



# A JOURNEY TOGETHER

## NATIONAL NEWSLETTER OF THE BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA

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(July, August and September)

### THE MYTH OF PERFECT PARENTHOOD

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

The feeling of worthlessness is strong in many bereaved parents. I believe that the myth of perfect parenthood which is deeply set in us is one of the main causes. We expect that we will raise perfect children, provide them with the very best we can afford and, most of all, see that they are safe and secure in their lives. Then when the unspeakable happens and our child died, we feel we have failed totally and completely.

We did not see the unhappiness in our child in time to prevent his suicide. We did not spot the symptoms of her illness in time to prevent her death. We let her take the car instead of driving ourselves. We were enjoying ourselves somewhere else when he was run down by a careless driver. It is our fault. We failed to be a perfect parent.

It sounds ridiculous, but unconsciously, below our awareness, lies the idea that if we had been doing our job as “Good Parents”, we could have prevented our child’s death.

Not one of us has ever said, “I expect to be the perfect parent,” but, on all sides of us, it is implied that we should be. The television and advertising media are big contributors to this myth. The “Father Knows Best” type of TV program convinces us we should be perfect parents. The parents in TV shows always see that their child is depressed and know

the right words to talk him out of it. The TV mother always discovers the illness in time for the doctors to cure her. The TV child has been taught to drive carefully and, if he does get into an accident, he comes out of it with fixable injuries.

Advertising tells us the right things to use to raise perfect children. If they are not perfect, it tells us the right things to use to make them that way. It even tells us what insurance to buy that will help us pay for that perfection.

We ourselves expect to do a better job of rearing our children than our parents did. All around us, other parents seem to be doing a better job with their children than we are.

We are bombarded from all sides by the idea that we should be perfect parents. Even before our child died, many of us felt inadequate as parents at times, but, when our child died, we saw ourselves as failures. Our unconscious minds told us we were not perfect parents so, therefore, our child was dead. We failed. We were worthless.

How unfortunate this is. As human beings, we cannot be perfect. We need to realize that we did the best we could have done for our child with the emotional, intellectual and material tools we had. Our child’s death, no matter what he/she died from, was not caused by our failure as parents.

We need to be aware that this myth of Perfect Parenthood is actively at work in our subconscious minds and fee

feeds our feelings of worthlessness. The pain of the loss of our child is devastating enough – we don’t need to beat ourselves down even further by allowing this myth to consume us.

(Margaret Gerner was presented the 2006 Roy and Juanita Peterson Award at the Gathering in St. Louis.)

### WHY?

By Rabbi Earl Grollman, from  
“Living when a Loved One Has  
Died”

How often in happy times did  
you ask, “Why?”  
When blessings were yours and  
life was joyful, did you ask,  
“Why?”  
Now death has shaken your  
faith, “Why?” “Why me?”  
“Why didn’t I die first?”  
“Why must my life be one of  
sorrow?”

There are no pat answers.  
No one completely understands  
the mystery of death. Even if the  
questions were answered, would  
your pain be eased, your  
loneliness less terrible?

There is no answer that bridges  
the chasm of irreparable  
separation. There is no  
satisfactory response for an  
unresolvable dilemma.

Not all questions have answers.  
Unanswered whys are a part of  
life.

**BEREAVED PARENTS OF  
THE USA**

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Betty R. Ewart  
BP/USA Newsletter  
326 Longview Ave.  
Lewisburg, WV 24901  
E-mail:  
newsletters@bereavedparentsusa.org

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You will find articles, location of Chapters, links to other organizations and other information on the Web site also.

For other information, contact  
Bereaved Parents of the USA  
PO Box 95  
Park Forest, IL 60466  
Phone & Fax: 708-748-7866

Our web site is:  
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**2007 Gathering**

Put it on your calendar now!

**WINDS OF HEALING...  
WINGS OF HOPE...**

**July 13-15, 2007  
Double Tree Guest Suites  
Downers Grove, IL**

**Near the O'Hara and  
Midway Airport s**

**More information to come soon!**



**FROM  
THE  
BP/USA President**

*I am* delighted and honored to become the new President of BP/USA. I thank the current Board of Directors for their confidence and trust in electing me. It is with much enthusiasm and eagerness that I look forward to this job.

I want to say a big thank you and congratulations to our outgoing President, Pat Moser, as she starts a new chapter in her life – *retirement!* I will have a tough act to follow as Pat Moser is loved by all and she is always full of energy!! Pat has served BP/USA BOD and completed her term limit of six years with two of them as President. I know BP will always be in her heart (after Pete) and she will continue to be there for us.

Another member leaving after fulfilling her Board term limit is Theresa Valentine who has been an asset and a delight when working on BP/USA business. Theresa is also starting a new chapter in her life–*travel!* Theresa promised me assistance when I need it – if she is *in port!!*

I look forward to working with our very compassionate, competent and talented new BOD. They are: Donna Corrigan, Hinsdale, IL, Vice President; Carol Welch, St. Louis, MO, Secretary; Cathy Bender, N. Las Vegas, NV; Kevin Hunsaker, Little Rock, AR who was reelected to a second term; Jack Ewart, Lewisburg, WV who served the remainder of Mitch Dudnikov's term and is now elected to a full term; Martha Honn, Southern IL, is our newcomer, elected to her first term; and our competent and knowledgeable appointed Treasurer, David Hurley– this is your Board of Directors.

We have set some valuable goals. Chapter Leadership is high on our priority list. All of the BOD have been or still are Chapter Leaders and recog

recognize the challenges that each Chapter faces day to day and month to month. We also will continue to encourage community outreach and have some interesting plans for improvement.

We recognize that this organization is a success because of you who donate your time in your Chapter as leaders, facilitators, editors, newsletter mailers, data base maintenance, treasurer, librarian, webmaster, phone friends, meeting set up, correspondent to new comers, program planners and so many other jobs that are needed to make your Chapter survive. We also know that many of you wear many hats! Our children taught us to have big hearts and to help others and all that we do is a labor of love and in memory of our children.

Please know that I and the entire Board of Directors will be available to assist and serve you as needed and we welcome your input. Together we can make a difference in so many lives as we accept, support, comfort and encourage each other, we demonstrate to each other that survival is possible as we find the hope to survive our losses.

Love, Peace and Happiness !

(\o/) May an angel always be on  
/\_| your shoulder.

Beverley Hurley

**Believe when you are the  
most unhappy**

**That there is something for  
you to do in the world.**

**As long as you can sweeten  
Another's pain,**

**Life is not in vain.**

**Helen Keller**

**10 YEARS WITHOUT  
OUR BABY  
4-5-96 to 4-5-06**

By Paul & Claudia Balasic  
Anne Arundel Co. MD BP/USA  
Chapter

It seems like a long time.  
It seems like yesterday.

Nothing has changed.  
Everything has changed.

The memories are painful.  
The memories are sweet.

We see your smile and sparkling  
eyes.  
We can't remember your sweet voice  
or touch.

The road has been rough,  
The road has been long.  
The road has had many twists and  
turns.

The hills are steep,  
The valleys deep.,  
The detours were many.

We haven't moved at all  
Yet we are far along.

The pain of missing you is terrible.  
The pain of missing you is finally  
bearable.  
It is our burden which we embrace.

Sometimes we can't stop thinking  
about you.  
Sometimes we can't start.

We cry when we think of you.  
We smile when we think of you.

Sometimes it makes us crazy.  
Sometimes it makes us very crazy.

We missed you then.  
We miss you now.  
We'll miss you always.

We loved you then.  
We love you now.  
We'll love you always.

It's been a long journey  
but we can now think of you  
and breathe  
and smile.

You were a gift!

You still are.

XOXOXO

Mom and Dad

(Some of you at the Gathering may  
have attended Paul and Claudia's  
workshop on music in the grieving  
process.)

**WE ARE THE  
CHILDLESS PARENTS**

By Sascha

I am the childless mother  
Lost between loving and pain,  
Lost to the promise of children  
Searching for answers in vain.

I am the childless mother  
Caught between courage and  
fears,  
Left without bridge to the future,  
Finding no sound for my tears.

I am the childless father  
Caught between courage and  
fears,  
Left without bridge to the future,  
Finding no sound for my tears.

I am the childless father  
Lost between loving and pain,  
Lost to the promise of children  
Searching for answers in vain.

We are the childless parents  
Sharing the grief and the night,  
Sharing the darkness together,  
Waiting to walk in the light.

**WHEN YOU SEE A  
BUTTERFLY**

By Brytani Russell  
BP/USATampa, FL

When you see a butterfly,  
*Think of me..*

When you see a shadow,  
Don't be afraid.  
When you see a light,  
Think of good things.  
But when you see a butterfly,  
*Think of me.*

When you see a cloud,  
Don't be afraid to try and grab it.  
When you see a raindrop,  
Open your mouth and let it fall in.  
When you see a hand touch you,  
Don't jump away.  
When you get all tingly,  
Let the feeling last  
When you feel loved,  
Cherish it forever.  
But when you see a butterfly,  
*Think of me.*

When you feel like no one is there,  
Make sure you know I am.  
When you feel like I am gone  
forever,  
Make sure you feel like I am there.  
When you think you have grieved too  
much,  
I know there is always another tear,  
*Think of me..*

For you know I am always with you,  
In every way, shape and form.  
I am always there to protect you,  
Even through dangerous storms.  
Know that I am right behind you,  
In whatever fate decides to put you  
through.

For I may be gone,  
But I am around.

*For when you see a butterfly,  
Know that I am always there..*

A 15 YEAR OLD Brytani Russell  
wrote the above for her grandmother  
after the death of Brytani's mother,  
her grandmother's daughter.

## REFLECTIONS ON THE 2006 GATHERING

By Debbie Hunsaker, BP/USA  
Central Arkansas Chapter Leader

“Gateway to Healing – Journey of the Heart!” - a very appropriate title to the 2006 Bereaved Parents Gathering in St. Louis, MO. It was an incredible event. We had 20 parents and siblings attend from our Central Arkansas Chapter. Everyone hated to see it come to an end Sunday. You make so many new friends from across the US and learn so much about this journey we are on from other kindred spirits. From the opening program on Friday morning to the closing ceremony at the Angel of Hope in Blanchette Park on Sunday afternoon, it was a whirlwind of educational workshops, lovely meals with great special speakers, getting acquainted with folks in the hospital-ity room, making special mementos of your child in the Creation Station to take home, shopping for a special butterfly or angel item in the gift shop, to staying up late to talk about your child with others who understand this lifetime grief journey. So many workshops speak to you right where you are, you relate to what the other bereaved parents are sharing, realizing we are all in this boat together; you just thought no one understood and you were alone in your pain. There is an extended family out there of gentle broken hearts and warm understanding hugs who come together at the Gathering.

Saturday night’s program was a very special picture presentation of our children and candle lighting. It is so touching to see 400 candles light the darkened room in memory of our precious children who left us all too soon. And there is just something magical about placing a white carnation in the arms of the Angel of Hope statue that makes you feel she will help you carry your hurt until your heart isn’t so heavy and you can remember the good memories and keep your child alive in your heart, good

sharing them wherever you go. There is HOPE.

Next year the 2007 Gathering will be in Chicago, IL. Plan to go. It’s something you will never forget.



### BOOK REVIEWS

**HOLDING ON TO MATTHEW** by Janine Bryan is a book dealing with children’s cancer. Her son, Matthew, fought a battle for two years against a rare childhood liver cancer. It is not only about his braveness but also his mother’s hope and refusal to give up fighting for her son’s life. There is a diary of his struggle and letters to him from his parents as well as pictures of him. I found another phrase to add to many I have collected over the years from her Chapter 11, “I will meet you there.” She and her son could not always leave at the same time for places so his phrase was, “I’ll meet you there.” This is something we can all join in saying. The book is published by Matthew Thomas Books, PO Box 835, Irmo, SC 29063. Janine has told us that she will pay all shipping costs and discount the book from \$20 to \$10 for any parent who has lost a child.

**WHEN A CHILD DIES FROM DRUGS** by Patricia and Russ Wittberger contains “Practical Help for Parents in Bereavement”. It has short, easy to read chapters and each deals with a different step in the journey through grief. Her suggestions are good. She and her husband also deal with the special problems parents whose child dies from drug related problems have. They have started an outreach group, GRASP, Grief Recovery After a Substance Passing. More information can be found at [www.grasphelp.org](http://www.grasphelp.org) or at

[www.jennysjourney.org](http://www.jennysjourney.org). The book may be purchased through Xlibris Corp., [www.xlibris.com/bookstore](http://www.xlibris.com/bookstore) or Amazon, Barnes and Noble and other bookstores.

The third book I want to report on was “unveiled” at the Gathering. It is **I WALKED A MILE WITH SORROW** by our own Mary Cleckley. Mary was one of the founders of BP/USA and served on the Board of Directors for 6 years. Her writings have always been an inspiration and help to grieving parents. From time to time she will send a new article for our newsletter.

The book was literally hot off the presses at the Gathering Bookstore. Mary was there to autograph copies too. What a treasure this will be for the future.

Her book deals with specific concerns and always offers encouragement to persons on their own journey. Also, the book a wealth of materials for use in chapter meetings. Some of you will recognize articles or words that helped you in the past. Some of you will also find new material you have not read before.

The book is available from The Centering Corporation, 7230 Maple St., Omaha, Nebraska 68134 or from Mary at 133 Summit Ridge Drive, Lawrenceville, GA 30245. The cost is \$11.95 plus \$3 postage and handling.

**MAGAZINES:** There are two magazines containing very good articles on various aspect of the grieving process. One is **GRIEF DIGEST**, available from Centering Corporation, [www.griefdigest.com](http://www.griefdigest.com), PO Box 4600, Omaha, NE 68104. The other is **LIVING WITH LOSS** from Bereavement Publications, [www.livingwithloss.com](http://www.livingwithloss.com), PO Box 61, Montose, CO 81402.



## HAVE AN ORDINARY DAY

Nita Aasen, St. Peter, Minnesota  
Bereavement Magazine, Spring  
2006 – www.bereavementresources.com

Hardly a day goes by without me hearing the words, “Have a great day.” This phrase signals the conclusion of many sales transactions or conversations. Similarly, many voice mails and e-mails end with those same words even though it will likely be just another ordinary day.

In our society there seems to be an underlying assumption that great days are the norm for one and all, ignoring the possibility that there may be those who are not having a great day; they have lost a job, had a fender bender, are struggling to pay their bills, have just been diagnosed with a life threatening condition or are grieving the death of a loved one. Consequently, when there’s an expectation that “everything is fine”, it’s not unusual for others to casually end a conversation with the well-worn and over used phrase, “Have a great day!”

In the initial weeks, months and even years following the deaths of my sons, those words landed with a thud in my heart. I found I could ignore them when they were said by a stranger or casual acquaintance, but that was not so easily done when those words came from someone I knew. Over time I’ve learned to live with it, recognizing that the phrase is just a positive (or perhaps convenient) way of bringing a conversation to closure. However, I remain very aware that life experiences can significantly change perceptions of what constitutes a “great day.”

My reality is that eleven years has not altered the fact that nothing has been the same since Eric and David’s death. Even though my outward appearance has not changed markedly, I am definitely not the same person inside. My worldview, that is those assumptions, priorities, beliefs and values that had served me as well in making sense of my world, no longer made much sense following my sons’ deaths.

In contrast, when grief is experienced at a lower-intensity level, one’s worldview remains basically unchanged and it’s possible to return to a level of stability

in a relatively short period of time. In essence, one’s personal values, beliefs and assumptions are undisturbed and they continue to make sense for one’s life. It was only because of my parental grief experience that I understood how those experiencing a catastrophic loss have their world view shaken as never before, how lives can become so massively unbalanced from a high-intensity loss by death.

This difference in world views, between those who have experienced a catastrophic loss and those who have not, frequently creates a gap in relationships. The non-bereaved frequently do not realize that long-term grief work involves the dual challenges of readjusting one’s worldview to fit life’s radically changed circumstances. Nor is there much recognition that many bereaved typically do most of their grieving under cover or behind a mask. Consequently, it’s a rather common occurrence for those not living with a grief beyond belief, to routinely and casually end a conversation with a breezy, “Have a great day”, with nary a thought that those on the receiving end of that idiom may not be having a great day.

But there is another option. Recently I received an e-mail that concluded with the words, “Have an ordinary day.” Since no one had ever said that to me before or since, I was surprised but also appreciative; it was so refreshing to think that having an ordinary day was acceptable. There was no expectation that I should strive to have a “great day” when I did not feel great. And, after all, aren’t the vast majority of our days ordinary? Would we really want it any other way?

If most of our days were only great days, wouldn’t that be exhausting? How could we keep up that pace and emotional level? More to the point, if most of our days were really great days, wouldn’t they become ordinary? And, if every day was a great day, it is likely our expectations would increase and then the search would begin for days that are greater than great days.

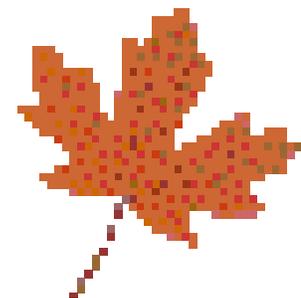
In contrast my new self has come to treasure the ordinary days. I cherish hearing the wind rustle softly through the pine trees, sitting on the porch reading an interesting article, meeting work

related deadlines or having a meaningful conversation. Amazingly, since the accident, I’ve also developed a high tolerance level for the inconveniences or irritants that are part of ordinary days such as getting after those pesky weeds in the garden, seeing the dust gather in the house, keeping track of bills, and even losing the diamond out of my wedding ring. In other words, I no longer sweat the small stuff.

Other events, such as births, graduations, weddings or attending recreational events could also be considered rather ordinary events in that they represent the expected developmental milestones and stages of ones’ life. Likewise the traditions associated with the holidays are rather ordinary occasions given their predictability in the calendar year and the sentimental sameness connected with experiencing generations-old rituals. Another major reality is that not many of us break an Olympic record, climb Mount Everest, win a jackpot or have some bigger-than-life experience that is truly out or the ordinary.

Most important, as long as things remain ordinary, it also means there are no phone calls or other means of communication that inform us of a horrific out-of-the ordinary disaster or tragedy of a loved one, our loved ones, remain safe and live to experience another day. Perhaps that’s what my son, David, meant with his signature quote: “The grass is green, the sky is blue. It’s a great day to be alive. It’s just the ordinary things that happen on ordinary days, like gazing at the green grass and blue sky that result in one feeling that it’s a blessing to be alive. It doesn’t have to be a mountaintop experience.

Have an ordinary day!



## Bereaved Parents of the USA - 2006 National Gathering - Available Videos

Number	Workshop/Occasion	Presenter(s)	Video Tape	DVD	Quantity	Amount
200601	Journey of the Heart (Opening)	Abbey Shields				\$
200602	Sids & Sudden Infant Death	Key-Price & Ahrens				
200603	Gathering Highlights					
200604	Grief & Depression: Do medication help or hinder?	Richard Dew, M.D.				
200605	Mourners are from Mars	Ned Levitt				
200606	Parenting After Pregnancy Loss	Sarah Key-Price				
200607	Power of Memorials	Ned Levitt				
200608	Create a "New Normal"	Janice Urie				
200609	Big Boys Do Cry	Prentice Minner				
200610	The Hope of the Brokenhearted.....	Fr. Joseph Kempf				
200611	Walking Through Grief	Richard Dew, M.D.				
200612	Growing Together (loss after a miscarriage/infant)	Cathi & Chuck Lammert				
200613	Inviting Peace and Relaxation Through Yoga	Peggy Desmond				
200614	African American Grief-Same Pain, Diverse Comforts	Donna Scott				
200615	Starting All Over Again	Mitch Carmody				
200616	The Transformative Power of Grief	Dr. P. Gill White				
200617	Death of a Young Child -- Subsequent Children	Ruby, Murphy and Presson				
200618	Please Say Her Name	Nina Bennet, MS				
200619	Are We There Yet? Rebuilding meaning in a life changed forever.	Nina Bennet, MS				
<b>TOTALS:</b>						\$

Ordered by: \_\_\_\_\_

Of the \_\_\_\_\_ Chapter

Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Enclose check payable to David Hurley for \$10.00 per ordered tape. (Includes Postage)

Enclose check payable to David Hurley for \$7.00 per ordered DVD. (Includes Postage)

**MAIL ORDER TO:**

**David Hurley**  
**3805 West San Juan Street**  
**Tampa, Florida 33629-7819**  
**Phone (813) 831-2588**

Email questions to [David.Hurley@gte.net](mailto:David.Hurley@gte.net)

## BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA MEMORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Michelle Calvert  
Bill & Florence Wolfel  
Don & Barbara Cook  
Coeur d'Alene ID BP/USA Chapter  
St. Louis MO BP/USA Chapter

Marion County FL BP/USA Chapter  
Hinsdale IL BP/USA Chapter

Central AK Chapter BP/USA Chapter  
Mary Murphy  
Renee Dudnikov  
Baltimore Metropolitan BP/USA Chapter  
Richard & Joanne Rose Murray

In loving memory of Michael Calvert  
In loving memory of Michael Calvert  
In loving memory of their children David, Ashley & Ann  
In loving memory of their children  
Donation for 2004, 2005 and 2006 in loving memory of their children  
and a donation in loving memory of Mitchell Dudnikov  
Printing costs for materials in loving memory of their children  
Printing of new BP/USA Chapter Leaders Guide in loving memory of  
their children  
In loving memory of their children  
In loving memory of her son, Dylan  
In loving memory of her husband, Mitchell, and her son, Marc  
In loving memory of their children  
In loving memory of Melinda Rose Silva

We also thank all of those too numerous to list who gave generously to help make the 2006 Gathering a success, especially those who made the gifts given at the tables each meal and the beautiful boutique items. All of this was done in loving memory of their children.

If we missed listing a donation, we apologize. If you will notify the Treasurer of your gift and the memorial, we will be sure it is acknowledged in the next Newsletter. Thank you. Our Treasurer is Dave Hurley and he may be reached at 3805 West San Juan Street, Tampa, Florida 33629-7819, by phone at 813-831-2588 or by e-mail at david.hurley@gte.net. Since BP/USA is a qualified charitable 501(c) (3) organization, your donation may be tax deductible. The work of BP/USA is financed entirely by contributions. All the leaders, national and local, are volunteers. Donations go directly to help chapters, to help in the sending of the Newsletter and to keep costs of the Gathering as low as possible. You may designate your donation to any of these areas or to the general work of the BP/USA. If there is no designation, the money will be used for general operating funds. Please always designate carefully how you wish a memorial or gift listed. We thank our chapters, individual members and other friends for their generous support of BP/USA and its work.

### DEATH'S AFTERMATH

(To a recently bereaved parent)  
By Shirley Ottman  
North Texas Chapter BP/USA

Just a little while ago  
I walked where you are walking now.  
Your child was special too, I know,  
and was quite different from mine.  
Yet love is love and death is death  
and pain is pain.  
Your pain is mine;  
my pain is yours.  
Come, friend, let us search for hope together.

By Paul O. Kinney

Louisville, KY  
Former Treasurer of BP/USA

We must grieve because we dared to love,  
and it is thru grief that we will recover.  
We may never have the life that we once had,  
but we can build another life.  
Our hearts will heal, our pain will lessen,  
and we will be able to talk about  
our son or daughter without the tears.  
There will come a day  
when we dare to laugh again.