WHY ATTEND A GATHERING?
By Sonia Berman
TCF/LA

Bereaved Parents of the USA and The Compassionate Friends each hold an annual gathering of bereaved parents, grandparents and siblings. For those who have never attended a gathering of bereaved parents, you may wonder why anyone would want to perhaps take vacation time to spend three days with other bereaved parents. Please let me explain because I had those same thoughts before I attended my first such gathering in Las Vegas in 2005, less than one year after Robert was killed. Here is what I found.

First, such a gathering is a safe place—not just to grieve, but to heal. Just as our chapter meetings allow for all emotions, a gathering is a safe environment. All emotions are safe and accepted. EVERYONE there understands you, even though they never met you before. And everyone there shares your pain as you begin to share theirs as well.

Second, there is an immediate kinship with others. Not just to grieve, but to heal. Just as our chapter meetings allow for all emotions, a gathering is a safe environment. All emotions are safe and accepted. EVERYONE there understands you, even though they never met you before. And everyone there shares your pain as you begin to share theirs as well.

Third, you have the opportunity to attend workshops on a wide variety of topics. These workshops address all aspects of grief from journaling to art therapy; from sibling grief to after-life communications; from losing your child suddenly to losing your child to a prolonged illness. There is always something to learn; and, the more you learn, the more coping skills you develop which will help you grieve and get through this devastating nightmare. And we all have to grieve in order to live.

Fourth, it is a chance to get in touch with your own emotions, thoughts, feelings and needs. You meet people who are just starting out on that miserable, never-ending road and some who have weathered the storm and are a little further down the road. Believe it or not, just seeing the continuum gives hope and peace.

A Gathering can be life-changing. It can serve as a tool to show how our children can remain a positive part of our lives and how it is okay to keep their legacy alive.

I am planning on attending the Bereaved Parents of the USA Gathering in St. Louis. This will be my third such Gathering and I know I have much more to learn and gain by attending. The first two helped me a lot in putting my feelings in perspective and discovering that everything I was experiencing was “normal.”

Editor’s Note: Sonia is a member of the TCF/LA Chapter which was a BP Chapter at one time also. Many of you may have met her at the last two Gatherings. Mort Schrag from that chapter has offered several good workshops at our Gatherings also. We enjoy a great relationship with this Chapter.

By Elizabeth Kubler-Ross

Hope is like the sun, which, as we journey towards it, casts the shadow of our burden behind us. Remember that it is our choice, and ours alone, to turn even a nightmare into a positive experience.
BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA

A Journey Together is a national newsletter published quarterly by Bereaved Parents of the USA.

You may subscribe or unsubscribe to this Newsletter by going to www.bereavedparentsusa.org, and clicking on National Newsletter on the Menu on the first page and you will find the proper forms through that site.

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

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FROM THE-DESK OF THE EDITOR

NEWSLETTER EDITORS:

1. Here is some information for newsletter editors. Living With Loss Magazine is the name for the magazine which used to be Bereavement Magazine. You must fill out a permission sheet with them in order to use these materials. This is what I was told.


If you wish to know more about this or get a permission to copy form, please write Carla Blowey at editor@livingwithloss.com.

2. Those of you not attending the Gathering, watch our web site for information on how to purchase tapes or DVDs of the speakers and some workshops. These would be helpful for Chapter meetings.

3. The CSRA Chapter in Augusta, GA, also sent a concern in their newsletter which we have experienced with National Newsletters too. They have found that some of their newsletters do not get delivered or at least at a very late date. They have even received a note that the person is “Unknown”. So, some of your newsletters may not go anywhere. It is probably well to advise your members to call if they do not get their newsletter in a reasonable time each month—a week after you mail them. As she said, she got a donation from one family and the newsletter was returned “Undeliverable”.

EXPERIENCED GRANT WRITER: BP/USA has a need for an experienced pro bono grant writer to help us apply for grants that will help us to better serve our valuable Chapters and Volunteers. If you qualify and are interested, please contact BOD member Beverley Hurley by e-mail at bee.hurley@gte.net.

UPCOMING CONFERENCES:

August 8-10 the POMC (Parents of Murdered Children) will have their 22nd Annual Conference in Irvine, CA. The theme is From the Storms of Grief. For information call 714-999-7132, email gspomc@yahoo.com or check on the web, at www.pomconf.com.

The MISS Foundation, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross Foundation and Arizona State University are presenting a Trauma and Mourning After a Child’s Death Conference and Retreat 2008 on Sept. 24-28 at the Embassy Suites North Phoenix, Phoenix, AZ. For information go to www.missfoundation.org/conference .

COMFORT ZONE CAMPS is the nation’s largest non profit bereavement camp for children. Most camps are held in the Richmond, VA area but there have been some in the metropolitan NY region. Camps are planned for other areas in the future. This is a traditional camp fun plus a presentation of tools to help children with their loss. For further information call 1-866-488-5679, toll free or look at their website, www.comfortzonecamp.org.
SUMMERTIME
By Sascha Wagner

It sounds so easy. A soft, warm word—time to run barefoot, time to leave windows open all night. Summertime. Somehow it seems, doesn’t it, that it’s especially meant for children. Children on beaches, children on swings, children in large pools, children in tiny tubs.

We who do not have all of our children with us may feel the summertime in two ways. One is to remember shared events and adventures—there were so many. Long rides in a hot car, a nap in the back seat. The famous question, “Are we there yet?” Everything from a heat rash to ice cream cones and sand castles.

For us, another way to feel summertime is the special emptiness brought about by children who are no longer on this earth. They used to trot along on hikes in the hills; they used to gather wood for an evening fire. Now summer brings us again the melancholy awareness of their absence. Have you ever walked on some unfamiliar path, surprised about not having been there with the children? Even when there’s nothing to remember, we are reminded of the children’s absence.

We have been diminished by death. Some of us may still have living children. Other parents have no children left. They have lost an only child, perhaps. Or all of their children died. And here we are, grateful for the warmth of summer mornings, aware of the ripe beauty of nature, trying to deal with our children’s absence with all the grace of which we are capable. Often we do not want to burden others with our grief. Or we may be convinced that others don’t want to share our distress. We have learned, after all, that the world around us is not always able to understand how we feel.

Besides, we were taught to be brave. Many of us will do everything we can to appear “normal” after our loss. But we were also taught to be honest. And when you feel the hurt, when you seem almost to be lost in the shadows of this golden summertime, don’t hide your sorrow. The grief of your spirit can perhaps be kept a secret on the outside. Yet, your deepest feelings, unexpressed, can burn into your existence with harmful force.

You can be both brave and honest. You know that it’s brave to share grief, be it old grief or new grief. You know that it’s brave to share grief, be it old grief or a new grief. And revealing that sorrow is also honest. Of course, nothing can wipe away much of your pain, but sharing grief is helpful. You will know that, after you have expressed the painful sorrow you once kept hidden and find yourself, finally, smiling at the memories and the blessings of past summertimes.

VACATION
In the Summer Sun
By Susan Pressler
Western NY BP/USA Chapter

How many of us remember this early ‘60’s song by Connie Francis? Thinking of summer, this song just popped into my head. Some of us are now enjoying vacations in the summer sun—we have lived in the past and sadness a very long time and have come to realize that life goes on. We understand that our child would want nothing other than our continued happiness and appreciation of every new day.

Thinking of vacations early after the death of our child is, we believe almost blasphemous. How can we possibly even think about seeking fun in the sun? We feel we are destined forever to stay home, mired in the muck of our grief and despondency.

Perhaps early on in your grief, forgetting the vacation may not be such a bad idea. There is a lot involved in vacation—from packing (we can’t even decide what to wear today—how can we manage to pack for a week?) to the tiniest details. Our minds truly may not be capable of handling any or all of the plans. We are distracted and driving in unfamiliar towns could be unsafe. Traveling in perfect sanity is difficult. Let’s not fool ourselves. It requires concentration of the kind we lack in our early grief. It may be better and safer for us to travel to our neighbors’ houses and forget about going any further than a mile or two in our own neighborhoods.

Try going to a local park. Bring a comfy lounge chair, sunglasses, a book or music, something cool to drink and some fruit. Go alone—try to get someone to watch your children, if necessary. Kick off your shoes and let the grass wiggle up between your toes (remember what that feels like?) Let yourself relax and drift off into your own reveries.

If we must vacation, it does not mean that we love our children any less. We will not betray our love for them by enjoying a few days away from home. Expect to be sad occasionally—it goes with us, wherever we travel but so does the love. You need not feel guilty (although you probably will) that you are having fun when your child is not with you. Try to welcome the distractions of being away from home. Try to see everything through your child’s eyes—with excitement and anticipation. Try to have the fun they would have, even for a short time. And remember, your child lives in glory. Let him/her share their glory with you in the form of peaceful moments, happy memories and delightful days in the summer sun.
BOOK REVIEWS

SOMETHING HAPPENED by Cathy Blanford is a book for children and parents who have survived a pregnancy loss. It is beautifully illustrated by Phyllis Childers. It is a story of the explaining of a boy who must face the death of the sibling he was looking forward to having. Along with good ways of understanding this, there is, on each page, a very helpful message for the parents that will help them in their explanations too. Cathy works as a grief counselor with parents at the Hinsdale Hospital in Hinsdale, IL. This book will be available at the Gathering or you may order the book through www.SomethingHappenedBook.com.

RILEY'S JOURNEY is a book by Chantal Gaudreau. It is only available on PDF on line on your computer at this time. It is a book to help children through the grieving process. It can be printed in black and white and the child can color it as someone reads it to them. If you have a computer, look at it. It is very good. Go into www.emmysrock.com.

WHEN YOUR FAMILY'S LOST A LOVED ONE: Finding Hope Together is by David and Nancy Guthrie. Two of their children died from Zellweger Syndrome and their lives were very difficult and difficult. It is a religiously oriented book which becomes a part of their struggle. As well as dealing with the grief of losing two children, the strain on a marriage is explored. In their introduction, they say “Welcome to the book you never wanted to read-the kind of book you never imagined you’d need to read.” The book was published by Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, IL. You may find out more about this book by contacting Mavis Sanders by e-mail at mavis-sanders@tyndale.com.

FROM A MOTHER'S HEART by Joyce Beaulieu is a collection of poems and articles by mothers who children have died. It is a very helpful book and a good addition to your library. She is now working on FROM A FATHER'S HEART which is a collection of articles and poems by fathers. This book should be out in June. The next book she is writing now is FROM A SIBLING'S HEART. She would welcome articles or poems by bereaved siblings. Both of her books will be for sale in the Bookstore at the Gathering and she will be there to sign books and attend our Gathering with her daughters. Joyce Beaulieu can be reached at her website, missucassie@cs.com.

Have you registered for the Gathering in St. Louis on July 11 -13? It is not too late. For full information and registration forms, go into the BP/USA web site, www.bereavedparentsusa.org or call Betty Ewart, 304-645-3048. You will find the workshops, speeches and other parts of the Gathering will help you on your grief journey and you will also meet other parents, grandparents and siblings on the same journey.

THERE will be Leadership Training for Chapter Leaders on Thurs. July 10 also. There is scholarship help available to attend this. If you are interested, contact Beverley Hurley at bee hurley@gte.net.

On Thursday, registration will be from 3 p.m. to 9 p.m. There will be an opening get acquainted session at 7 p.m. The bookstore will be open from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. and the butterfly boutique will open for one hour after the evening program. On Friday, registration will open at 7 a.m. and the first speaker will be at 9 a.m.

Grief cannot be conquered like an enemy.
Grief can only be changed from pain to hope, from hope to deeper life.

AN EMPTY SPACE

By Joann Jones
BP/USA Tampa, Florida

Day in, Day out we falsely think That life will stay the same. We go about our routine tasks 'Till God calls out a name. First we love, then experience grief When a deep loss we face. Salty tears are the evidence of A heart with an empty space.

Many years have drifted by Since we lost our infant son. The shock was devastating. My world became undone. For a time we couldn't accept it As I still felt his presence near. Deep denial was my refuge. No sleep … depression so severe.

Through guidance and empathy we Learn To accept things that cannot be; And remember the happy times You shared as a family. These memories will sustain you. Hold them close within your heart And share with other parents Who also had a child depart.

By and by you'll smile; your head Held high. You'll get back into life's game And return to your familiar routine Still knowing things will never be the same.
TAKE YOUR TIME
Therese Goodrich
BP/USA

The one phrase we hear more than any other is: “It’ll take time for you to get over your child’s death.” We know that this is spoken with care and love. But little do we know at the beginning of our grief just what Time means: The first time, the day time, the night time, the last time—all of these times. The one thing we can say is: “Take it.” Take all the time you need. Grief is hard work. We need to take the time for all aspects of grief, and really work through it.

TAKE THE TIME to feel. It’s hard, but it’s worth it. We can’t just push those feelings aside. They are part of who we are, how we’ve managed and the life we’ve had. All of our experiences combine to affect our feelings.

TAKE THE TIME to talk. Talk to anyone who seems to care about you. Ask your friends and families if they will take the time to listen. If you need a telephone listener, call one of the Chapter listeners. We have time to listen. TAKE THE TIME to read. When you read the experiences of others, you will realize that you are not alone. Maybe a special book will help you understand what is happening to you during this time we call Bereavement. Take the time to read and reread the paragraphs or chapters that help.

TAKE THE TIME to physically take care of yourself. If you like to walk, jog or run, go out and use that time to help you feel better. Get enough rest. Take the time to sleep late some days, or go to bed earlier if you need to. Sleeping may be an escape but, if it helps you, take the time for a few extra hours. Take care of yourself by eating better. Try to understand that food gives you energy and that food helps to satisfy unmet needs. Food is always better for you than drugs or alcohol and a small weight gain or loss is not unusual. Take the time to understand what is happening to your body.

TAKE THE TIME to be angry or guilty without letting these feelings ruin your life. You may think that your life is ruined anyhow and who cares? But anger and guilt turned inward can destroy your self-esteem faster than anything. Take the time to sort through these feelings and acknowledge them. Then let them go.

Know that, when someone says, “It’ll take time,” we can nod and try to accept that as a part of our getting through these days, months and years.

Remember that someday you will TAKE THE TIME to help someone else and that time will be the most satisfying time of all.

HOW MANY CHILDREN DO YOU HAVE?
By Mary Cleckley
BP/USA

Worth repeating even if familiar

Shortly after my son died, I realized this question was going to be bothersome. Each time someone asked me about the number of children, I struggled with the answer. I soon decided I was not going to let this become a problem. I thought about how I felt about my choices of answers and chose the one that met my needs in the beginning. I had a surviving daughter, but I knew for me to answer “One” would seem a denial of my part that my son had lived and that wasn’t right for me.

In the beginning when I still needed to tell people that my son had died, I would tell in detail about his accident when the question came my way. As the months passed and I had told the story enough times, I found that it wasn’t necessary for me to go into detail any more. My needs had changed and I rethought my answer.

Now, when I am asked about how many children I have, I answer, “I had two children.” The criteria I use in determining if I go any further is whether the person asking is going to be a continuing part of my life. If so, they need to know about my son and I tell them. Otherwise, we would be constantly dancing around that fact. Better, I think, to have it out in the open. It then loses its ability to interfere with the relationship.

If, on the other hand, the person asking is simply passing through my life, then I feel no need to go any further than “I had two children.” Seldom does anyone catch had instead of have and pursue it. If they do, or if they ask follow-up questions about ages or professions, I tell them that my 26 year old was killed in an accident. Then I tell them about my daughter, who is alive and well. This gives them a choice. They can either acknowledge my son’s death and ask questions, or they can ignore that and ask about my daughter. I am comfortable either way. If they are embarrassed, I see this as their problem. Just to show you how different we all are, however, my husband felt comfortable answering, “We have one child.” This is what was right for him and is what he should have said.

You decide what is right for you—then say it! That way you define that powerful question and it loses its ability to traumatize. Don’t let it be a problem.
WHEN YOU LOSE AN ONLY CHILD

By Bill Snapp, Conyers, GA

Written in memory of Billy, son of Bill and his wife, Teal: 6/23/81—2/25/96

The loss of an only child is neither greater nor less than the loss of one of many children. However, the loss of an only child is experienced differently. It is different because you lose your parenthood, which is such a large part of the life of any parent.

With the death of an only child, you lose the person who could use all of the love you had to give every hour of every day. One of the secrets of parenthood is that from birth children teach us that we have a greater capacity for unselfish love than we thought possible. When your only child dies, you may feel that you are drowning in the parental love your heart continues to generate for the child you have lost.

With the death of an only child, you lose so much of your own future that was tied to your child's future: the first day of school; sports; learning to drive; a first crush; a first date; a first breakup; high school; college; career; marriage; children, grandchildren, great grandchildren.

Your only child lost all of this from his or her future. And, so did you. With the death of an only child, you suffer many tiny losses that cause pain only another grieving parent can comprehend. You have lost the joy of checking the cereal aisle to see if Cocoa Puffs are on sale. You have lost the reason to keep up with the top ten hits on the pop music charts. You have lost the joy of caring what prize is in a box of Cracker Jack. You have lost the joy of getting up early on Saturday morning for kids soccer, basketball or bowling. You have lost the reason to hope for a December snow. You have lost the person who thought you made the best cocoa on a cool December evening. For me, I lost a gentle, kind, generous child who loved, watched for and shared beautiful sunsets.

The loss of an only child is a devastating loss. Your child has lost his or her life. And you have lost an important piece of your own life, your parenthood. Many local support groups are near you and there is help to acknowledge and grieve these losses by sharing your pain with others who have known their own pain.

NOTE: This came from ALIVE ALONE, Summer 2008. Bill asked that donations at the time of his death be given to Alive Alone, BP/USA or TCF in lieu of flowers. The contributions page lists the people giving to BP/USA. Kay Bevington tells us what a caring man he was and how much they at Alive Alone will miss him. His words mean a lot to those of us who have lost an only child.

A KEITH STORY

By Tom Sluder, in loving memory of Keith Joseph Sluder 4/25/64—5/11/06

When he was a teenager, my wife struck deal with our youngest son, Keith. She paid him in advance to rake the leaves at a later time. When that time arrived, he was reminded of the agreement and sent to the chord.

Later, I went outside. A small amount of leaves had been raked into a pile or two. Keith was standing in the yard, rake in hand, looking up as leaves trickled down. “What are you doing, Keith,” I asked. “You’re supposed to be raking leaves.” He replied, “I am waiting for all the leaves to fall.”

Keith went ahead of us into eternity as age 42 in May of 2006.

Today, when most of the leaves have fallen and need to be raked, I look and see that yet others are drifting to the ground. I picture Keith standing in the yard, rake in hand, smiling at me, knowing that now I understand what he meant when he answered those year ago.
BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA
MEMORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

BP/USA Coeur d’Alene, ID Chapter
In loving memory of our children
John Crenshaw
In loving memory of William D. Snapp & son Billy Snapp
Barry Levenstam
In loving memory of William D. Snapp & son Billy Snapp
Carole Barber
In loving memory of William D. Snapp & son Billy Snapp
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Larry & Sandy Huber
In loving memory of William D. Snapp & son Billy Snapp
Evelyn Snapp
In loving memory of William D. Snapp & son Billy Snapp
Mary Murphy
In loving memory of her son Dylan Thornton
Evelyn G. Sorrell
In loving memory of Derick James Springer

If we missed listing a donation, we apologize. If you will notify the Treasurer, David Hurley, at 3805 West San Juan Street, Tampa, Florida 33629-7819, by phone at 813-831-2588 or by email at david.hurley@gte.net of your gift and the memorial, we will be sure it is acknowledged in the next Newsletter. Since BP/USA is a qualified charitable 501(c) (3) organization, your donation may be tax deductible. The work of BP/USA is financed entirely by contributions. All the leaders, national and local, are volunteers. Donations go directly to help found chapters. There is no charge to found a chapter and each new chapter is given a group of books to help them start a library. The money is also used to print and send copies of our brochures and to print and send our quarterly Newsletter without a fee. Donations are also used to help to keep costs of attending our Annual National Gathering as reasonable as possible as well as to maintain a website (www.bereavedparentsusa.org) . You may designate a donation to any of these areas or to the general work of the BP/USA by giving an undesignated gift. Please always designate carefully how you wish a memorial or gift listed. We thank our chapters, individual members and other friends for their generous support of BP/USA and its work.

CHILDREN AND FOREVER

By Elaine Stillwell

Ask any parent who has lost a child and he or she will tell you that it is the ultimate pain. Dealing with the numbness and shock, the loss of future plans and dreams, overwhelming sadness and heartache torment thebereaved parent. Coping and surviving after the death of a child is a never-ending struggle. You’re always missing their smiles, their voice, their laughter, their hugs and their special ways; the little idiosyncrasies that make each child uniquely your own. Unfortunately, the road through the Valley of the Shadow is a long one with no shortcuts.

After losing my two oldest children, 21 year old Denis and 19 year old Peggy, in a freak car accident, I faced the heart-breaking chore of sorting through their possessions. I realized then how easily they might become “erased” from the memories of friends and loved ones. I vowed that would never happen I wanted the world to know my Peggy and Denis and to remember them with fondness and smiles I wanted thoughts of them to tug at heartstrings. I wanted no one to ever be afraid to mention their names to me. I guess you could say I started a crusade. The more I talked about them, the more people came to know them and the more people shared them with me. Miraculously, everybody began to realize that Peggy and Denis still live on in my heart; they are my children forever.

That one thought—“my children forever” - makes my heart sing. When the boy friend of my third child, Annie, who had never met Peggy or Denis, remarked, “I feel like I know them,” it was the nicest thing he could have said. He recognized that they were still part of our family and part of our lives. With this I knew I’d done what I’d set out to do; make sure my children would never be forgotten. That focus gave me strength, the will to survive and a special meaning to my life. It inspired me not only to tell the world about my children but to share my experience since their deaths with others who have suffered this loss. Reinvesting that special love I had just for them comes back to me a hundred fold. The most important thing for bereaved parents to know is that their children will always be theirs—that they will never be forgotten.
If you no longer wish to receive this newsletter or have a new address, please let us know by clicking on National Newsletter on the menu on our web site, www.bereavedparentsusa.org. Thank you.