valley*.



the drowning death of her thirty-four year grief and devoid of strength. Eventually, she included *Just A Woman, Who Was That*. This coal miner's daughter found her way back to life. So can you.

One cannot close the door on suffering and open another into joy. It doesn't work that way. When we dwell in the house of sorrow we have a long lease which cannot be cancelled, Eventually another door does open into a place of quietude and acceptance.

From Another Path by Gladys Tabor



BOOK REVIEWS



When There Are No Words

Charlie Walton

Pathfinder Publishing of California, 1996

Charlie Walton was a professional writer before he became a bereaved parent. After two of his sons died he found he was "standing with my nose pressed hard against the trees. I was in no position to pontificate about the forest." Much later he put pen to paper and delivered *When There Are No Words*, one of the finest books on early grief; the first moments, hours and days along the grief trail.

He tells us how he managed, what worked and what he would do differently. He reminds us to take care of ourselves and how to deal with others. He instructs while empathizing. All done with the talent and flair of an excellent writer.

Because this effort is most helpful to those just beginning this journey and to more seasoned veterans as they reach out to the newest members of our club it is well worth reading.

Red Hook Road

Ayelet Waldman

Doubleday, 2010

Ayelet Waldman is not a bereaved parent, but she gets it. *Red Hook Road* is a story of two very different families who share a common tragedy when their newly married children die. Although this is a novel and not a grief book, the emotions and attitudes her characters present will not be unfamiliar to veterans on the grief journey. Ms. Waldman deals with themes common to us such as: wanting to hear your child's name; or, the need to keep busy. She has written certain phrases that express, in succinct terms, the feelings many bereaved parents have experienced: "The funeral was over. Now there was nothing but the hollow expanse of a life without her daughter." "Iris had found herself anticipating this day [the unveiling of her daughter's headstone] ...because she longed for some fixed point on the calendar of sorrow to give focus to their diffuse and measureless misery."

This is not a book for the newly bereaved, but if you are further along and enjoy a good yarn, then consider taking a ride on *Red Hook Road*. You'll recognize the scenery.



GRADUATION TIME

by Peggy Gibson

It's June and graduation time again. Your child would have been among those wearing the cap and gown, walking down the aisle to the ever stirring "Pomp and Circumstance." Now there will be a vacant spot in the line. Should you attend? Can you stand the pain? Will people think

you're strange? As always, you must follow your heart. So, go if you like, and don't hide your tears. It's quite all right to miss your own child while celebrating the achievements of others. Just remember that your own instincts are the most important ones; that no one else can make this deci-

sion for you; and that it doesn't really matter what other people think. It was your child who died. This is your pain, and you have the right to feel it and deal with it in your own way – and may a bit more healing take place in the doing.

People who try to drown their sorrow should be told sorrow knows how to swim.

Ann Landers

PRACTICAL ADVICE

SOME FATHERLY ADVICE FOR BEREAVED FATHERS

- Take some time for yourself. Go fishing, take a long bike ride or go for a walk in the woods.
- Don't take on any new responsibilities. Give up some.
- Allow yourself to cry. This is a most healthy response because it not only lets out stored up tensions, but it releases toxins from your body.
- Deal with your natural anger by venting on things, not people
- Talk with other bereaved fathers.
- Focus on your feelings, not just on how to help your wife. There is a good possibility that you need more help than she does.
- Talk with your wife about your feelings. Listen to her.
- Accept the fact that men grieve differently from women and talk to your wife about this. Let her know your needs.
- Read about grief. Discuss your experiences with other bereaved fathers.
- Take one day at a time. It's the only way.



What we have once enjoyed deeply we can never lose. All that we love deeply becomes a part of us.

Helen Keller

WHAT DO I DO WITH MY CHILD'S THINGS?

This is a problem that faces all bereaved parents. We discuss it from time to time at our meetings. Some of us keep the child's room just as it was before the death. We don't want anything touched or moved. Some of us find solace in giving things away to close friends or relatives. Knowing that someone we love is wearing our child's clothes or playing with his or her toys brings us comfort. Some of us find we can deal with only a few items at a time: clothes one month; books another; perhaps toys a few months later. Some of us find that, as time goes on and we would have gotten rid of the things anyway, it becomes easier. For instance, after a while we realize that if the child were still alive, he/she would have outgrown the clothes. Then it's easier to give them away. Or he would have graduated from college this year and therefore would no longer use the study desk or clock radio. We can give these things away in the normal time sequence. The important thing is not to let others rush us into doing something before we are ready and not to let ourselves feel guilty about the amount of time it takes us to make decisions. When the time is right and the decision is right for us, we'll know what to do.

Nancy Mower, Honolulu, HI

PATIENCE

We need to develop patience. Patience with ourselves, our spouse, our kids, our friends. Starting with yourself use patience to help you accomplish the things you used to be able to do so quickly, but now you don't seem able to even get started, and if you do, you can't seem to stick to the job and get it finished. Be Patient. Give yourself a little longer, but by all means when you set yourself a job to do, keep working at it until completed. So many of us admit that apathy toward doing things which seemed ordinary and easy before, are now just too difficult to think about. If old hobbies simply don't interest you any more, try something new. Above all, doing something for someone else may turn out to be the best thing you ever did for yourself and for them.

*Mary LaTour
Dallas, TX*

Along the Road

by Robert Browning Hamilton

I walked a mile with Pleasure;
She chattered all the way,
But left me none the wiser
For all she had to say

I walked a mile with sorrow
And ne'er a word said she;
But oh, the things I learned from her
When Sorrow walked with me!





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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.