



A JOURNEY TOGETHER

NATIONAL NEWSLETTER OF THE BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA

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WHY DO I COME TO BEREAVED PARENTS MEETINGS?

By Charlotte Miller
BP/USA Central Arkansas Chapter

A family member recently asked me why I continue to come to Bereaved Parents meetings? She said, "After all, it's been 5 years since your son died. Don't you find it depressing to go to those meetings?" I stopped and thought for just a minute...it is incredibly sad to hear the stories of loss and pain, but it does not depress me. I ache for those families whose loss is more recent, where the pain is a heart savagely torn into raw pieces and where the pain seems relentless and like it will last forever. But had I not had the support of this group, I wonder if I would have made it, and kept my sanity, through the past 5 years. I know for certain that my grief journey, as hard as it has been, was made easier, and my burden lighter, because it was shared by those who truly understood my loss and who constantly reassured me that I was not losing my mind...I was just grieving.

I have personally been blessed by a supportive family and by loyal friends at church and at work who, even after 5 years, send me cards or flowers or call or e-mail to see how I am doing. And I am grateful for their support. But somehow there is nothing quite like the hug of another bereaved parent and the tears that mingle with mine as we grieve together the death of our own child and our friend's child. I can't explain it. I can only be grateful to have experienced this amazing support that has made this unending grief journey bearable.

I can share laughter and tears at the same time with parents who understand the guilt that accompanies those first moments of laughter. It seems like a betrayal of our children...even though we know that they would want us to go on and they would not want us to be miserable. A friend who was recently widowed told me just today that she was so sorry that I had the grief experience to be able to comfort her and yet she was inexplicably comforted by the fact that she was not alone in her grief...that there were others who understood even a portion of what she was feeling. I know what she means. I felt that way the first time I came to a Bereaved Parents meeting and every time I have come since then. I would not have chosen the pain of this loss and yet I would not want those whose children have recently died to not have the loving support that others gave to me when I thought I could not stand another day, another minute of the pain of our loss.

And so we continue to come monthly...to meet, to hug, to cry, to laugh to listen and to try to understand another's story. And we come to love each other's children that we never got to meet. Their faces become almost as familiar as our own children's countenance and so incredibly dear because they were so special to our friends. In sharing our children's lives and their deaths, they continue to live on through our stories and our pictures and we are comforted as we grieve together.



THE HOLIDAYS

The leaves are turning and falling. Halloween is coming. Thanksgiving is coming with the family get togethers. And Christmas is coming with all its parties, gifts, music, etc. Remember the good memories of past times and make new memories.



**BEREAVED PARENTS OF
THE USA**

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The ultimate goal of the grief work is to be able to remember without emotional pain and to be able to reinvest emotional surpluses. While the experience of grief work is difficult and slow, it is also enriching and fulfilling. The most beautiful people we know are those who have known defeat, suffering, struggle and loss and have found their way out of the depths. These persons have an appreciation, sensitivity and understanding of life that fills them with compassion, gentleness and a deep loving concern.

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross
From BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE
DON'T JUST HAPPEN



**FROM THE
DESK OF THE
EDITOR**

Two tragedies became front page stories in USA TODAY these past weeks and had some good insights into grief.

One was about Tony Dungy, coach of the Colts, as he begins another year with his team. His son, James, was found dead, having hung himself. The family, as all of us, was suddenly confronted with this unexpected tragedy. Father and son were very close and the son was often with his father at training camp, games, etc. Dungy says, "But then the choice is how you handle the pain. You can choose to go on and fight through it, or you can choose to succumb to it. You can't make the feeling go away. There is no Novocain or anything that can just take it away. You begin to realize that you can still function, you can still move forward."

He also said, "One thing I've learned from this: I'll bet you I've talked to over 200 people in the same situation. They're going through the same things; it's just that thousands of people don't know about it. On the one hand, it tells you you're not in this by yourself. There are a lot of people making it through. On the other hand, if you can share your feelings and say some things, it probably is going to help a lot of people."

This kind of testimony in a major interview and from a respected coach may touch many who are also grieving and need advise. How much this is like what we have all experienced and like the great service a support group such as BP/USA serves.

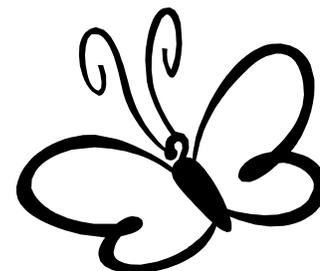
The second story was the collection of stories from the survivors of 911 victims on the fifth anniversary of those tragedies. One front page story, again in USA TODAY, was about 4 widows who just happened to get together after the tragedy. They met for coffee and found that they could talk without

having to explain things – they all just understood. They found that they had similar experiences and feelings but they also had different feelings that could help one another. They are still meeting regularly. They have written a book, LOVE YOU, MEAN IT. This title is on all their e-mails, often shortened to LYMI. "The message was clear," they write, "Love is a gift. Share it.

One could say they have a little support group that works much like our BP/USA. An excerpt from their books says, "By writing this all down, we've been able to see in black and white just how far we've come and how much we've helped one another. In the time since we first met, all four of us have learned and grown more than we ever thought possible. ...Together, we've reached a point where we can look at our lives and know how truly blessed we are. We make sure to treasure every good thing that happens to us, because in life, nothing is certain."

How much both of these stories show the need for supporting family, friends and groups. It also shows the value of keeping a journal so that you can look back and see how far you have come.

It is good to see things like this coming out in newspapers and books so that many of those out there who are grieving can know that they are normal in their feelings and that it does get better even though we will never get over the loss – only through it. Reach out to people you meet and/or know who may need to hear this message.



DEATH IS NOTHING AT ALL

Henry Scott Holland
Canon of St. Paul's Cathedral, London 1847-1918

“Death is nothing at all.
I have only slipped away into the next room.
I am I and you are you.
Whatever we were to each other that we are still.
Call me by my old familiar name
Speak to me in the easy way which you always used
Put no difference in your tone
Wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow
laugh, as we always laughed
At the little jokes we enjoyed together
Play, smile, think of me, pray for me
Let my name be ever the household word that it always was
Let it be spoken without effort
Without the ghost of a shadow on it
Life means all that it ever meant
It is the same as it ever was
There is absolute unbroken continuity.
What is death but a negligible accident?
Why should I be out of mind because I am out of sight?
I am waiting for you, for an interval,
Somewhere very near
Just around the corner.
All is well.
Nothing is past; nothing is lost
One brief moment and all will be as it was before
How we shall laugh at the trouble of parting when we meet again!

From a sermon on death delivered in St. Paul's Cathedral in 1910 while the body of King Edward VII was lying in state at Westminster. This is on the most visited page of www.poeticexpressions.co.uk

THE GATHERING

By Carla Dvoracek
Coeur d'Alene, ID BP/USA
Mother of Eric Dvoracek

We wander the hotel.
Moms and Dads hiding scars
under picture buttons of children gone.

Paper programs in hand list workshop titles:
Preserving Memories
Quit Kissing My Ashes
Sudden Death
When there Were No Miracles

At meal times around banquet tables
we softly ask...
What was his precious name?
How did she leave?
How long has it been?

Each chronicle sears, then soothes
as a mother once again can enjoy
her child's feats,
and remember his outrageous laugh
and the color of her hair.

Permission to pursue the texture,
bumps and ridges
of personalities vanished is implicit.
Stories are retrieved and cradled.
Laughter and sadness easily mingle here.

But this contract has a price,
for even we gasp backward
as she tells of two sons now gone,
three triplet girls lost or a vicious
murder.

Heroes of 10, 18 and 25 years since,
come to offer trust and hope.
Initially staggering through lifeless living,
they too knew unadorned intimacy with
death.
Their testimony of life's power to breathe
into us again
allow my grief to move softly through me
leaving a memorial of tenuous optimism.

Written after attending the
2006 National Gathering

For information about
the 2007 Gathering
See page 7.

WISH

By Sascha

I wish you gentle days
and quiet nights.
I wish you memories
to keep you strong.

I wish you time to smile
And time for song.

And then I wish you friends
to give you love,
when you are hurt and lost
and life is blind.

I wish you friends and love
And peace of mind.

By Mary Cleckley
BP/USA Member

It's getting to be that time of year. The holidays are almost upon us, as though you haven't noticed! Those of you who are approaching your first Thanksgiving, Christmas or Hanukkah without your child are probably already anticipating them without glee. Know that you are normal.

All of us who have gone through those first of many holidays without our children understand how you feel. I don't know of any way to avoid that apprehension. It is part of the experience of losing someone you love. I can tell you that the fear of the unknown is one of the worst fears there is. Once you have gone through those special family-oriented times without your child or children, it is an unknown no longer. In the future, though you may not enjoy them in the same way you once did, at least you know how it feels.

You will be able eventually to help yourself and your family discover ways of approaching and observing these days so that they are less traumatic. I found I got in the worst trouble when I allowed myself to get so far into the future. Worry about this day because this is the only day you have to get through right now., Though you may not think so now, you will once again find something for which to be thankful. It takes time. Be patient.

HOLIDAZE

By Shirley Corrigan, BP/USA
of Northern Texas from
"Where Are All The Butterflies?"

I was getting ready to go to the store to purchase candy for the "great pumpkin day," which brought my attention to the holidays of preceding years: Thanksgiving, Christmas, Chanukah and New Years – those days that threaten us so much.

This is the fifth holiday season since my son Douglas's death, yet I still have a fleeting desire to run and hide. Although last season was not as terrible as the one before, I know this year there will be tears shed and some lonely times. Such times are very private moments of grief for me now.

If you are bereaved, I hope that you will take some time for yourself during the holidays. Take the time to cry and take time to be alone. Try not to take on assignments from other family members who cannot know the exhaustion you experience. Ask for the things you think you need. Others cannot read your mind, yet it is so difficult to tell someone that you are hurting and need something from him or her. There is no requirement to pretend you are okay when, in fact, you are not.

Healing is a slow process requiring a lot of work. I always know when others have never experienced a great loss, for they will say *time will heal all wounds*. What they do not know and cannot know is that healing a great grief requires hard work which time only permits.

Time itself cannot heal anything. It is not the passage of time in itself, but the pain and suffering endured and the struggle to reclaim one's life which through time earns a new life. Others see only the end result without realizing the work that went into the healing; therefore, others can only allude to superficial and trite remarks.

Take the time you need to complete your work, to heal your spirit, your mind, and your body and your will to live again. Be good to yourself. Remember that healing is possible through your own effort and determination, and not simply by the passage of time.

A FORGIVING THANKSGIVING

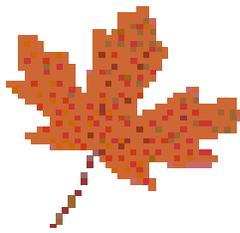
By Jim Hobbs, BP/USA of
Northern Texas from
"Where Are All The Butterflies?"

Thanksgiving was always an easy holiday. Unlike Christmas, there was no pressure of giving just the *right* gift! Thanksgiving Day brought family gatherings and good food. Late on those afternoons, we would return home full from over-eating and satisfied that our family relationships were intact. It was also a day that reminded us of everything for which we were thankful.

We are supposed to be thankful for our health, our families, our comfortable life, etc. The death of a child changes our perceptions, however. When the family now gathers around the Thanksgiving table, I now see a missing plate that no one else sees. When our nieces and nephews are laughing or crying, I hear a voice that no one else hears. When a family member recounts a story about something his or her child did last wee, I wish for a story to tell. (Of course, when I say *no one else*, I exclude my wife and daughter. I'm sure that they see, hear and wish what I do, although probably at different times.

We still have much to be thankful for, we bereaved parents, and we should remember that. But now Thanksgiving Day has an additional observance for us too, doesn't it? It is a day of forgiveness also. We must forgive others who cannot acknowledge the missing child, for whatever reasons. If family and friends cannot understand us, then we must exhibit tolerance, forgiveness and understanding. On a day on which we offer thanks, we can climb another step on our ladder to recovery.

I hope you have a forgiving Thanksgiving.



THANKSGIVING

By Shirley Ottman, BP/USA of
Northern Texas from
"The Slender Thread"

The first Thanksgiving after a loved one's death can be very difficult. All the traditional thankfulness that bereaved families once acknowledge and shared with others no longer seems joyous. One might even feel cynical or bitter. What have we to be thankful for when our loved ones have been plucked from our midst? And, in some cases, there has not even been an opportunity to say goodbye. We feel as if other people who have never experienced such deaths go about totally oblivious of the great pain we bereaved endure. Of course others have reason to be thankful! But why should we be forced to join this celebration – or any other – just because it is traditional, or just because the rest of our family included us, or just because society in general views us suspiciously if we do not participate?

The answer to these questions is that we need not celebrate if we do not feel like it. We may ignore the day altogether, we may go out of town or otherwise be unavailable to join other family members for the traditional feast; weather permitting, we may take a picnic to our child's grave site; we may confine the day to immediate family members or close friends. We may have the meal catered if we want the customary dinner but cannot muster the energy to prepare it. We may skip the festivities and plan something else instead, such as arranging old snapshots and photographs in albums, enlisting all the other family members' participation. Such gatherings might spark

the sharing of favorite anecdotes; so be sure, if you are very recently bereaved, that you would be able to welcome all the memories. If you try this latter approach and find it more overwhelming than you anticipated, do not hesitate to halt the project or excuse yourself to go to bed while others finish the album.

Others may think of additional ways to spend Thanksgiving Day. The point is that you should spend it however you think you would benefit most. If anyone else tells you what is best for *you*, he or she is being very presumptuous. Sometime during this season you may discover, in spite of yourself, that there are a few things for which you are actually thankful. On my first Thanksgiving after my daughter's death, I found that, although I still terribly resented her death, I remained astonishingly thankful for her life, however brief it seemed to me. That was about all I was consciously thankful for that year.

The following year, when grief was less intense and real healing had begun, I could be truly thankful not only for her life, but also for all the rest of my family and friends who had borne this grief with me, for the formation of our local bereavement support group and the new friends I had found there, for the help of friends and businesses, for God's strength when I grew faint, for fresh laughter, for migrating birds that enhance our environment twice a year, and for other blessings too numerous to mention.

ORNAMENTS OF GRIEF

By Margaret Brownley
Bereavement Magazine,
Nov./Dec. 2002
1-88-604-4673 (HOPE)

When astronaut James Irwin returned from space, he described what it was like: "The earth reminded us of a Christmas tree ornament hanging in the blackness of

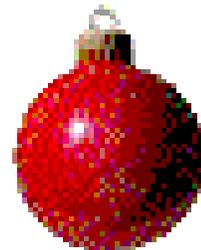
space...that beautiful, warm, living object looked so fragile, so delicate, that if you touched it with a finger it would crumble and fall apart. Seeing this has to change a man, has to make a man appreciate the creation of God and the love of God."

Death forces us to look at a loved one through the empty black space of our grief. Alone and in despair, we naturally seek something that is familiar: a memory of happier times, a memory of our loved one: Planet Earth. The memory hangs in the darkness like a shiny bright ornament. Such "ornaments" can be seen only from a distance, mirroring the soul and reflecting the deepest regions of the heart. As the pain eases and grief subsides, the warm, loving memories multiply until the darkness disappears behind a sea of jewel-tone "ornaments."

Like astronauts gazing at earth, we find comfort in memories. These special "ornaments" that hang in the darkness of our soul are fragile too, as earth is fragile. Anger can break them; depression can hide their luster.

Hang your "ornaments" for everyone to see by placing photo albums of a loved one on the coffee table. Light a memory candle and place a blue ornament on the tree bearing your loved one's name. Fill the house with the sounds of your loved one's favorite music.

Take time out from the holiday rush to enjoy memories of the past and work on next year's "ornaments."



SURVIVING SPECIAL DAYS

By Rabbi Earl Grollman

For you, the bereaved, there are significant events that are especially difficult: birthdays, anniversaries, Mother's Day, Father's Day, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Chanukah, New Year's Eve, Passover, Easter, Bar and Bat Mitzvahs, weddings and confirmations. You remember when they were such joyful, sharing spiritual times. Now they are days of wrenching memories, lost hopes and dreams. How to survive when you experience such anguish and feel so empty, depressed, abandoned, angry at life and even at God?

It is not a choice of pain or no pain, but how you manage the pain on this special day.

Planning ahead may lessen some of the despair. You need to feel less like a victim and more like a survivor. You may decide to do things differently; like changing old routines or starting new customs. Just don't escape into loneliness. Choose the right people to be with those friends or relatives who allow you to share your innermost feelings. You should be allowed to mention your loved one's name, tell favorite stories, cry or laugh at past events.

Remember your loved one in a way that is meaningful to you. Light a memorial candle, peruse a photo album, watch home videos, write a letter or poem to your beloved, visit someone else who may be alone and suffering.

Especially you may need interludes of emotional and spiritual respite – a quiet walk, meditation, prayer. Perhaps, more than any other of life-cycle events, the death of a loved one raises the most profound issues about good and evil, reward and punishment and a concept of an afterlife.

You may find consolation and hope in meaningful rituals and the Holy Scriptures. Theology might aid in releasing those aching feelings of helplessness and guilt.

Painful losses often shake up spiritual beliefs. You may be surprised to find yourself furious at God for allowing this tragedy to occur. But great religious leaders in the Bible have asked the same question: "My God, why have you forsaken me?" The questioning of faith is a normal expression of loss and consistent with later spiritual growth.

As time goes along, you may eventually draw strength from your religious heritage. Faith may not immediately take away your heartache, but faith may help you ultimately to accept the unacceptable.

Take consolation in knowing that other people have survived what you now feel. They often remark that the anticipation was frequently worse than the special day itself.

WHEN ALL YOU CAN DO IS BUY FLOWERS

By Sabra Penrod
St. Louis, MO BP/USA

One of the many hurdles that I faced after my son Matthew died was not being able, during the holiday season, to buy him anything ever again. When the holidays rolled around, I had such an empty feeling. I was buying gifts for my surviving children and all I could get Matthew was flowers for his grave. That just wasn't enough!

Shopping was such a chore because I didn't have the energy and the Christmas spirit just wasn't there. Not being able to buy anything for my Matthew was just unbearable. What has helped me so much throughout the years is our St. Peters BP/USA support group meeting. At our December Potluck, Picture and Gift Night, we are asked

to bring a gift. The gift is something that we would have bought for our child if he/she were alive. This is not mandatory but the majority of the group does participate. We go around the table and each person displays what they bought and explains why they bought and explains why they bought it. Hearing funny stories that are told is just wonderful. I hear laughter and see tears at the same time. The gifts are later taken to a local children's home.

At first, the gifts that were taken to the children's home consisted of a couple of bags. However, the generosity has grown more and more each year. The parents that don't attend meetings anymore throughout the year will come to the meeting in December, just to bring a gift for their child.

On Christmas morning, when my surviving children are opening their gifts, I sit back and I picture a child that probably would have not gotten a gift at Christmas, opening the gift that I bought Matthew. That gives me such peace.

I will not wish you joy this holiday season. That is something that will come later. But I will say this; do as much or as little as you can handle; don't push yourself too much. I will, however, wish you peace.



The officers and Board of Directors of BP/USA and your Newsletter editor wish you peace at these seasons too. We hope the articles in this Newsletter – all by people who have experienced the death of a child – will help you through the seasons. We hope you will find peace and joy in your memories.

**BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA
MEMORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS**

Barbara O'Hanlon	In loving memory of Charmane Hart
Patrick & Christina Poggi	Donation for work of BP/USA
Mary Murphy	In loving memory of her son, Dylan
Renee Dudnikov	Donation for expenses at 2007 Gathering
Mary Cleckley	In loving memory of Steven Estes, son of Charles & Elizabeth Estes

If we missed listing a donation, we apologize. If you will notify the Treasurer of your gift and the memorial, we will be sure it is acknowledged in the next Newsletter. Thank you. Our Treasurer is Dave Hurley and he may be reached at 3805 West San Juan Street, Tampa, Florida 33629-7819, by phone at 813-831-2588 or by e-mail at david.hurley@gte.net. Since BP/USA is a qualified charitable 501(c) (3) organization, your donation may be tax deductible.

The work of BP/USA is financed entirely by contributions. All the leaders, national and local, are volunteers. Donations go directly:

- To help found chapters : there is no charge to found a chapter and each new chapter is given a group of books to help them start a library, some copies of our brochures and the quarterly Newsletter without charge.
- To help in the sending of the quarterly Newsletter which sent by mail (to over 400 persons) or e-mail (also over 400 people) at no cost.
- To help to keep costs of attending the Annual National Gathering as low as possible in order that anyone wishing to attend can do so.
- To maintain a web site (www.bereavedparentsusa.org) . This web site reaches numerous persons and provides a means to find a nearby chapter, read the newsletters, read special brochures and articles, find information about the Gathering and find links to other organizations serving the bereaved as well as a means to reach out for help with the grief process.

You may designate a donation to any of these areas or to the general work of the BP/USA. If there is no designation, the money will be used for general operating funds. Please always designate carefully how you wish a memorial or gift listed. We thank our chapters, individual members and other friends for their generous support of BP/USA and its work.



*Winds of Healing...
Wings of Hope...*

**PLAN NOW TO ATTEND
THE 2007 GATHERING**

**INFORMATION ON
WEB SITE
AS AVAILABLE**

Bereaved Parents of the USA Chicago, Illinois
National 2007 Gathering July 13-15, 2007
Doubletree Hotel Downers Grove, IL
www.bereavedparentsusa.org