

# A Journey Together

National Newsletter of the *Bereaved Parents* of the USA

VOLUME XIV NO. 4 Fall 2009 (October, November and December)



## PANACHE

Keith Sweet, Seymour, WI

(EDITOR'S NOTE: Keith has presented workshops at several of our Gatherings.)

Remodeling the kitchen we had to put the cats in the basement for days at a time. Samson never got used to the basement. His howling echoed through the house from morning to morning, unceasing relentless, plaintive. He had plenty of food and water, a litter box, chairs, toys and his sister, but he didn't have us. With all his physical needs met, life was painful, almost unbearable.

I can identify with Samson. I eat, sleep, play, work, recreate, but I'm not with Matt.

I too want to howl at the universe-disconsolate, unsatisfied. From the outside, people wonder why I don't move on-why I can't enjoy success, admiration, love.

But I'm in the basement, locked away from my first-born. I console myself with memories of yesterday and hopes for tomorrow. Our spirits walk together, playing in the snow, tasting the fresh cold air sharing yesterday and tomorrow. I can hear him. He is just beyond reach, but I can't open the door. It is maddening to be so close and yet always, always finding myself just barely, just a breath away.

Samson swipes a paw under the

basement door, trying to snag me as I walk by. We almost touch. From my side, I know why he must stay in the basement. The construction would terrify him. He might get outside but, at his age, that is a death sentence. He could be injured, crippled by the workers and their equipment. He is better off without me now and I know we'll be together soon. He'll crawl up in my lap and purr for hours. In my lap in front of the fire, the pain of the basement will disappear. Reunited, Samson and I will doze peacefully, happy-rejoined, contented together. The life will again be good.

Every day Samson struggles, trying to avoid the basement. The kitchen is almost done but time and thought are too abstract for a cat.

In my own basement, struggling with pain that I can't understand, I cry, hope, pray. I don't know why Matt is gone or how his being gone makes sense. I just miss him, reach for him, want him with me.

Soon, not soon enough, Matt will reach through to help me cross. I may never understand why or how I ended up in the basement but love will lead me out.



## NOW LET US LOOK TO BUTTERFLIES

By Shirley C. Ottman from "Where Are All the Butterflies?"

Where are all the butterflies?  
Do they wing their way  
unaccompanied toward light?  
Do they rest sometimes  
in their silent flight?  
Are they ever frightened in  
the murky depths of night?

Or do they sleep within our hearts?  
If so, let us awaken them  
with gentle voice and touch.  
Let's bid them spread their wings  
to fly transformed with joy and such  
abandon that our pain, too, will yield  
within their tender clutch.

Now let us look to butterflies  
as symbols of our deepest love.  
Death, for all its boastful claims,  
has power only over mortal clay.  
Our children's souls, unbound by  
earthly frames now soar;  
and we, enriched by steadfast love  
ignite new lives from their love's  
flames.

When darkness seems  
overwhelming,  
light a candle in someone's life  
and see how it makes  
the darkness in your own  
and the other person's life flee.

Rabbi Harold S. Kujshner, "When  
Bad Things Happen to Good People"

**BEREAVED PARENTS OF  
THE USA**

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For other information, contact:

Bereaved Parents of the USA  
PO Box 95  
Park Forest, IL 60466  
Phone & Fax: 708-748-7866  
or on the web at  
[www.bereavedparentsusa.org](http://www.bereavedparentsusa.org).

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The editor of the Newsletter is  
Betty R. Ewart  
BP/USA Newsletter  
326 Longview Ave.  
Lewisburg, WV 24901  
[newsletters@bereavedparentsusa.org](mailto:newsletters@bereavedparentsusa.org)



**FROM THE  
DESK OF  
THE  
EDITOR**

I am sorry to say that Jack and I were not able to attend the Gathering this year—the first since BP/USA formed. We have had a bad summer and fall of aches, pains, breathing problems, etc. We are working hard to be all well and back with our many BP friends at the 2010 Gathering.

**2009 Gathering:**

David Alexander is the new President of BP/USA and of the Board of Directors. He reports that the 2009 Gathering in New York was a “huge success!!” He thanks all who helped to make it that way—planners Diana Roscigno and members of her Long Island BP Chapter and Elaine Stillwell as leader of the Rockville Centre Chapter of TCF who helped with many areas. Of course, we also thank the speakers, workshop leaders, and those who handled the boutique, bookstore, hospitality room, meditation room and butterfly lift off.

**Officers and Board of Directors:**

David is pleased to announce the new officers and Board for BP/USA also. The Vice President is Donna Corrigan. Jill Theriault is taking over the responsibilities as Treasurer from David Hurley after six years of very hard work by David in handling our finances. Everyone’s thanks to David too. Lee Ann Hutson is Secretary. Other Board members returning to the Board are Beverley Hurley and Beth Reynolds. Newly elected is Toni Holohan. Names, addresses and e-mails for all of these people are listed on the web site and we hope that you will feel free to write to any of them with questions about BP or suggestions you might have for programs, etc.

**Roy and Juanita Peterson Award:**

Everyone was pleased to learn that the 2009 Roy and Juanita Peterson Award was given this year to Linda Horn. Linda was a part of the group that founded BP/USA serving as the second President. She has worked hard for the national organization for many years.

She provided the Book Store at the Gathering also for several years. Linda also is a long standing member of the Hinsdale BP Chapter and helped in many areas with the Chapter organization. She was not going to be able to attend the Gathering this year. Since there was a special gathering of the chapter, our national adviser, John Goodrich, attended and presented her award at that time. It was especially meaningful to have it presented with her many friends in the Chapter and several of her family members were able to be there to see her honored. Thanks from all of us, Linda. We hope you will be back at the Gathering next year too!

**2010 Gathering:** Linda Bates is pleased to announce that her chapter, South Central Arkansas BP/USA, is the official host of the 2010 Gathering. Co-hosting will be Central Arkansas BP, North of the River BP and Western Arkansas BP. It will be held on July 9-11 at the all newly refurbished Holiday Inn at the Airport. The rooms will cost \$89 plus tax and meals are being negotiated for about \$132 for a package. Shuttles are available to the airport and nearby sites and the rooms will be available at that price before and after the Gathering for those wishing to stay for personal sight seeing. The Committee is very excited about the hotel and the plans so far. You may keep aware of plans by checking on the web site or you may contact the committee at [bpusagathering2010@yahoo.com](mailto:bpusagathering2010@yahoo.com). Put the dates on your calendar now and plan to join with other bereaved parents, grandparents and siblings.

**Other Upcoming Events:**

Nov. 21: Annual National Survivors of Suicide Day. You may organize an observance of this day which has been designated by the US Senate as National Survivors of Suicide Day or observe it yourself. For information send an e-mail to [rthorp@afsp.org](mailto:rthorp@afsp.org) or visit [www.afsp.org](http://www.afsp.org).

July 2-3, 2010: The annual Compassionate Friends National Conference will be in Arlington, VA on July 2-3, 2010. Information, as available at [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org).

## HALLOWEEN AND BEYOND

Shirley Corrigan  
BPUSA of North Texas

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 Year’s—those days that threaten bereaved parents so much.

I am writing this on the fifth holiday season since my son Douglas’ 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 I’ll shed tears again and hide this year during some lonely and sad times. These are very private moments of grief for me now.

For those of you who do not attend support meetings, our group’s newsletter may be the only link you have to other bereaved parents. Please take time for yourself during the holidays. Take time to cry and 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 can not 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 and lots of time.

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 will make healing possible. Others see only the end result, without realizing the work that went into the healing process.

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

### HALLOWEEN

By Sascha—“Wintersun”

It is here, this day of merriment  
and children’s pleasure.  
gremlins and goblins  
and ghosties at the door  
of your house.

And the other children  
come to the door of your mind.  
Faces out of the past,  
small ghosts with sweet, painted  
faces.

They do not shout.

Those children  
who no longer march laughing  
on cold Halloween night,  
they stand at the door of your  
mind—  
and you will let them in,  
so that you can give them  
the small gifts of your Halloween --  
a smile and a tear.

### THE TALKING PUMPKIN

By Mary Cleckley  
Former BP National Board Member

Halloween always was a special time at our house. When my son was a year old, my husband got out an old intercom set he had packed away and, with its help, created a special pumpkin—one that talked. Our son was intrigued by it as was his sister later and all the neighborhood children who came and discovered our unusual pumpkin. Eventually the word spread and parents came miles out of their way so their children could talk to our pumpkin.

We continued that tradition over the years. My husband always handled the chatting with the visitors from his comfortable chair in the den. My job has always been to not only hand out the goodies, but also to make sure that the little ones know he’s a friendly pumpkin and not to fear when they come upon him for the first time. We went through all the stages over the years with our own two children: believing (like in Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy), doubting (I’d like to believe but something is wrong here and the voice sounds awfully familiar), discovery (if I look under the leaves, I can see where the wires come out of the house!), to joining in on the charade and even speaking for the pumpkin sometimes.

That first Halloween after our son died, we found it was no longer a favorite night and couldn’t bring out the talking pumpkin. We had a plastic one instead of the unusual cored, real pumpkin, intending to get through the night as quickly as possible. The memories were too painful. But we had failed to realize how much the children would miss him. They approached our house as usual, yelling Hello to the pumpkin and were disappointed when he didn’t answer. I told the kids he had laryngitis and they left candy for him to help him get better soon.

The next year, we returned his voice and have had him ever since. I relive many memories on Halloween night as I see everything from the little ones with stars in their eyes as they earnestly talk with the pumpkin, and believe, to the blasé older ones who have a need to let the world know they’re too old for such foolishness!

I know we are creating memories. Some years down the road, a young father or mother will tell their child about a talking pumpkin who only came out on Halloween night at the Cleckley’s. That thought has helped make Halloween a special night again for us, one that gets us in touch once more with our children in all stages of childhood. The memories of older and simpler times do bathe and soothe the painful scars of more recent ones. For you too, I hope.



## BOOK REVIEWS By the Editor

**NAMING THE CHILD:** Hope-filled Reflections on Miscarriage, Still-birth, and Infant Death is a new book by Jenny Schroedel. It deals with many areas related to the death of a child before birth, at the time of birth or soon after birth. Some of the issues dealt with such as the affect on the marriage, the affect on other siblings and the affect on a surviving twin are well dealt with and you may learn some things that not everyone is aware of. I know that I found the section on the reactions of twins to be very interesting and helpful. The book is published by Paraclete Press in Brewster, Mass. You may call for more information at 1-800-451-5006 or visit [www.paracletepress.com](http://www.paracletepress.com).

**SOLACE:** Finding Your Way Through Grief and Learning to Live Again is a book by Roberta Temes. It is a good resource book. She also tells us that we are our own resource book and will cope with this death as you have coped with others happenings in your life. There are workshop aspects to the book also to help someone work through different areas of grieving. She also gives ideas of ways of coping and when to recognize that we might need more professional help. Amacom, 1601 Broadway, NY, NY publishes the book and you can find out more at 1-800-250-5308 or on [www.amacombooks.org](http://www.amacombooks.org).

**HEAVENLY HUGS** by Hannah Grace is a Christian children's book with guidance for handling a terminal illness. It is about a child's visit to a cancer ward. There are illustrations of angels in the book which bring in the element of hope and remind the reader that no one is ever alone. You may attach a picture of a child to the beginning of the book and use it for a gift. For information, contact AuthorHouse in Bloomington IN at 1-800-839-8640 or read more on [www.authorhouse.com](http://www.authorhouse.com).

**ALWAYS MY BROTHER** by Jean Regan is another children's book which deals with a family's grief after the death of a child. Becky has a very hard time dealing with the death of her brother John with whom she was very close. This helps as we see her begin to realize that John will always be her brother and she will find ways to remember him. The book is published by Tilbury House, Gardiner, Maine. You may find out more by a phone call to 1-800-582-1899 or on the web at [www.tilburyhouse.com](http://www.tilburyhouse.com).

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### SURVEY

You may recall that we mentioned a survey that was being conducted by a young man in South Dakota. We gave the web site location and it was entirely up to persons whether they were interested in participating. We and TCF were asked to participate and a donation will be made to the groups for each survey returned by members. The response has been coming in but not from bereaved fathers. If you are interested, you may find more by going to [www.usd.edu](http://www.usd.edu)—study by Paul Kincaid.

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### SILENT FLIGHT

By Chris Roe, Norfolk, UK  
"In Search of Silence"

In the silence  
The clarity of your voice,  
Climbs high  
Upon the eagle's wings  
The chains of doubt  
That imprison my soul,  
Fall beneath my feet.  
In the freedom and majesty  
Of the sentinels gaze,  
Faith is strengthened  
And hope returned  
To a weary heart,  
Upon the silent flight  
Of eagle's wings.

I have developed a new philosophy - I dread only one day at a time.

Charles M. Shultz, Peanuts

## CORNER

By Margaret Gerner  
St. Louis, MO BP/USA Chapter

Peanuts, the cartoon character, is walking blissfully along when, all of a sudden he takes a somersault. In the next box of the strip he says, "...and suddenly, you're reminded of a lost love." It is like that for many of us. I was having my hair cut at the beauty shop one morning when I heard a little boy behind me telling a tall tale about fighting Indians. Suddenly, I was jolted with the memory of how my six year-old son, Arthur, used to tell about the Indians he killed in the back yard.

Twenty six years have passed since Arthur was killed, but that memory was like a knife through my heart. Every time I hear the song "Betty Davis Eyes" the same thing happens. My granddaughter, Emily, has been dead for 15 years but, when I hear it, in my mind's eye I can see her dancing to that song. It hurts. I call these experienced "potholes of grief." We can be years beyond our painful grief when, suddenly, something will remind us of him or her. A song on the radio, a place we hadn't been in years or something someone says will bring our loved one back so vividly to us. Occasionally,, there are pleasant memories that bring us a feeling of warmth, but many times they hurt.

Fortunately the pain doesn't last long, although, for a time, it can seem like we're back to square one in our grief. The best way I've found to deal with potholes of grief is just to let them happen and try not to fight them. They are a sign that your loved one is still in your heart and, no matter how much time passes, you will always miss him or her. Potholes are bumpy but shallow places in a normally smooth road. So it is with potholes of grief. They are bumpy painful places in our lives that come after we're resolved our grief.





## A FORGIVING THANKSGIVING

By Jim Hobbs, Denton Texas Chapter  
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 week, 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 what ever reasons. If family and friends cannot understand us, then we must try to understand them, especially on holidays. If we can 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.

(Editor's Note: many of you will remember Martha Honn, leader of the Southern Illinois BP/Chapter and co-chair of the 2009 Gathering. She was diagnosed with Cancer just before the Gathering and died soon after. I found this article in my files and feel it would be a good one to read now.)

## AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

By Martha Honn  
BP/USA S. Illinois Chapter

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 Jun. 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 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 named 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 in WINTERSUN

I can not hold your hands today,  
I can not 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 storytimes and winterwalks,  
and haring 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.

## THE GOLD WRAPPING PAPER

Author Unknown

It's said that we have a choice to make. I've chosen; The story goes that some time ago a man punished his 5 year old daughter for wasting a roll of expensive gold wrapping paper. Money was tight and he became even more upset when the child pasted the gold paper so as to decorate a box to put under the Christmas tree.

Nevertheless the little girl brought the gift box to her father the next morning and said, "This is for you, Daddy." The father was embarrassed by his earlier over reaction, but his anger flared again when he found the box was empty. He spoke to her in a harsh manner. "Don't you know, young lady, when you give someone a present, there's supposed to be something inside the package?" The little girl looked up at him with tears in her eyes and said, "Daddy, it's not empty. I blew kisses into it until it was full." The father was crushed. He fell on his knees and put his arms around his little girl and he begged her to forgive him for his unnecessary anger.

An accident took the life of the child only a short time later and it is told that the father kept that gold box by his bed for all the years of his life. And whenever he was discouraged or faced difficult problems he would open the box and take out a imaginary kiss and remember the love of his child who put it there. In a very real sense, each of us as human beings have been given a golden box filled with unconditional love and kisses from our children, family friends and God. There is no more precious possession anyone could hold.

Friends and family are like angels who lift us to our feet when our wings have trouble remembering how to fly.

## TONIGHT I HOLD THIS CANDLE

Written and sung by Alan Pedersen to honor the death of his daughter, Ashley, and used at many Candlelight Memorials

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.

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.

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.

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 you were here.

(If you wish a copy of the music for this song and other ones helpful for the grieving journey, contact Alan at [www.everashleymusic.com](http://www.everashleymusic.com) or 720-218-6238.)



## REMEDY

Memories will bring you love  
love from the past  
courage in the present  
hope for the future.

Sascha from WINTERSUN

## BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA MEMORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Asis Pharmacy  
Simmons Institute of Funeral Service  
Donna Adams  
United Way of Treasure Valley

Donation toward the work of BP/USA  
Donation toward the work of BP/USA  
In loving memory of son, Jonathan Edward Holliday  
Unrestricted gift

If we missed listing a donation, we apologize. If you will notify the Treasurer, Jill Theriault, 4282 South Shreiber Road, Hemlock, MI 4836-9536 or by e-mail to [treasurer@bereavedparentsusa.org](mailto:treasurer@bereavedparentsusa.org) 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. Some donations go directly to help start new 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. Other money is used to print and send copies of our brochures. This quarterly newsletter costs about \$5.25 per year for each one mailed. Donations are always welcome towards any of these costs. We welcome donations to help with the costs of our Annual National Gathering also, as well as to maintain a web site ([www.bereavedparentsusa.org](http://www.bereavedparentsusa.org)). You may make a donation to any of these areas by designating it with your donation or you may make the donation to the general work of the BP/USA by giving an undesignated gift. Please always note 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.

### GINGER

By Mary Cleckley  
BP/USA

It was a few days before Christmas and I had gone to the cemetery to put some flowers on my son's grave. At any other time of the year I am usually alone but at Christmas there are people all about, remembering in their own way the ones who have died.

One of my neighbors is also buried in the same cemetery and, since her family had moved away, I took some flowers for her too. As I wandered about looking for her gravesite, I saw the many different ways that people had chosen to honor their loved ones. The graves of the young people naturally caught my eye. Some had small Christmas trees, complete with garlands and tinsel; others had strings of fruit, popcorn and berries so the birds could enjoy Christmas, I imagine. One family had selected special

cards and they were hanging on their tree. There was tree-shaped greenery in one urn and others had simple pine boughs, pine cones and poinsettias. Some graves had no decoration at all, but I knew that did not mean they were not loved and missed. It simply meant that, for whatever reason, someone couldn't or didn't want to come. It had nothing to do with loving, caring and remembering.

Then I came upon this small, new grave, so new that there was no grass or marker except for a hand-lettered sign that simply said, "Ginger." Stuck in the soft earth above the sign was the smallest Santa Claus I have ever seen. He couldn't have been over two inches tall, in keeping with the size of the grave. I stopped there, touched more by this grave than anything else I had seen and wept for Ginger and her parents.

I recognized all of the anguish spoken by this simple scene. I remembered by own pain that first Christmas and wanted to put my arms around somebody and tell

Them that it would be better—never the same, but better than now with the fresh, raw and bleeding pain that is a part of the newness of grief. I am thankful that I can say it is better now.



The thoughts and prayers of the Board of Directors of BP/USA are with you this holiday season. All of you who receive this newsletter, realize that we are all on this journey together and offer our help to all who need it.