KEYNOTE AT 2002 GATHERING

Reviewed by Betty Ewart, Newsletter Editor

With Abby Shields’ permission, we are presenting some highlights of her Keynote Address in New Orleans at the 2002 Gathering. Abby is a bereaved mother a survivor and a motivational speaker. She set a very good tone for the Gathering and offered several matters for thought.

Her first and continuing comment was, “Life is what happens when you are making other plans.” She told us about the death of her daughter and how she, as all of us, never really expected what happened. She likened it to the fact that, when we leave the hotel, someone will put a bill under the door that day to remind us that this is our last day. We get no reminder like that – no slip under the door so we can prepare or maybe even change things.

Abby also talked about gardening and how a flower has to go through a lot of “dirt” to get to the top and bloom. So we all have to go through a lot before we again break into the light and go on with life.

Then she reminded us that death brings pain and pain is the price we pay for loving someone. She told us that, at some time we must all put up our right hand and say, “I can never get yesterday back.”

Next she talked to us about the fact that we must take one day at a time and suggested that we Focus. She had us look at all the brown things in the room around us and make a mental note of them. Then she had us close our eyes and said, “Imagine now all the orange things in the room.” This showed us that, when we are focusing on one thing, we tend not to see other things. Focusing on the death of one child may cause us to forget the other children in the family or the spouse and the good things in life. She suggested that God puts eyes in the front of our head in order that we may look forward.

LIFE IS WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU ARE MAKING OTHER PLANS.

(This exercise about Focus would be good to use in a Chapter meeting to open a discussion.)

Abby next urged us to practice the Be Attitudes. These include Be still, Be hopeful, Be patient, Be yourself. We were also encouraged to grasp the red nose attitude. Abby uses it in traffic when others are irritated at delays, in the grocery store, etc. It causes laughter. Laughter is healing. Some may not be ready for this kind of approach yet but it was easy to see that it could work. She told about wearing the red nose to the store one day. She saw a woman who looked especially sad and spoke to her and the woman smiled. The woman came up to her in the store later to thank her and to tell her that she had just buried her husband and this was her first day out shopping. She was so sad and this “crazy woman with the red nose” had made her smile again. They were able to talk and share. Abby gave each person at the Gathering a red clown nose to take home and wear to use the red nose attitude.

At the close of the talk, Abby had us all stand up. She put us through another “exercise”. We put our right hand out in front of ourselves and put our right hand in back of us. We then put our left hand in front of us and then in back of us. We began to suspect what we were doing! She then asked us to put our whole self in and take 2 steps forward, take our whole selves out and take 1 step back. Then to turn it all around and shake it all about and “that’s what its all about.” This was a favorite game of her child and she calls this the HP (Hokie Pokie) Principal! We ofted take two steps forward and one step back sometimes but we can realize that we do move forward even if slowly. We need to “put our whole selves in, turn ourselves around” and start again because that is “what it is all about.”

Abby’s grief was hard to deal with, but Abby is what we all want to be – a survivor. She ended by telling us to take two of our common sayings, “I can’t” and “I quit” and put them together and say, “I can’t quit”. We all went on to the rest of the Gathering and home later with new ideas and inspiration.
Bereaved Parents of the USA

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To send address changes, ask for a Newsletter or send other materials; Betty R. Ewart, Editor BP/USA Newsletter 326 Longview Ave. Lewisburg, WV 24901 Phone/FAX: (304) 645-3048 E-mail: newsletter@bereavedparentsusa.org

For other information, contact the Bereaved Parents of the USA PO Box 95 Park Forest, IL 60466 Phone: 630-971-3490 FAX: 708-748-9184

Our web site is: http://www.bereavedparentsusa.org

FROM THE EDITOR

Betty R. Ewart

We are a little late with this newsletter in order that we could bring you the news and materials from the 2002 Gathering. It went very well, with a good attendance. We thank the St. Bernard Chapter of New Orleans Chapter for all their hard work to make it a success. Laurie, the chair of the committee, had serious health problems with both her mother and father during the Gathering but continued to ensure that everyone had a helpful and meaningful experience. Thanks to you all. We are looking forward to the 2003 Gathering in St. Louis. More on that later.

Mitch Dudnikov and Cathy Bender were elected to the Board of Directors, representing Chapters and Theresa Valentine was re-elected as the Member at Large Representative.

They join John Goodrich, Pat Moser, Mary Murphy and myself on the Board. Paul Kinney was re-elected Treasurer and Dennis Klass was appointed Advisor again. Names, addresses, phone numbers and e-mails will be posted on the web for all members. You will also find them throughout the newsletter. Please contact any of us anytime with questions, requests, etc. The Board will meet again in October in St. Louis. These meetings are open to any member wishing to attend. The actual date and time is not set yet. It will be posted on the web or you may find it out by writing or calling Betty at the addresses in the column at the left or Mary Murphy at e-mail, aamurph@swbell.net or by phone at 314-822-7448.

Officers for the coming year are: Betty Ewart, President; Pat Moser, Vice President, Mary Murphy, Secretary and Paul Kinney, Treasurer. Mary will oversee the web site, Pat and Cathy will work on Chapter Development, and Theresa will work with the Members at Large. Mitch is Chair of the Nominating Committee.

We are all looking forward to another year and welcome the input of all of you. We will keep you posted of actions and activities and Chapters will receive a Chapter Chat soon too. Keep in touch!

NOMINATIONS

The nominating committee will begin work on a slate to run for two places on the Board at the next Gathering. If you have nominations to offer, please send them to Mitch Dudnikov, One Farrington Ct., Baltimore, MD 21209 by no later than October 15.

THE ROY AND JUANITA PETERSON AWARD

The Roy and Juanita Peterson Award was presented this year to Paul and Pat Kinney in recognition of all that they have done and are doing for BP/USA. They were active in their chapter in Louisville, helped found BP/USA and set up the first two Gatherings in Louisville. Paul serves as Treasurer and Pat has contributed to the Boutiques at the Gatherings, chairing the one last year. As Pat said when receiving the award, it is all done in memory of and to honor their son Jeffrey John Kinney.

Juanita had hoped to be with us to present the award but her health prevented that. However, her sister Gail, who is a newly bereaved parent presented it for her. Gail has become a part of the New Orleans Chapter and helped with the Gathering although her grief is very fresh. How great that BP/USA can repay Roy and Juanita for all they have done by helping Gail.

Please note that we now have pressure sensitive car window decals, Christmas ornaments and lapel pins with the BP/USA Logo for sale. For more information, contact Betty at the e-mail listed above, Pat at patmoser.aol.com or check our web site. The decals are $1, ornaments are $6 and the pins are $3.

Please note that the new address for Bereavement Magazine is 4765 Carefree Circle, Colorado Springs, CO 80917-2118. The phone is still 888-604-4673, toll free. Remember to give this information when copying articles from the Magazine.

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THE PENNY JAR
Faith Murray Ewald
BP/USA Hinsdale, IL

At our local chapter meeting, one man said that he has developed some “quirks” since his son’s death and one of them is to save pennies. He refuses to use his pocket change to pay for things, giving instead whatever larger denomination he may have and waiting for change. He says people wonder sometimes what’s wrong with him but it’s only this: his son used to save pennies in a jar. Now the father puts pennies in that same jar. His wife explained further that the jar is emptied and refilled, and the accumulated money goes to a fund they’ve established to send boys to summer camp.

Another family regularly sends a contribution in their late child’s name to a children’s charity drive. And more than one family of our acquaintance supports a child through the Foster Parents Plan or a similar organization which sends the family a picture and periodical progress reports on the health and education of one child in a disadvantaged area.

I know there are many ways of memorializing our children and when we set out to do something, we need not mean to build a university. A simple jar of pennies that grows into the sum of a camp tuition is just as real a memorial, even though it begins with just a handful of loose change.

Memories are a legacy of hope and courage, left to help us go on when the giver is gone.

Sascha
From WINTERSUN

HIS SHOES SPEAK TO ME
Ora S. Lewis
BP/USA Orange County, CA

Written in memory of her son, Gregg Lewis
His shoes still sit on the closet floor
Tho’ he’s been gone a decade and more.

Some days my memories are a bit hazy.
Is it a nightmare or am I going crazy?

I go to the closet and there are his shoes.
It’s easy to see they really were used.
The prints of his feet are still inside.
He really did live but too soon he died.

Reality returns, with his shoes on the floor.
How long will they be there? Till I need them no more.

His bronzed baby shoes sit on a shelf.
They help me to meet a need in my self.
These baby shoes speak of a life just beginning.
The work shoes tell about life and it’s ending.

With the passing of years, some peace I’ve attained.
But the happiness I once knew cannot be regained.
Yet there’s much about life I still want to live
To my family and others, I still yearn to give.
I’ve cried many tears, felt the guilt and the pain.
My grief has diminished and I can laugh once again.

WHAT IS LEFT?
Betty Stevens
BP/USA Baltimore, MD

When a child dies, you ask, among other questions, what is left? A beautiful, sensitive, intelligent child has died. What can be left after such a crushing blow? Others will point out that you have a spouse, other children or grandchildren, perhaps relatives or friends; they are all left. Perhaps you have a career that is left. And yet, how meaningless all of those are to a bereaved parent, to one who is suffering the most devastating loss of all. So you continue to search for what it is that is left.

You read books on bereavement, scarcely remembering what you have read; you attend meetings, talk with others who have suffered a loss like yours. If you are fortunate, you have one or two good friends who, while they cannot fully understand, are there to love and listen. Perhaps there is a therapist who guides you in your search for an answer. But, for a long while everything you read or hear has little meaning and certainly cannot provide the answer to your question. Or can it? Does all that you have read and heard and experienced finally come together and answer the question of what is left?

For me it does, the answer was thirteen months in coming, but how clear it comes now. I am left. That’s it! I am left and I have been left with the love of my child. It is a new love, it is different, more intense; it is understanding, it need not be reciprocated, there are no strings attached. I love this love of my child. It warms and comforts me. It is a wonderful love, but I cannot keep it. It is too precious to keep to myself. I am left with love to spare and love to share. It will never run out. My child will always be with me to replenish it. I have found my answer. I am left to share my child’s love with you.

Sascha
From WINTERSUN
UPCOMING EVENTS

September 12-15, 2002: Third International TCF Conference in Sydney Australia. For information contact TCF New South Wales, PO Box 1303, Sydney NSW Australia 1043, email:tcf@bigpound.com.au.

June 27-29, 2003: The St. Louis Chapter of the Bereaved Parents of the USA is pleased to announce that the 2003 BP/USA Gathering will be in St. Louis at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, St. Louis Airport. As their information becomes available, it will be announced by mailings, in the Newsletter and on the web site. Plan now to attend.

BOOK REVIEWS

IN SEARCH OF HOPE: ONE WOMAN'S JOURNEY THROUGH DESPAIR IN THE WAKE OF NEONATAL DEATH, INFERTILITY AND MISCARRIAGE by Susan R. Lowe. She helps the reader to know better the feelings of a bereaved mother during these times and reveals what she experiences as "God's compassionate hand in all circumstances from sorrow to joy, from despair to hope." The book is available through Publish America, Inc., PO Box 151, Frederick MD 21705 and can be ordered on line at www.publishamerica.com.

MY TEEN ANGEL BY Sally Silagy. This is a book by a mother whose 15 year old son Scott died. She also presents the stories of several other bereaved parents who have had a teen age child die. It deals with how quickly our lives change and how we begin a new life and journey. The book is available from SDS Publishing, 680 Calico Court, Woodland Park, CO 80863. You may reach her at sallysbook@aol.com.

LOVE NEVER DIES by Sandy Goodman. This book is the story of a mother's journey through loss and contains parts with each chapter which she feels are communications with her son. Sandy led a workshop at the Gathering in New Orleans. The book is available from JODERE GROUP, Inc., PO Box 910147, San Diego, CA 92191-0147 and the contact is www.jodere.com.

REPORT ON 911 DONATIONS

BP/USA has received a thank you note for the brochures and newsletters we sent in November for use with the families affected by the 911 tragedy. The letter says, "Your materials offer 'life-lines' to many, filling them with positive thoughts and strategies in their grief." Elaine Stillwell, who has coordinated this, reports that they are still delivering packets to bereaved parents, spouses, children and siblings.

We used the money donated to us for a 911 Fund to pay for these brochures, newsletters and the postage to send them both to NY and to the Pentagon. We also purchased the BE-REAVEMENT MAGAZINE special edition for all of our chapters and for distribution to grieving persons.

The Board of Directors has voted to close the 911 fund as of Sept. 11, 2002, and send the remaining money to the New York Fire Department Fund. It has been suggested that we ask that, if there are any bereaved parents who might have had one or more child die and might welcome some help, that the money be used for that purpose. If anyone wishes to give to the Fund before it is closed, send the donation to Paul Kinney, Treas., PO Box 5903, Louisville, KY 40255-0903 and note the purpose of the gift. This should be done by Sept 1, 2002. We will report the final amount distributed. Thank you all for your kind donations for this purpose.

TAPES AVAILABLE

If you found the opening coverage of Abby Shields’ talk at the Gathering and would like to hear the entire program or are interested in other tapes from the Gathering for use with Chapters or personally, David and Beverley Hurley of Tampa, Florida, have taken tapes that Dave made and can provide copies for $5 including postage. This covers the cost and the time and work is a work of love by Dave and Beverly.

Tapes include:

Opening with Abby Shields
Friday evening with Paul Alexander
Sat. evening with Patsy Keech
Suicide workshop by Paul & Pat Kinney
Grandparents grief with Roy & Joyce Zaffuto
Tabatha Walker Songs

If you wish tapes contact Dave and Beverly Hurley, 3805 W. San Juan St., Tampa FL 33629, phone 813-831-2588 or email at david.hurley@gte.net or bee.hurley@gte.net

INFORMATION

Several people have written to ask to approach our members for information for a book or a study. We never give out information on our members but will list these and, if you wish to contact them, you may.

A journalist from England is writing a book about men and their loss of a child in pregnancy or within the first year. If you wish to share your story contact him at andrew.don@ntlworld.com. Another person is writing a book on the positive lessons learned from a dying child. You may learn more about that at www.lessonsinliving.com and offer imput if you wish.

EDITORS NOTE: This is a good time to remind Chapters and members that we do protect our members by never giving out information on them to anyone seeking to solicit information or funds.
LIVING MEMORIALS
A letter from Sascha

I wondered for a while whether I should call you “my fellow bereaved parents”, but then I decided that you are so much more than that. You may be bereaved parents first, but you are also on your way to becoming heroes, if you have not already reached that point. Of course, you are friends and better friends than most. But you are still more than heroes and friends, you are also a collection of memories, you are the listeners, the faithful guardians of the spirit of your dead children. You live in their honor, you heal in their honor, you work in their honor, and yes-you even laugh in their honor. Take a moment right now for a long deep breath and remember a happy moment in the life you and your child or children were given to share together. Was it a birthday? Was it a Christmas? Was it a vacation? Was it the day they were born? Was it the day you first knew you would have a baby? Take a long deep breath and remember. So, today you have your memories-though sometimes there are only the memories of things that might have been. But for now, for as long as your heart beats-the living memorials for your children. What does it mean to be a living memorial?

Most of us already have an idea about that, but many may still be looking for a way to define our calling or to enrich our mission. That’s not an easy task for grievers. Still the search for more than mere survival is a rewarding road, and you have already begun to travel that road or you would not be reading this. In fact, one of the very best places to start your journey may be right in the company of others, sharing your sorrow and understanding your search for becoming a living memorial in your own way. You will find many living memorials. You will find tears to comfort your easy grief, you will find smiles to promise that you will feel better tomorrow or next month or next year. You will find gentle words helping you wait for your grief to grow a little softer. You will find encouragement and understanding from bereaved parents who took whatever time was necessary to mend their broken lives. And there are always those who are well-known heroes in honor of their children, heroes who have decided on some work of love, for giving new strength and comfort to other grievers.

Being a living memorial starts with the tears you cry at first and continues with the patience you give to yourself and to the partner and surviving children with whom you now share a more solitary life. Some day soon you will be able to see how important your acceptance of grief is for healing-and for your survival as a living memorial. Simply being the bearer of hope for other grievers and keeping your courage alive, carries to the world a mission which honors your children. The bereaved father, the understanding mother who learn to inspire us with hope are as meaningful as the grief support professional or the workshop leader. As long as you do or plan something positive for the love of your child, you are a living memorial.

Some of us do all the work for thousands of newsletters. Many of us make telephone calls to the newly bereaved parents in our city, our county, or state. We help to prepare meetings, conferences, provide transportation, invite speakers or bake the best cookies this side of heaven. How many of us have not made cookies while softly crying because we were making the cookies our child loved best?

The lesson of patience is perhaps the hardest route to becoming a living memorial. This first lesson means learning to be patient with your grief. There are some bereaved parents who feel an overwhelming need to begin helping other bereaved parents almost a day after the funeral—parents almost a day after the funeral—we can all understand that.

But grief is a dictator, at least for a while. How well we know that early grief demands that we deal only with it. This can give us an overwhelming sense of hopelessness. It makes us afraid that the pain will always be the same; tomorrow, the same as today-the same pain, forever. But if we allow grief to take its time in our life, we can gradually become ready to survive and, later on, to feel some hope again.

That’s when we find ourselves capable of choosing new ways in which to remember, to honor, to love our children. That’s when we discover the wonderful ways in which to make the children live again in spirit. In time, we will enjoy being a living memorial. The important words are “in time.”

While I can’t be there with you in body today, you can be sure that I will be with you in spirit. I wish you courage and patience. I wish you peace of mind and hope for the future.

There is a little LARGO verse which is making its round in grievers’ newsletters today. It is the perfect thought for our road to becoming a living memorial.

THEY ARE WITH US STILL
RETURNING EVERY DAY TO US
THE LOVE WE GAVE THEM
ONCE

With greetings from the heart, I am yours especially today.

Sascha
BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA
MEMORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

BP/USA Baltimore MD Chapter                              In loving memory of the children of their members
BP/USA Greenbrier Valley WV Chapter                In loving memory of the children of their members
Ruth Walker Banick                                     In loving memory of daughter, Lesley Marie Walker
Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham A Gift to our organization
Barbara & Donald Cook                                    In loving memory of their children, Ann, David and Ashiev
Mitch & Renee Dudnikov                                   In loving memory of their son, Marc Dudnikov
Jack & Betty Ewart                                       In loving memory of their daughter, Ruthie Ewart
Vickie Hodge                                             In loving memory of nephew, Christopher Hodge
Donald & Helen Powell                                    In loving memory of Gene A. Powell
John & Therese Goodrich                                  In loving memory of daughter, Paula MarieGoodrich
Craig & Sis Flanders                                      In loving memory of son, Andrew R. Workman
Pat & Paul Kinney                                        In loving memory of son, Jeffrey John Kinney
Carol & William Paulson                                   A gift for our healing programs

FOR THE 2002 GATHERING

Tampa Bay Chapter                                        In loving memory of all our children
Jack & Betty Ewart: BP./USA lapel pins                  In loving memory of Ruthie
Best of Friends Daycare                                 In loving memory of Marissa
Coca-Cola: Ronnie Webster                                In loving memory of Cyerese
Cure’s Cleaners : On behalf of the Fichards family       In loving memory of Brenda
Daiquiri’s Paradise : On behalf of the Longo family     In Loving memory of Nathan
Grand Casino Biloxi: On behalf of the Nash Family        In loving memory of Darren
Kentwood Spring Water: On behalf of the Roose family    In loving memory of Charlie
Longo’s Mechanical Contractors                           In loving memory of Nathan
Nata Carpet Care                                         In loving memory of little Joey
Transportation Group, Inc.                               In loving memory of Marc LaFrance, Marissa Myers, Charles
Viacom, Inc.: On behalf of the Smith family              Miller, Jr. & Dustin Owens
Many businesses in the New Orleans area including the Sheriff’s Office

If your donation does not appear on this list, notification of it was received after this Newsletter went to press and we will acknowledge it in the next Newsletter.

Since BP/USA is a qualified charitable 501(c) (3) organization your donation may be tax deductible. Donations may be designated as follows: in memory of a loved one, in appreciation for someone or something in our life, the Gathering costs, brochure printing or the newsletter printing and postage. If there is no designation, the money will be used for general operating funds.

Please carefully designate how you would like the donation listed on this page. We thank our chapters and individual members for their generous support of BP/USA and its work.

Contributions may be sent to: Paul Kinney, Treasurer, PO Box 5903, Louisville, KY 40255-0903.