Editor's note: With the change of seasons comes an undeniable urge to “clean house”; to sweep away the clutter that has accumulated and is now causing stress, confusion and disharmony. This urge leads us to make decisions about what is sacred to our spaces and what no longer serves us anymore. I think the same is true for our grief and mourning – periodically, we need to examine what is working for us and what is not... KC

LET IT GO

Let go of the ways you thought life would unfold: the holding of plans or dreams or expectations – Let it all go. Save your strength to swim with the tide. The choice to fight what is here before you now will only result in struggle, fear, and desperate attempts to flee from the very energy you long for. Let go.

Let it all go and flow with the grace that washes through your days whether you received it gently or with all your quills raised to defend against invaders. Take this on faith; the mind may never find the explanations that it seeks, but you will move forward nonetheless.

Let go, and the wave’s crest will carry you to unknown shores, beyond your wildest dreams or destinations.

Let it all go and find the place of rest and peace, and certain transformation.

Danna Faulds

“When after heavy rain the storm clouds disperse, is it not that they’ve wept themselves clear to the end?”

~ Ghalib

“That’s the worst, I think. When the secret stays locked within not for want of a teller but for want of an understanding ear.”

~ Stephen King
I’m Not Moving On From. I’m Moving On With.
By Sarah Kravits, BPUSA Sibling Coordinator

Bereaved people should “move on” from grieving the loss of a loved one, right? Scholarly publications call this idea misguided, a myth. However, many people must still believe it - and say it in private conversations - because I have read countless articles and blogs expressing anger and pain around it. In a raw and eloquent Facebook post, Kay Warren addresses the suggestion that she and her husband should be moving on from the loss of their son Matthew, who died of suicide. “The truest friends...[are] willing to accept that things are different,” she writes. “They’re ok with messy and slow and few answers....and they never say ‘Move on.’”

To me, this “moving on” concept makes no sense at all. In fact, my brother - who died just over two years ago - is the person I least want to move on from, because he is the most gone.

Where did it come from, the idea that one should completely separate from a loved one who has died? How is it still in our collective consciousness, given that it works for absolutely no bereaved person I know? Why do I not see it written down in advice articles? Perhaps something instinctively feels wrong about advising people to move on - wrong enough that we don’t offer it as written advice, but entrenched enough that we still find ourselves saying it. I think it feels wrong because it is impossible.

In recent years, research has revealed information about how our relatives and close friends, our life experiences, and our traumas change us physically and psychologically. Mothers and children exchange cells during pregnancy and at birth, cells that may remain in the other person’s body and play a role in health down the road. Stress and trauma can permanently change DNA in the cells of the traumatized person, in such a way that the altered DNA is heritable, often resulting in children who are more likely to experience stress-related psychiatric disorders. In education, carefully designed short-term interventions can lead to radical shifts in attitude and behavior that change how students think and work.

Our lives change us, often permanently. People and experiences become part of us at a cellular level. How, then, are we to be expected to “move on” from a child, a life partner, a sibling, a close friend, a parent who has died? How could I set aside the parts of myself linked to my brother? You might as well ask me to cut my own heart out with a knife, leave it by the curb, and then continue walking down the road. It is impossible.

What, then, is possible? For me, it’s noticing the thoughts and emotions that come up from moment to moment and sitting with them however I can. What that looks like changes all the time. I talk about him, or I stop talking. I cry in my car, or I go running. I pore through old photo albums, or I put all the albums away. I notice when his favorite songs come up on my shuffle, I write about memories, I text his friends, I take walks alone, I escape in work, I wallow in old e-mails. I show up, day after day, and I try to understand.

Caregivers who study the process of grieving refer to integrated grief - an enduring state of grief in which the loss, your understanding of it, and your emotions around it become incorporated into your life over time. Integrated grief doesn’t mean forgetting the person or setting aside the pain. On the contrary, it sustains the bond by including both the agony of loss and the positive memories. I believe this is what I am instinctually doing - trying to integrate my grief. As I slowly realize I cannot be connected to my brother how I once was, I am creating a whole new web of connection between us - a web that needs all the threads, good, bad, and ugly, to stay strong.

I have family and friends whom I love and care for, multiple work responsibilities, and personal and professional aspirations for the future. I want and need to be able to continue. So, yes, I move on - not from, but with my brother. Moving on with him gives me a chance to live.
PLEASE DON’T ASK ME IF I’M OVER IT YET

Please, don’t ask me if I’m over it yet. I’ll never be over it.
Please, don’t tell me she’s in a better place. She isn’t with me.
Please, don’t say at least she isn’t suffering.
I haven’t come to terms with why she had to suffer at all.
Please, don’t tell me you know how I feel unless you have lost a child.
Please, don’t ask me if I feel better.
Bereavement isn’t a condition that clears up.
Please, don’t tell me at least you had her for so many years.
What year would you choose for your child to die?
Please, don’t tell me God never gives us more than we can bear.
Please, just tell me you are sorry.
Please, just say you remember my child, if you do.
Please, just let me talk about my child.
Please, mention my child’s name.
Please, just let me cry.

Rita Moran

As long as I live you will live...
As long as I live you will be remembered...
As long as I live you will be loved...
FROM THE BPUSA PRESIDENT…

Fall is in the air! I live in the beautiful Black Hills of South Dakota and the scenic drives of Spearfish Canyon and Vanocker Canyon are breathtaking. The Aspen leaves are golden and the red sumac is gorgeous. It reminds me of The Fall of Freddie the Leaf: A Story of Life for All Ages by Leo Buscaglia.

The Fall of Freddie the Leaf is about a leaf named Freddie. Freddie and his companion leaves change with the passing of seasons, finally falling to the ground with the first winter’s snow. This tale mirrors the grief we experience as we mourn the death of our child/sibling. However, each leaf (each mourner) is unique and each leaf reaches the ground differently. Some fall to the ground gracefully and quietly, others are tossed by tumultuous winds. The leaves ultimately fall from the tree, but the tree continues to stand and live on. The tree has roots that grow deep to withstand all that Mother Nature gives.

With winter fast approaching, our grief seems to grow as bleak as the cold wind that blows. The holidays are less than joyful for most of us who mourn. We grow weary in this journey. I want to leave you with hope; you are part of a large “tree”. Bereaved Parents of the USA is that tree. All of us are here for you as we wait for the leaves to bud once more in the spring. There are BP USA Chapters throughout the nation. You will find the support on our website www.bereavedparentsusa.org. Please contact Chapter Development and Support and find a chapter near you. If there isn’t a chapter near you, please call Debby Hunsaker; perhaps you could be the one to open a Chapter in your area.

The BP USA Board of Directors will be meeting this October 14-16 in Washington, DC planning the Annual National Gathering/Conference for August 4-6, 2017. The theme this year is Reflect, Renew and Remember. Many new speakers and workshop presenters have already committed to next year’s conference. I hope you begin to plan your trip to join us and gather together to encourage each other in a new season of hope and healing. Until then, take very good care of you!

Delain

Editor’s Note: To view The Fall of Freddie the Leaf go to www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qs-trXRUI81o
THE WELL OF GRIEF

Those who will not slip beneath the still surface on the well of grief, turning down through its black water to the place we cannot breathe, will never know the source from which we drink, the secret water, cold and clear, nor find in the darkness glimmering, the small round coins, thrown by those who wished for something else.

Our resilience takes my breath away. It stands intimately entwined with our terrible translucent fragility. We are soft and small, brief and biodegradable. And yet, we sometimes flare like a match ignited in darkness Illuminating the moment, revealing the truth we know but cannot explain: How we are sustained By the scent of another’s sun-salted skin, the soft brush of lips on the nape of the neck.

By the blazing dawn- a promise searing the sky, and the loon’s lonely wail at the end of the day.

How we are sustained By what we love by that which loves us.

~Oriah "Mountain Dreamer" House (c) 2016

THE RIVER OF GRIEF AND HOW TO KEEP BEING

By Jini Maxwell

When I think about grief, words don’t really come to mind. What I do get is the visceral feeling of being too deep underwater. When I think of grief, I imagine the sudden stab of fear that accompanies a realization that you’ve dived deeper than you first thought: your trapped breath like a weight in your chest, the glimmer of oxygen perpetually too many arm lengths away.

Grief is more than a feeling. It’s really an environment, a new condition to your life that you have to meet with your whole self. No amount of swimming against the current, or scrambling up the banks, will make it easier to navigate. Most importantly, it is not a puzzle you can think your way out of. It’s something more bodily than that, like the mammalian diving instinct. At first contact with water, an infant’s heart rate slows, oxygen moves more slowly, and the glottis spontaneously blocks access to the lungs, all before the conscious mind can react at all. Living with grief is an animal experience, and surviving it requires the action of a body that knows how to keep being when the mind couldn’t possibly go on. Your body knows how to keep you safe, not just before your conscious mind, but instead of it. You just have to be in it, and it has to be processed as a part of you.
The bad news is, no amount of time in rivers of grief will prepare you for a new one. The good news is, you didn’t drown then and you’re not drowning now. Your body is carrying you through the experience on instinct. Take a deep breath and listen to yourself from the toes up. Feelings are hard, inconvenient and unpredictable, but the less time you spend fighting your body’s messages, the more you can learn from them.

Survival is, in the end, a game of trust, and not of thought. You have to trust that you can survive your own emotions. You have to feel, even if it’s overwhelming. The most important thing to remember about the river of grief is you’re not surviving it wrong. It’s not taking too long. You’re not moving too quickly. The river you are in is just the river you are in, without moral resonance. Trust that you can cope with doing what you need.

It’s easier to think of grief as something of a redemption arc, starting with pain and ending with the well-being you knew before. But mourning exists without narrative; it’s not something you can itemize in a eulogy. The river’s current will stick with you for longer than you expect, and you’ll emerge and re-emerge from the worst parts of it feeling as shocked by the ways you’ve stayed the same as you are by the way you’ve changed. Like a newborn in a swimming pool, trying to analyze your progress is only going to make the water feel heavier around you. Your body knows what it’s doing.

In the moments that you feel yourself entirely submerged, trust that your heart rate may slow, your throat may close and the pressure may build, but your body knows how to navigate this space, even if your mind does not. Every fiber of you is already working slowly and carefully to navigate this new emotional landscape, if you let it. That’s how survival happens—by gentle instinct, not by achievement or analysis. Take the time to be in your body, listen to every soft and hurting part of yourself whenever you feel the urge: beat to beat, without scrutiny, until you can resurface.

However you’re going, you’re going okay.
THE SEASON OF LIGHT
By Darcie Sims, Ph.D.

BE PATIENT WITH YOURSELF
Know that hardly anyone is as happy as you think they might be. We all have our hurts to bear. Do what you can this season and let it be enough.

BE REALISTIC
It will hurt, but don’t try to block bad moments. Be ready for them. Lay in a supply of tissues (a roll of toilet paper is even more efficient!) Let those hurting moments come, deal with them and let them go.

BE KIND AND GENTLE TO YOURSELF
Figure out what you should do, balance it with what you are capable of doing and then compromise. Forgive yourself for living.

PLAN AHEAD
Grieving people often experience a lack of concentration. Make lists. Prioritize everything. Decide what is really important to you.

LISTEN TO YOURSELF
As you become aware of your needs, tell family members and friends.

ASK FOR HELP WHEN YOU NEED IT; TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF PHYSICALLY
Eat right. Exercise (or at least watch someone else). Gift wrap some broccoli. If nothing else, jog your memory!

CHANGE SOMETHING
Everything has already changed, so don’t be afraid to change some traditions. Try whatever pops into your head. You can always stop it if it doesn’t feel quite right or doesn’t work! But don’t toss out everything this year. Keep some traditions. You choose which ones.

LEAVE THE WORD “OUGHT” OUT OF THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

HOLD ON TO YOUR WALLET AND CHARGE CARDS
You can’t buy away grief, but you might be tempted to try.

UNDERSTANDING...
The heartache will be unpacked as you sift through the decorations, but so, too, are the warm loving memories of each piece. Don’t deny yourself the gift of healing tears.

SHARE YOUR HOLIDAYS
With someone, anyone! Ride the ferry, visit a soup kitchen or nursing home, spend an evening at the bus station. There are lots of lonely people who could use your love and caring.

WORK AT LIFTING DEPRESSION
Take responsibility for yourself. We cannot wait for someone else to wrap up some joy and give it to us. We have to do that for ourselves. Think of things you enjoy and give yourself a treat. (Cookies are often therapeutic!)

HANG THE STOCKINGS
Place a wreath on the grave. Do whatever feels right for you and your family.

LIGHT A SPECIAL CANDLE
Not in memory of a death, but in celebration of a life and a love shared.

LEARN TO LOOK FOR JOY IN THE MOMENT
Get a pair of rose colored glasses and change the way you look at things. Joy happens when we look for it!

FIND THE GIFTS OF YOUR LOVED ONE’S LIFE
Think of all the “gifts” that your loved one gave to you -- joy, safety, laughter, companionship, etc. List these “gifts” on strips of paper and keep them somewhere close to you. Some may put them in a gift box while others may decide to place them in the stocking. Some may decorate the tree with them or simply keep them in a memory book or in a secret place. But, wherever you place them, know these small strips of paper hold treasures far beyond our capacity to understand. They hold tangible evidence that someone lived. It is a reminder that we did exchange gifts and that we still have those gifts, even if the giver has gone.

LIVE THROUGH THE HURT...
so that joy can return to warm your heart! This is the Season of Light – for it is the season when we remember that once we loved and were loved.

And that is the greatest light and memory of all!
Memories are where our loved ones continue to live after they’re gone; this is why we hold onto objects that remind us of them and go to places where they feel near.

True, when someone we love dies, we are forevermore at risk of their memory triggering aftershocks of the pain.

But inversely, if we let them, such reminders may also fill us with warmth and comfort.

In time you may even find that the very “grief triggers” that once caused you sadness now fill you with a sense of love and remembrance.

www.whatsyourgrief.com

During this holiday season may you find peace and comfort as you cherish the memories you have shared with your loved one...
Go to www.bereavedparentsusa.org to donate today

With your help... we, as bereaved parents, help grieving parents and families rebuild their lives after the death of a child.

THANK YOU!