



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.

The Echoing Stillness

The Wind was fierce and loud. Porch furniture had grown wings and was flying past as I stood watching through my kitchen window. Trash can lids became Frisbees sailing through the air. Leaves, litter and lots of branches took flight on the gusting waves of this summer storm. Suddenly...a thunderous CRACK! One of my neighbor's magnificent ancient black walnut trees came crashing down, missing our house, but landing with an audible thump on our lawn, smashing my wife's garden where her carefully planted irises were waving their fond farewells till next year's blooming. Once before I witnessed such a storm that ravaged my neighbor's wood and laid a tree across our yard. But, that was a long time ago. Andrew died three days after his sixth birthday. It was 2:30 in the morning. He died after a ten month struggle with leukemia that left his mother and me thoroughly exhausted. All the hard, technical therapy approaches we had to learn about constantly clashed with our emotions that ranged from the softness of a mother holding her dying baby to a rock-hard rage that would gladly destroy the universe if it could. It was absolutely mind-numbing. Andrew's last great battle was two bone marrow transplants at a hospital far from our home which meant 100 mile round

*After the night is done;
Life brings the sweet with the bitter.
Laughter will follow tears,
Just after the snows of winter,
The glory of springtime appears.*

Thomas Malloy

trips every day. As time went on, the pace became more frantic. With each passing month Anne and I slept less and grew wearier. At last Andrew came home...to die. We had a party for him on his birthday. A hospice team helped us through his final hours. The funeral home came for his remains at 4:30 and the hospice team stayed till dawn. By mid morning the equipment company had removed the medical paraphernalia: hospital bed, I-V stand, beeping monitors. All gone. And then it was only the two of us, me and Anne, all alone, sitting there dazed, in a very loud, very frightening silence. Later that day it stormed; a violent winter storm. As if to punctuate the end of one struggle and the start of another, as I stood gazing out my kitchen window, the largest of my neighbor's massive trees fell in front of my eyes, hitting the ground with such a force I felt the house quiver. Our phone and electric lines

were severed. The quiet in that house was both real and metaphoric. Either way, the silence was deafening. That echoing stillness lasted for five months. We finally dragged ourselves out to meet new friends at the Bereaved Parents in Baltimore. At our first meeting, our hearing began to come back; just a little at first, but more and more over time. Our neighbor planted new trees that began to grow, ever so slowly. Likewise, our hearing, gone since the storm, started returning a little at a time. Somehow, though shattered, we found our way to the place we needed to be. We can occasionally hear that silence to this day, but we understand it a little better. It's not so frightening anymore.

Bill Lyon,
Baltimore



*There are no goodbyes for us.
Wherever you are,
You will always be in our hearts.*

Mahatma Ghandi



HE LIVES FOR ME

I shall see him
 In the beauty of the earth,
 In the loveliness of summer sunsets
 And in the loneliness of winter winds.
 In the delicate new life
 Of springtime trees,
 In the blazing glory
 Of fall's bright leaves.
 I shall see him
 In the ocean's mighty power.
 I shall see him in the wonder of the stars.
 I shall see him in the face
 Of happiness and care.
 I shall always see him everywhere.

Rita Asher, Cape Cod, MA

Year Two: Empty Holidays

Since my Genevieve Marie died in May of 2009 I go through the motions for my other two children. I fake my smile and laugh like I do any other day when there are no holidays. I buy gifts and cook dinners for everyone. I hate it. I want her here to celebrate with me. I still wait for her to call me so I can hear, "Hey Momma". There is never a day, minute or waking hour that I don't think about her. I remember the last Christmas that we had together and wish I could have it all back again. Why is it that time seems to fly by so fast, (already the second Christmas without my daughter is approaching) and yet, I always feel like I am going in slow motion? Is this the paradox of grief? To me, right now, the "Holidays" are just plain days that she is not with me. My hope is next year I may find some holiday spirit. I hope you find some, too.



Laura Wilson, Baltimore

It is heartening to know that others also are struck with unpredictable and inexplicable moments or days of deep sadness and loss, like a drenching rainstorm which we just slog through until it passes.

Meg Tipper, Baltimore

Remembering

Your life was a blessing, Your memory a treasure.
 You are loved beyond words, and missed beyond measure.
 Time has marched on, And the world may have changed.
 But deep in our hearts, You will always remain.

Parents of Brenda Kerstetter

Though gone much
 too soon
 Your child's Life
 Was a beautiful Gift
 That will Remain
 In so many Hearts
 Forever

Death
 Leaves a heartache
 No one can heal,
 Love
 Leaves a memory
 No one can
 Steal

Memories grow
 More meaningful
 With every
 Passing year,
 More precious
 And more Beautiful,
 More treasured
 And More dear.

BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA

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**To Vacation
Or
Not to Vacation.
That is the Question.**



No Vacation

There is no vacation from your absence.
Every morning I awake
I am a bereaved parent.
Every noon I feel the hole in my heart
Every evening my arms are empty.
My life is busy now, but not quite full.
My heart is mended,
But not quite healed.
For the rest of my life
Every moment will be lived without you.
There is no vacation from your absence.

Kathy Boyette, Gulf Coast, MS

Beach Havens

by Cathy Sosnowsky
from: *Holding On: Poems for Alex*
As the tide of grief goes down
New beaches are revealed.
Their sand, it's true, is wet,
And barnacles protrude,
But wear your rubber shoes
(hot pink would be preferred).
Step daintily on the shore;
A storm-thrown log
Will give you rest.
Now sit and sun yourself
And dream of those you love.

Vacation From Grief

After Brad died his girlfriend returned his high school ring to me. I put it on and did not remove it for a very long time. By wearing it I felt like I was taking Brad with me wherever I went. Actually, it was the grief I was carrying around with me; and I wasn't ready to let it go. About two years later my wife said she was tired of the constant gloominess that had infiltrated our lives and insisted we take a vacation. "And we're not taking our grief with us," she pleaded. Easier said than done.

On the day of departure I slid Brad's ring off my finger and placed it in my jewelry box. Just like when he was little and we'd leave him with his grandparents, I spoke to the ring. "We're only going for a few days. Me and mom need some alone time. I know you'll be here waiting for me. I'll pick you up as soon as I get back."

Somehow that seemed to work. The symbolic act of taking off the ring allowed me to have a nice time. Not surprising, the grief was waiting for me right where I left it. The grief, after eight years, has softened, but I still wear Brad's ring every day and I still take it off before going on vacation. And yes, I still say, "I'll see you when we get back."



Richard Berman, Baltimore

2011 National Gathering

July 28-31, 2011

Sheraton Reston Hotel

Reston, VA

Announcing the 2011 Speakers:

Darcie Sims, Rosemary Smith, Mitch Carmody,

Drs. Gloria & Heidi Horsley,

Ron Villano, Dave Roberts, Becky Greer



For full information and registration materials visit WWW.BEREAVEDPARENTSUSA.ORG



NEW HOLIDAY TRADITIONS

A New Christmas

After my husband and I split up, we cobbled the family back together for Christmas celebrations with our children, Stephen and Maggie, gathering at my ex's house for a morning of opening little stocking gifts and cooking a big breakfast. None of us cared about the religious significance of the holiday, and we didn't do much with presents either. It was a chance to be together. It became our "post divorce" tradition.

Then Maggie died. I knew I needed to be somewhere different that first Christmas, with no possibility of the feeling that we were doing what we always did but without Maggie. So I went to Florida to be with my brother and his family who loved Maggie and were grieving terribly too. Christmas remained low-key, with stock-



ings and food, but we added a walk on the beach. The next year (2009) I returned for our Florida Christmas and plan to do the same for 2010. It's a new tradition. I still get together with my ex and our son, but we do it on Maggie's birthday. Somehow that feels right.

Meg Tipper, Baltimore

Empty Stocking

Each Christmas we had stocking stuffers. Our son, Tyler, died at age 17 after a riding accident.

I broke down that first Christmas when I put his up and realized I didn't need to put stocking stuffers in it. I started writing a letter to him, about a page long, and sticking it in there. I just tell him in the letter how much I love him.



Vicki Blount,
Enid Oklahoma

Thanksgiving Angel

It was on a Wednesday, the day before Thanksgiving. "I need to keep reminding myself that this is my mother's funeral and not an extension of Brad's," I remember saying to the funeral director, the same man who helped us bury our son exactly eight weeks before. Unlike her grandson, who died suddenly, Mom had been in declining physical health for some time. Her mind, however, was alert and clear. When it was obvious she would only last a few more days we put out the call and all nine of her surviving grandchildren came in from around the country to say their goodbyes. The emotions ran deep, but Mom was at peace. She was eighty-five years old, tired of fighting the health issues and was ready to join our Dad, who had passed on a few years earlier. Thanksgiving was the next day. Although it was usually 'our' holiday my brother and sister-in-law agreed to host it this year as we were in no shape to do so. Our mother's death would make this an extraordinary Thanksgiv-



ing. Along with my brother's family and mine, my three sisters and their families were all in town. It had been

many years since we were all together. Eerily, I began to understand we could never be all together again. Not in this life, at least.

After dinner someone suggested that all the cousins stand together for a photo. I'm sure no harm was meant, but it was heart wrenching to see our other children and their cousins reunited minus Brad. The picture, emotions aside, turned out quite good. My wife could not look at it without falling apart so she had a recent photo of Brad superimposed in the background and slightly above the rest as if he is a guardian angel looking down on his cousins and siblings. That's how I think of him now: Our guardian angel, helping his grandparents there, and keeping an eye on us here.

Every year now, we put the picture on the Thanksgiving table to remind us of our missing children who are in another 'state.'

Richard Berman, Baltimore

Practical Advice

This column is dedicated to providing ideas to help you find your way through the grief.

**From: Tabitha Jayne,
Transformational Loss Coach**

Dance is a great way of tapping into deep emotions and connecting with yourself after loss. When I talk about dance I don't mean the kind of dancing you do on a Saturday night but rather solo dancing to allow self expression. It's very hard to let yourself get caught up in music and dance with abandon when there are others around.

This type of dancing is a throwback to using dance as part of rituals and ceremonies. The key is the intent behind the dance. Find some music you are attracted to. Create an intention for your dance. I know that after my brother died a lot of my intentions were all about expressing my anger safely. Maybe you want to express your love, let go of pain or just tap into something you can't express.

Moving to the music in an authentic way allows you to tap into deep emotions and express them. It's not important that you don't know what they are only that you have expressed them. Dancing also boosts your immune system which is lowered after loss. This means that you are working on a physical and emotional level creating powerful internal change.

It can be intimidating, at first, to do this in a group. Pick a song you like. Make sure you are alone and put it on loudly. Stand up and close your eyes. Listen to the music and feel it with your body. Then slowly let your body move in its own rhythm. As you're alone you don't have to worry about looking silly. Experience how this feels. You have nothing to lose.

From: Susan Zimmermann

Begin by jotting down memories, little or big ones. You might want to pull out an old photo album or scrapbook or an object to jog your thoughts. Now read over your list. Choose one item from your list that you want to write about. Give this memory a context, a beginning, middle and an end. Make it rich in detail. Muster up the courage to digress, for it is in the digression that you will discover what you really want to remember. From time to time pick another and another item from your list. Write about each with detail and digression. After a while you will have a wonderful collection of vignettes or short stories that will be yours for keeping or sharing.

From: Mt. Vernon, IL

Talk to those who have traveled this way before, if only to assure yourself that there is a way: a way to survive, a way to get back to life, a way to take your kids with you there. Look for confirmation that you are on the right route and that this route will get you to a place where there is some sense of arrival and comfort.

I don't pretend that I am completely comfortable in this new life or that I have enjoyed the trip through grief. I don't even know that "comfort" is the right word. What I can say, though, is that I know some of what to expect. I can't say that I can never get lost. I do hope, however, that when I do, I know where to find direction. I can look to those who have gone this way before, who have suffered this loss.

From: COPE

Plant a tree, bush or garden in honor of your child. A perennial that grows year after year will continue to remind you of the light your child brought into your life. If your child had a favorite flower, consider adding that to your garden.

Wear something special. A picture of your child in a locket, a pin she made for you. A color that was his favorite. These things will help you feel connected to your child.

Create a reminder of your child around the house. A collage or other art project, a memory box, an afghan or pillow with your child's picture on it. Something made especially in honor of your child will help to honor and work through your grief.

From: Laurie Pawlik-Kienien

Consider volunteering regularly at a hospital, senior's home, school, prison, animal shelter – anywhere, really. You'll never heal completely from your losses, but you can distract yourself from the pain. And, you'll help others in the process, which is so good for both them and you.



***What soap does for the body,
Tears do for the soul.***

Jewish Proverb



BOOK REVIEWS

Standing at the Edge

A Year of Days After Sudden Death

Meg Tipper

Apprentice House, 2010

After her daughter, Maggie, died Meg Tipper began to journal. What followed is really two stories. The first is the emotional roller-coaster of grief expressed in daily synopsis. The second is how she managed to function, and sometimes not function, while dealing with the first. Newly bereaved parents will find her a guiding light: telling us how she managed to get through the long days and even longer nights. Veterans on this journey will recognize the coping methods Ms. Tipper employed. A number of relevant quotes



from both the famous and her friends succinctly express her feelings on various days. She does not preach to us; rather she allows us a glimpse into her life from which we can gain insight, shed tears and nod in understanding as we relive that first year with her.

Ms. Tipper suggests if you plan to purchase the book to do so through the web site www.standingattheedge.org. A donation will be made to the Maggie Feiss Fund which supports epilepsy research.

One Way Ticket

Rita Lowenthal

Beaufort Books, 2007



This, like other stories of an addict's long battle, is hard to read. Ms. Lowenthal takes us on her family's 25 year journey of the near successes and disappointments of her son's heroin addiction. She intersperses history of Josh's (and her) younger years through the telling, keeping this from being a straight forward 'cradle to grave' biography. She makes it clear to any parent whose child "perished in this modern day plague" that you can "experience the depths of parental impotence and survive." This book is not about grieving; it is about strength of spirit, and that makes it well worth reading.

Overcoming Life's Disappointments

Harold Kushner

Anchor Books, 2007

Using Moses as his example, Rabbi Kushner writes about finding new dreams and goals when those we've held (even those we've held for a very long time) become unobtainable. He continues, in this book, to offer his personal view of G-d's influence, repeated in various forms through all his books: "G-d's power is not the power to control events; it is the power to enable people to deal with events beyond their power to control." His use of many varied sources helps us find a way to happiness when life kicks us in the butt.

THE WELL OF SORROW AND JOY

When Matt died, I cried more than I thought possible. I didn't know I could shed so many tears. Sometimes the tears would rush to my eyes, unbidden and without warning. Sometimes I could feel the tears standing, waiting for a signal, for permission to be released...like when I visited my son's grave.

The Profit says that sorrow carves into your being. That seems exactly right. Grief hollowed me out. I've been emptied, gutted. My stomach muscles would ache from the heaving of my wails and screams. As I grieve, I want to believe that something good, beyond the annihilation of my being, is taking place.

Now I understand I have two choices. Neither of them will give my son back to me the way I want him - alive, laughing, warm, filling up my arms.

I can choose to stop living - not so much the suicide option, although I considered that, but the living - dead option: turning from life and love, hunkering down in my grief and waiting out the days of years left to me, holding tight to grief in all its anguished intensity, feeling that's the closest I can get to Matt while I still draw breath.

Or I can choose transformation, reaching, stumbling around trying to find my way back to living fully again. Making myself do things, be with people, be outside, take in nature's beauty, pay attention to good moments.

So far I have chosen the path pointed toward living, mostly because I don't want my surviving sons to be burdened with more loss and pain. But I also feel the need to find out who I will be, having raised three wonderful sons and then buried one of them. I want to see who will be looking back at me from the mirror at the bottom of the well, someone who knows there can be light and life beyond the blackness...to see if my laughter will rise up from the deepest place that my tears have come from. As a bereaved mother I doubted that I could ever feel joy again, much less a joy that could match the depth of my sorrow.

There's a place of knowing inside each of us (the soul?) where we can realize that the words written in *The Profit* are true... and that it takes a lifetime of living to learn this wisdom. I hope it is true, because if it is, then the joy that is still possible in my life will be staggering, spectacular, indescribable and enduring.

Nancy Ronquillo

*Lord, grant me the grace
to seek a rainbow-
But, most of all, grant me the
courage to go into the rain.*

The sorrow for the dead is the only sorrow from which we refuse to be divorced. Every other wound we seek to heal, every other affliction to forget; but this wound we consider it a duty to keep open; this affliction we cherish and brood over in solitude.

Washington Irving

DID YOU KNOW THEY WERE BEREAVED PARENTS?

The happy, delightful songs Irving Berlin gave to the American people belied the personal tragedies that he carried in his heart. At five years old he witnessed the Cossacks, on orders from the Czar, burn down his entire village. His family fled Russia and landed in New York's Bowery. His father died three years later and Irving grew up on the streets in abject poverty. Just when it seemed his life was really beginning – when he started to become known as a song writer (Alexander's Ragtime Band) – the love of his life, Dorothy, died suddenly just six months after their wedding.

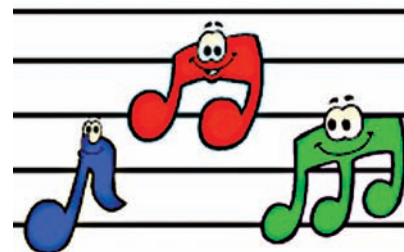
After Dorothy's death Berlin buried him-

self in his work producing such hits as *Blue Skies*, *Always*, *Puttin' on the Ritz*, *I've Got My Love To Keep Me Warm* and *God Bless America*. Eventually he married again. In 1928 his wife, Ellin, delivered a baby boy they named Irving, Jr. Three weeks later the baby died on Christmas day.

Somehow they managed to put their grief aside. Three more children, all girls, followed. Fourteen years after his son's death, Berlin wrote what is arguably the most popular Christmas song ever written, *White Christmas*. The holiday was always a bittersweet time for the Berlin family. Every year, on Christmas

Day, the Berlins would lay a wreath on the grave, a tradition their heirs carry on today. It is truly amazing that a man who had experienced so much personal sadness was able to wish for everyone else:

“May your days be merry and bright, and may all your Christmases be white.”



BECAUSE MY SON DIED

by Fran MacArthur, Southern MD

Dear Friend,

Because my son died –

I know the emptiness, the awful aloneness that follows those unforgettable words, “He’s gone.”

Because my son died –

I can feel a searing empathy with all other mothers and fathers who have lost a child.

Because my son died –

I find myself agonizing with the parents of those children, young men and women whose deaths are reported with frightening regularity on our television; from murder, suicide, and auto accidents.

Because my son died –

I follow with a sense of dread the reports

that we are sending young men and women to fight a war on the other side of the world. I hurt with those mothers and fathers who watch them go, wondering whether they will see them again.

Because my son died –

I have had to rearrange my priorities. Things that once seemed important to me no longer matter; I look with different eyes at the scenes around me. When I see a sunset I wonder if John sees it too. When I look out to sea, I remember that is where John is buried because he loved nature; nature brings him closer to me.

Because my son died –

I have had to learn that a nice neat sense of order that says children will survive their parents is myth, not reality.

Because my son died –

I must live with memories – funny moments, tender moments, special times when we were very happy or very close, and yes, times when we had our differences.

Because my son died –

I am a member of an exclusive club, and while I would rather not be eligible to belong, I have found in my support group love, true sympathy and understanding. I am not alone in my grief.

*When I Lost You
I lost the sunshine and roses,
I lost the heavens of blue,
I lost the beautiful rainbow,
I lost the morning dew,
I lost the angel who gave me,
Summer the whole winter through
I lost the gladness that turned into
sadness,
When I lost you*

Irving Berlin

JUST FOR A MOMENT

Just for a moment we held in our hands a gift so precious, so rare.
Just for a moment we beheld with our eyes her face so lovely, so fair.
Just for a moment her sensitive touch,
Just for a moment her lyrical songs.
Just for a moment she was where she belongs.
Just for a moment we heard with our ears her laughter thrilling the air.
The echoes are lingering still; they always will.
Now, just for a moment, she lives in our hearts, cherished with tenderest care.
For as long as we live, for as long as we love, she will always be there.

Philip Jones



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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.