



A JOURNEY TOGETHER

NATIONAL NEWSLETTER OF THE
BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA

LEARNING TO LIVE AGAIN

By Rhonda Henshaw
BP/USA Central Arkansas Chapter

June 21, 2007 was five years since my son's death. Sometimes I can't believe it has been even a year so how could five years have already passed? Yet it feels like a lifetime since I held my baby boy, David. He was not a baby anymore. He was 18 and becoming a fine young man. I was very proud of him and I love and miss him very much but life is getting better than I ever thought it would be after his death.

I moved this month so, over the last two months, I have been packing which included Dave's room. First I was going to sell the house so I just re-decorated and made it look like a guest room but all of his things remained in the closet. I had cleaned out the dresser within the first couple of years, but never made it past that point; re-decorating was hard and sad. I decided I had to finish packing up his room. Actually, my Mom did all of his clothes in the closet but I found some unexpected things—like the last thing he wore in a box from the detectives and the case file with pictures that were traumatic to me. I also donated some clothes and toys to the Union Rescue Mission which left me with many mixed feelings.

This weekend will be my last weekend in the house but I haven't been sad like I expected. I hope the feelings of happiness that I have had lately will continue. I had forgotten what it was like to have a truly happy moment. Sure, I have laughed

over the last five years, but to catch yourself in just a good, happy mood like "today's a great day" for no reason—I hadn't really had one of those days until recently. I guess I had given up hope of ever having one of those days again. Granted, it didn't last all day, probably not even an hour, but it was a great feeling—a feeling that left me with hope and promise that this journey of grief will change and I can make progress and live a happy life. I know I still have many difficult days to live through but I also know now that I will survive them. I have learned to accept the fact that I will never be who I was again and I will have a new normal. This was something I was determined I could overcome but now I know I can't but just having hope again is great!

I want to thank all of my friends and family who have helped me travel through this journey. I appreciate their continued support. Bereaved Parents of the USA has been my strength and my star of hope!



This article relates well to our theme for the 2008 Gathering, SEEDS OF HOPE. Rhonda has been sowing her seeds of hope as she travels on her journey through grief. Read more about the 2008 Gathering in this newsletter, in the months ahead and also, as information becomes available, on our web page at www.bereavedparentsusa.org.

From FOOTSTEPS THROUGH THE VALLEY

Somewhere between depression and recovery, lies the beginning of HOPE.

By Darcie Sims

AND THAT WAS THE DEAL

Michael Gartner wrote about the sudden loss of his 17 year old son, Christopher, to juvenile diabetes:

"Tim Russert of NBC called Friday, devastated, as we all are, and said the only thing that has helped: "If God had come to you seventeen years ago and said, 'I'll make you a bargain. I'll give you a beautiful, wonderful, happy and healthy kid for seventeen years and then I'll take him away', you would have made that deal in a second."

And that was the deal.

DECEMBER 9

December 9, 2007 is the annual worldwide Candle Lighting. On that Sunday bereaved parents all over the world light a candle in memory of their child/children. This is to be done at 7 pm, and, as people in each country light their candles, the light spreads throughout the world. Some groups or chapters have their candlelight memorial on that night. This can be an individual event too.

BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA

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FROM THE-
DESK OF
THE
EDITOR

Another good Gathering was held in Chicago in July with many good speakers and workshops. We all thank Donna Corrigan and her chapter members for all their hard work putting the Gathering together and running it. We thank all the chapter members and friends who also helped in so many ways—as workshop leaders, making items for sale in the boutique, making items for table favors, etc. Many people went home strengthened and encouraged. There are pictures and other reports on page 4 of this newsletter.

Now we are underway with the plans for the 2008 Gathering. Martha and Gene Honn and the Southern IL Chapter, assisted by Jack me and our chapter in WV, are already at work on plans. The Gathering will be at the Crowne Plaza, St. Louis, MO, July 11-13, 2008. The theme is SEEDS OF HOPE. The speakers will help us all find new seeds to sow to grow new hope.

This is the same hotel where we have had two other Gatherings and, as you know if you attended those, it is a great place to meet. Rooms will be \$75 plus tax for up to 4 to a room. The price will also be available 2 days before and 2 days after the Gathering for any persons who might like to combine a visit to St. Louis with the meeting. Final information on meals and cost will be available soon. Information on speakers, workshops and the registration forms will be sent to Chapters and posted on the web as soon as all is finalized. We expect to have it all in place starting in January 2008. Put the dates on your calendar and keep in touch. For further information you may also write 2008Gathering@bereavedparentsusa.org.

If you have suggestions for workshops, please contact Martha Honn at the above e-mail. Also contact her if your chapter or you are interested in making items for table gifts.

Pat Kinney is putting together the Boutique for us this year. We are so glad to have her doing it and, those of you who have visited boutiques she had done in the past know that there will be great items there. She is already at work on handmade items herself. The items should be butterfly, angel or theme related. If you are interested in donating items for sale, she would welcome them. Please clear with her by contacting her at Patssewing@insightbb.com.

As part of the 2007 Gathering, we welcomed Beth Reynolds from the North Texas BP/USA Chapter as the new member of the Board of Directors. Beverley Hurley was re-elected for a second term and re-elected as President of the Board. Beth has been in charge of Chapter Development and will continue to do that and will serve as Vice President of the Board. Donna Corrigan will be editor of Chapter Chat. Cathy Bender will be Secretary of the Board. Martha Honn and Jack Ewart work on the 2008 Gathering and Jack will continue to supply brochures to those wishing them. Kevin Hunsaker will continue to handle the persons wishing to link with BP/USA. David Hurley will continue as our Treasurer and John Goodrich continues as our Advisor. The next Board meeting will be by Nov. 10. If you have any questions, concerns, or suggestions for the meeting, please contact Beverley at President@bereavedparentsusa.org.

Lastly, and important for this season, we all need to be aware that the season of holidays—Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Hanukah, New Years, etc.—is upon us. We hope that the articles in this newsletter and past December newsletters (posted on our website) will help you as individuals and will supply you to some information for Chapter members and friends that may make their holidays easier. The Board and I wish you peaceful and healing holidays.



SURVIVING THE HOLIDAYS

By Mary Cleckley,
Former member of the Board of Directors of BP/USA

If this is our first year at surviving the holidays since your child died, it is important that you accept that there are no magic words to get you through November, December and January. I'm sure you already know these months will not be the fun days you have experienced in the past. Rather than fun days, let's try to at least make them no worse. Give yourself permission during these months to fall apart when you need to and you'll probably need to! That person you lost is very important and you have that right. Better still, you have that need.

Let's talk first about tears. When you need to cry, do it! Tears are healthy. They are a sign that you are doing well, for you are allowing your grief, rather than denying it. You can't move ahead through the grief process until you've become well acquainted with the normal signs of grief. The people who care about you may feel uncomfortable when you are obviously grieving. If they haven't experienced this loss themselves, they don't understand your needs now, any more than the old proverbial man on the street. Remember how unprepared you were for the deep pain of grief? It's important that you let those caring people know that you are profoundly changed by this tragedy.

It's the time of year when friends and neighbors plan parties. Some may invite you no matter if it's the last thing on your mind. If you do decide to attend, please leave the back door open in case you need to escape. Some may mistakenly think it's possible to keep you so busy that you'll forget that your child died. You know that's impossible. No matter how well intended these plans are, they are the wrong plans for your family. Don't worry about the impact on your friends.

Thanksgiving can cause problems if you aren't ready to sit around a turkey trying to act thankful! It probably is going to be awhile before you have that ability again. You may consider having pizza that day and just pretend it's just another day. Grief can make you do strange things! You may find you need to change lots of things that have been the ways you have observed the holidays in the past. For instance, you may decide not to have a Christmas tree this year. Some will see this as weird, but those of us who have made that same decision think it makes perfect sense. Maybe you'll ignore the holidays and run away to places where holidays aren't uppermost in most minds—maybe the beaches in Florida or California or the skiing in Colorado or a cabin in North Georgia. Maybe this is a good time to explore the treasures of New York City, Washington, D.D. or New Orleans.

You will survive the holidays better if you take control of them. Some think they have no control of anything but, if you feel that way, you probably haven't explored the possibilities that are available to you. Your brain is very curious. If someone suggests things that are different, it rushes around madly trying to come up with a few. Here's a plan for you. First, get input from your family members for their suggestions. You already know that small children don't take too kindly to changing anything. Maybe they'll be happy about seeing what Santa brought. Afterwards, go to a nearby skating rink. Have hot dogs for all later. Also, consider some of the things in the previous paragraph.

Maybe your needs keep you at home. If so, plan to do it the easiest way. Can another member of your family have the meal? Can others bring favorite items of food to help with the meal? If not, can you have the meal on Christmas Eve. Some people do that instead of having it on Christmas Day. It leaves Christmas Day itself not so rushed. Any change seems to help. Go to a different place of worship. It's okay to cry. Sit in the back so you can either cry in peace or, if you feel a need to, you can leave.

If you feel Christmas cards are needed this year or a very few presents, could a relative or friend help with the addressing and shopping? If you must shop yourself, select a place where there is less atmosphere such as music and decorations. Take advantage of the discount stores. Things don't have to be perfect. Give up perfections this year. Everyone will understand. Don't over do. You're already tired. Grieving is exhausting. Next year or the one after that or whenever, you'll be ready to resume some of the old traditions. Maybe not! Some traditions may never be done again. It's up to your family.

Take care of yourself physically. If you are in a depressed state, don't make it worse by overdrinking or overeating or too much caffeine. Take time for you. Read in a quiet place. Exercise by running, walking or swimming. Rest. Eat

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nourishing food. Establish priorities and make a list of them. Check them off as you accomplish them. This helps to maintain control. Seek help if you need it. Call one of the telephone friends listed in your newsletter or call one of your friends. Seek professional help if you feel you need it. Whatever you do, don't isolate yourself! Withdrawal is not the answer. It's important to know that you are not alone. Others out here care and understand. I am one of them. We do not have to walk this lonely road alone.

Your attitude is important. You can/will survive. You have greater strength than you know. You have already survived the worse thing that can happen. Stay flexible. If the plans you made don't seem right now, dump them! Do something on the spur of the moment that does seem right. Care not if other people don't agree or that your brain isn't too excited about it. Outsmart them all!

The New Year is ahead. Let's hope for better days. The holidays will come again and one of these days you and your family will have figured out how to survive the holidays now that things have changed for the better. Know that there will be more peaceful days ahead for you and your family. Take it as a promise!



BOOK REVIEWS

GRANDAD'S ASHES by Walter Smith is a beautifully illustrated book for children from ages 4 to 8. Their grandfather, whom they dearly loved, dies and is cremated. Grandma tells them that he wants his ashes scattered in a "special place". The book is about their attempt to decide what that special place is. It would be a helpful book to use with children. The book is available from Jessica Kingsley Publishers, P.O. Box 960, Herndon, VA 20172 or by calling 866-416-1078.

I AM STILL HIS MOTHER is a book by Diana M. Cimador-Roscigno, leader of the BP/USA Long Island Chapter, written in memory of her son, Mark Anthony. Elaine Stillwell says of the book, "Sharing her personal anguish, Diana tells a poignant story of overcoming complicated grief as she discovers the healing power of forgiveness for herself, her son and all those who caused her pain." The book is published by Infinity Publishing in West Conshohocken, PA. You may obtain it by calling 877-BUY Book, at www.buybooksontheweb.com or by contacting Diana at markanthonymom@yahoo.com.

THE SEVEN T'S is a book written by Judy Collins, the well known singer/songwriter. Her son died by

suicide and the book deals well with her journey through that experience. She also had conversations with hundreds of others who have grieved over death from suicide. Her 7 T's—Truth, Trust, Therapy, Treasure, Thrive, Treat and Transcend—are all covered in depth. Bill Moyers says of the book, "There is no return from the depths of grief that does not begin with the truth. Judy Collins has written a book that will light the way back for any who take her hand and sing with her in the dark." The book is available in most bookstores and is published by Penquin Books, 375 Hudson St., New York, NY.

AWARDS



Linda Delk, a member of the BP/USA Tampa Bay Chapter was the recipient of the Roy and Juanita Peterson Award for 2007 at the Gathering in Chicago. Linda has been active in her chapter and in the National BP for many years. Beverley Hurley said, "If you say BP/USA in Tampa, everyone says, 'Linda Delk'."

John Goodrich was presented an award for his years of service as BP/USA Advisor and Betty Ewart was presented an award for her years of service as Newsletter Editor. They will both continue in their activities. They are all in the picture in the previous column.

David Hurley was presented with a gift for his years of service as BP/USA Treasurer and for his work video taping workshops and speeches at our Gatherings and making them available, at cost, to Chapters or persons. Since he was taking the pictures, we do not have a picture of him getting the gift!

A special award was given to Dave and Kathy Simone in recognition of all they have done for the National BP/USA, especially the wonderful presentation of the pictures of our beloved children shown each year at the end of our Gatherings, providing us with a moving and meaningful close to the Gatherings. Jack and Betty Ewart are pictured with the Simones in the picture below. Betty was President when the program started at the 2000 Gathering.



AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

By Martha Honn, Chapter
Leader, So. IL BP/USA Chapter
Written 11/06

(Martha and her husband Gene and
their chapter are co-chairs of the
2008 Gathering in St. Louis.)

As Thanksgiving approaches, I find myself thinking of people, events, feelings and things I am grateful for. However, the first Thanksgiving after my son died I cannot say I possessed an attitude of gratitude. My 16 year old son, Cameron, died in an automobile accident on June 4, 1999. That first Thanksgiving after he died, all I could think of was the things he didn't get to experience, the places he never got to go, items I never got to buy for him, subjects we never got to discuss, arguments I wished we hadn't had, finding out how his life would have unfolded, what he would have become, who he would have married, how many children he would have had, where he would have lived, etc., etc., etc.

If you are newly bereaved, I know you can relate to those thoughts. My head was so full of the thoughts of what death cheated Cameron out of. I felt singled out and alone. Life wasn't fair and I felt cheated. I was hurt, angry and in pain. But, along the way, I was blessed to find fellow travelers on the journey through grief. I found out that it was normal to have these thoughts. I feared that I would forget some of Cameron's ways and mannerisms that made him so unique. I have gained strength, insight and hope from other bereaved parents. I encourage you to go to support groups for bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents and just talk. Tell your story as many times as you need to. Listen as others share their experience, strength and hope. I promise you that, if you do the grief work, and, yes, it's probably the hardest work you'll ever do, you will reach a point in time when you too can have an attitude of gratitude.

This Thanksgiving finds me with an attitude of gratitude. I am grateful that I had a son names Cameron. I'm grateful for my two surviving children, Aaron and Josolyn, my husband, Gene, and my son-in-law, Doug. I'm grateful for all the special people I have met on this unwanted journey through grief. I'm grateful for friends and family who supported me. I'm grateful that we can talk about Cameron and share special memories we have of him. I'll always miss him and wonder how his life would have unfolded. I'm grateful that I'm at this place in my journey through grief. I can, once again, participate and be a part of life. I have learned to love Cameron in death as much as I loved him in life. Today, I can talk about Cameron, share memories of him and smile.



GIVING THANKS

By Sascha, from WINTERSUN

I cannot hold your hands today,
I cannot see your smile.
I cannot hear your voices now,
my children, who are gone.

But I recall your faces still,
the songs, the talks, the sighs.
And story times and winter walks
And sharing secret things.

I know you helped my mind to live
beyond your time with me.
You gave me clearer eyes to see,
you gave me finer ears to hear
what living means,
what dying means,
my children, who are gone.

So here it is Thanksgiving Day,
and you are not with me.
And, while I weep a mother's tears,
I thank you for the gifts you were,
and all the gifts you gave to me,
my children who are gone.

DECEMBER

By Carol Welch
St. Louis Chapter of BP/USA

With Love to my son
Sean Christian Anderson

Everything I did this week
I did because of you
You might not see me doing it
But I promise that it's true

I began the week with Candlelight
Well...maybe it was two
I really can't remember much
The week flew by that's true

They sang, they talked they even cried
I guess they always do
That really doesn't matter much
It's all done because of you

I might've even helped some folks
Maybe one or two
I hope they know I do it
It's all because of you

Then, did I mention, there's a Meeting?
They're family there "to me"
Although they're not related
That doesn't have to be

We brought you gifts, We talked a lot
Our gifts were from the heart
It really didn't matter
Because—we're still apart

But one thing that I know today
This week was just for you
I might've helped a couple folks
But it was just for you.

This special week in December
I always will maintain
It gives me strength
To hear folks speak your name

All year I know you're with me
That never can be changed
But this week it's all different
Because they call your name

This week in December
I am so filled with joy
Especially this week in December
You're still Mama's little baby boy



PSST!

By permission of
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Psst! They're coming, you know. Before you know it, they're gonna be here! They do sneak up on you. You're going along, peaceful, not too many down days, and then, almost without warning, they're on top of you! Those mind-blowing, gut-wrenching, shiver-producing holidays—they're coming. Yes, starting with Halloween, then Thanksgiving and finally Christmas or Chanukah, they are all on us, each with its myriad memories on our family when it was larger—each holiday tearing at us, destroying us.

To avoid them, there are those who recommend that we do something different - travel, take a cruise, eat out rather than at home, etc. You can do these things and they may help you get through the holidays. There is another way to beat them –another method to defuse and defeat the downer that the holidays can be to us. Beat them to it!

Let's take Halloween. What about Halloween can tear us apart? The kids' costumes? Remembering how we went around "Trick or Treating" with them? I remember a very small one who, by the third house, had turned into a witch—a voracious, avaricious little greedy-guts who wanted to continue forever getting, getting, getting, more and more candy and goodies and who cried when she had to stop and go home. Avaricious little greedy-guts who wanted to continue forever getting, getting, getting more and more candy and goodies and who cried when she had to stop and go home.

Is there a children's home somewhere that can use a helping hand? Sure you may dissolve in tears but, if you can help someone else in any way, you'll be helping yourself more. Or don't shut off the lights and hide in the darkness. Open your door to the little ghosties and goblins. Try to guess who they are. Ask the little ones what their "trick" is. In their innocence, they think they have to perform a trick for you, and may do a dance or something similar. Will it hurt? Maybe. Will the tears come? Probably. But you'll have some fun too. Hiding in the dark at Halloween is no way to live.

For Thanksgiving, you can go away and escape, but, how about doing the same things you did before, only now you are one short. Just use a little less salt, let your tears provide the seasoning. It's OK to cry; it's OK to remember; no one will laugh at you, although they may think (and say), "You should be over it by now," but who cares?

Meet Christmas or Chanukah head on! Hang that one special stocking. Don't be afraid of talking about the past. I remember the joy I had when they finally found out how much more fun it was to give a gift than it was to receive one. The tree lights and the menorah candles are much more beautiful when viewed through teary, blurred eyes. They have a special glow and luminosity then. Don't worry about "spoiling" these holidays because you are sad. Ask, out loud, for the one gift you really want and need: Compassion. You'll get it.

Sometimes grief seems to be like a splinter. We treat splinters in two ways. We can do nothing and it will slowly fester and probably become infected. We can attack it head on with a needle and gouge it out of our life. Either way hurts. The first way hurts for a long time; the direct attack way hurts for a much shorter time. The scar is about the same. This year, try not to dodge or hide from the holidays. Try meeting the holiday's head on! The anticipation of the day or the event is usually much worse than the day or the event actually is. You can do it. You can't hide from 'em and you can't avoid 'em either. Psst! They're coming, you know...

People who pray for miracles usually don't get the miracles...but people who pray for courage, for strength to bear the unbearable, for the grace to remember what they have left instead of what they have lost, very often find their prayers answered. Their prayers helped them tap hidden reserves of faith and courage which were not available to them before.

By Rabbi Harold S. Kushner

BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA MEMORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Shirley Ottman

In loving memory of daughter, Teri Atkins; husband, Bob;
and friends Mitchell & Renee Dudnikov and
Paul Kinney

Richard & Joanne Rose Murray

In loving memory of Melinda Rose Silva

Mort & Lorraine Schrag

In loving memory of Becky

Mary Murphy

In loving memory of Dylan Thornton

We would also like to thank all the chapters, chapter members and friends of BP/USA who donated the beautiful items for sale or auction at the boutique and for use as table favors at the Gathering in Chicago. Everything you provided helped to make that Gathering such a meaningful experience.

If we missed listing a donation, we apologize. If you will notify the Treasurer, David Hurley, 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 of your gift and the memorial, we will be sure it is acknowledged in the next Newsletter. 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 at no cost; to help to keep costs of attending the Annual National Gathering as low as possible; and to maintain a web site (www.bereavedparentsusa.org) . You may designate a donation to any of these areas or to the general work of the BP/USA by giving an undesignated gift. 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.

TONIGHT I LIGHT THIS CANDLE

By Alan Pedersen

“God wrote this song. I consider myself fortunate that he trusted me to hold the pen.”

Tonight I hold this candle In memory of you
Hoping someday, somehow, my love will shine through .
I close my eyes lost in the glow
There are so many things I want you to know.

Chorus:

This candle says I love you—This candle says I miss you.
This candle is saying I remember you.
When I’m holding it toward heaven,
It feels like you are near.
If you’re looking down tonight,
And see this candle burning bright,
It says I’m wishing you were here.

In the glow of this candle I can almost see your smile
And it carries me away for a little while
To another time, another place
When all it took to light up my world was your beautiful face.

Chorus

Someday, someday I’ll see you again
I’ll hold you in my heart until then.

This candle says I love you -
This candle says I miss you.
This candle is saying I remember you.
When I’m holding it toward heaven,
It feels like you are near.
If you’re looking down tonight
And see this candle burning bright,
It says I’m wishing your were here.

This was used at the Gathering at the
Candlelight Memorial and would be good for
use in chapter Candlelight Memorials. Alan’s
CD is available by contacting EverAshley
music.com or 303-480-4761.

