

A Journey Together

National Newsletter of the *Bereaved Parents* of the USA

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SUMMERTIME

By Sascha Wagner

From ALIVE ALONE

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 or 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 of 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. 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 summer times.



Like a bird singing in the rain,
Let grateful memories survive
in time of sorrow.

Robert Louis Stevenson

NOW LET US LOOK TO BUTTERFLIES

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

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

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

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

BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA

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

For other information, contact:

Bereaved Parents of the USA
PO Box 95
Park Forest, IL 60466
Phone & Fax: 708-748-7866
or on the web at
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The editor of the Newsletter is
Betty R. Ewart
BP/USA Newsletter
326 Longview Ave.
Lewisburg, WV 24901
newsletters@bereavedparentsusa.org



FROM THE-
DESK OF
THE
EDITOR

Summer always brings a new dimension to our grief journey. Vacations and picnics, family gatherings and reunions, etc. all are a part of our past and present. The current series of crises and changes in our country and its economy have had an impact on what we might have done in the past or might have planned to do this year.

I have tried to put some articles in this newsletter to help you make plans. The important thing is, as all the articles say, plan ahead and plan to read and relax and remember the great past summers you had with your loved one.



2009 Gathering of BP/USA, July 10-12

It is not too late to be a part of the 2009 Gathering in NYC. Go onto the web site, www.bereavedparentsusa.org or contact Diana at markanthony-mom@yahoo.com or call 516-233-4848. Speakers, workshops, sharing sessions and many other ways to be involved with other bereaved parents, grandparents, siblings and other loved ones.

T.A.P.S.

For those grieving service men and women, T.A.P.S. now has Care Groups in Phoenix, AZ, Long Beach, CA, Washington D.C., Chicago, IL, Fort Campbell, KY, Boston, MA, Springfield, MA, Lathrup Village, MI, Bloomington MN, Raleigh, NC and Philadelphia, PA with more to come in Tampa, FL, Lexington, KY, New York, NY, Watertown, NY, Cleveland, OH and Fort Hood, TX. For information, call 1-800-959-TAPS (8277).

OTHER UPCOMING EVENTS:

Aug. 7-9: Annual Conference of TCF in Portland, OR. For information visit www.compassionatefriends.org.

Aug 20-23: Annual POMC (Parents of Murdered Children) Conference in Cincinnati, OH. For information contact Sherry Nolan or Bev Warnock at 513-721-5683 or visit www.pomc.org.

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

BUT IT HURTS - DIFFERENTLY

By Earl A. Grollman

There is no way to predict how you will feel.

The reactions of grief are not like recipes, with given ingredients and certain results.

Each person mourns in a different way.

You may cry hysterically. Or you may remain outwardly controlled, showing little emotion.

You may lash out in anger against your family and friends, or you may express your gratitude for their concern and dedication.

You may be calm one moment - in turmoil the next. Reactions are varied and contradictory.

Grief is universal. At the same time it is extremely personal.

CHASING AFTER CLOSURE

By Amy Florian
Hoffman Estates, IL

I have kept reading in the newspapers about survivors of tragedy or death seeking “closure.” Yet no one really defines what closure means, whether it is possible or how to get there.

For many in our society, closure means leaving grief behind, a milestone usually expected within a matter of weeks or months. Closure means being “normal,” getting back to your old self, no longer crying or being affected by the death. It means “moving on with life” and leaving the past behind, even to the extent of forgetting it or ignoring it. For we who have experienced death, this kind of closure is not only impossible but, indeed, undesirable.

Closure, if one even chooses to use the term, is actually more a process than a defined moment. The initial part of closure is accepting the reality. At first, we keep hoping or wishing that it weren’t true. We expect our loved ones to walk through the door. We wait for someone to tell us it was all a huge mistake. We just can’t accept that this person has died, that we will never physically see them again on earth, that we will not hear their voices, feel their hugs, or get their input on a tough decision.

Usually it takes weeks or even months for the reality to finally sink in. We come to know, in both our heads and our hearts, that our loved one has died and is not coming back. We still don’t like it, but we accept it as true.

As the reality sinks in, we can more actively heal. We begin making decisions and start to envision a life different from what we had planned before, a life in which we no longer expect our loved one to be there. We grow, struggle, cry and change. We form fresh goals. We face our loneliness. We feel the pain and loss, but except for short periods of time, we are not crippled by it. We also make a shift in memory. Memories of our loved ones, rather than being painful as they were at first, sometimes make us smile or even laugh.

This healing phase takes a very long time and involves a lot of back-and-forthing. We alternate between tears and joy, fears and confidence, despair and hope. We take two steps forward and one step back. We wonder whether we’ll ever be truly happy again and often doubt that we will.

Eventually we realize we are taking the past, with all its pain and pleasure, into a new tomorrow. We never forget and, in fact, we carry our beloved with us; he or she is forever a cherished part of who we are. We are changed by the experience of having loved this person, by the knowledge of life’s transience and by grief itself. We become different and hopefully better, more compassionate, more appreciative, more tolerant people. We fully embrace life again, connecting, laughing and loving with a full heart.

Still, there is no point of “final closure,” no point at which we can say, “Ah, now I have finally completed my grief.” Or, “Yes, now I have healed.” There is no point at which we will never cry again, although, as time goes on, the tears are bitter-sweet and less common. Healing is a lifelong process, one in which we often don’t even realize we are healing until we look back and see how far we have come.

“Closure?” I don’t think so. Acceptance—yes. Peace—yes. Hope—definitely. But putting a period behind the final sentence and closing the book on it? No! Life and love are much too complex for that. The story does not end; instead, it awaits the next chapter.

NOTE: This is reprinted with permission from Grief Digest, Centering Corporation, Omaha, NE 402-553-1200. The Centering Corporation will be our Bookstore at the 2009 Gathering in July. Stop to see them, if you attend, and see their many good books and other items. You can also pick up a catalogue there to take home. You can also learn about joining with the Centering Subscription/Membership. If you join, you or your chapter receives a 10% discount when purchasing books and a one year subscription to the magazine from which this article was taken. This magazine contains many good articles by persons who understand our grief and our journey. If you can not attend the Gathering, you may contact the Centering Corporation at the address above and learn more about all of this by going to www.griefdigest.com.



BOOK REVIEWS By the Editor

NOW: Overcoming Crushing Grief by Living in the Present is a book written by Jack Cain with Anne Hatcher Berenberg. The basis of the book is, "The past is dragging you down. The future scares you to death. It's time to reclaim your life by living in the present." Within a 20 month time span Jack Cain had his wife die from cancer, his son from suicide and his daughter from congestive heart failure. These three deaths coming in such a short time frame are overwhelming. As the book deals with each death, we find information relating to slow prolonged death, sudden death, and shock and violent death. It is a self-help book and deals with the memories of the past and fears that the future may bring more grief and pain and the realization that one must live in the present. Rabbi Earl Grollman has endorsed this book. The book is published by JJC Publications, Winnetka, IL. You may contact them at jack@living-in-the-now.com.

THE ANDREW POEMS by Shelly Wagner is a book known by many of our readers. We have reviewed it before but received a new copy of it recently. This book contains very touching poems written by Shelly Wagner after the sudden, tragic drowning of her 5 year old son, Andrew. You will find these poems to be not only beautiful but inspiring. The book is published by Texas Tech University Press in Lubbock, TX. You may reach them at 1-800-832-4042 and read more about the book and author at www.ttup.ttu.edu

AFTER ALL IS SAID AND DONE is a book by Emily Richardson. It is basically a journal into which you can write your thoughts as you travel on your grief journey. There is an introduction and then some guiding questions and areas to write about in the journal. It is, "In your words a

personal search for hope and peace of mind body and soul." The book is published by ECPrinting.com, in Eau Claire, WI. You may contact them at 1-888-832-1135.

WHEN A BROTHER OR SISTER DIES, Looking Back, Moving Forward is a book by Claire Berman. Her sister died on 911 from heart disease. She deals with the many causes of death, especially as it relates to the death of a sibling and the relationships of siblings. The book deals with the usual concerns of the grieving person but it also presents some insights that may be new to some of us. There are chapters on the death of a twin, the part of ritual in the relationship to the death experience, and the death of a sibling with either or both are young children. The book contains interviews with persons who have had a loved one die and counselors who helped these people. There is also a section listing support groups and web sites. The book is published by Praeger Publishers, Westport, CT, an imprint of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc. You may read more at www.praeger.com.

LIFE WITHOUT SUMMER by Lynne Griffin is a novel. It deals with the grief of parents who have a 4 year old daughter die. It also deals with her counselor and their sessions. We later learn that the counselor is working to put her own life back together. The stories intertwine and, at times are confusing if the reader is not clear about the story line. The author, in writing the book, talked with bereaved parents and is able to relate to such things as we as mothers and father all have faced. The child was killed by a hit and run driver and there are all the interwoven problems about trying to find out what happened. In the novel, the mother begins to try to find the driver herself, feeling that the police are not doing their job. I feel we would not want to encourage our parents to do that for some of the reasons seen in the book. As I said, it is a novel and, therefore, not an actual story. The book is available from St. Martin's Press in NY. For information, contact 646-307-5654 or Sarah Goldstein at St. Martins.

WIND

By Deb Kosmer
Oshkosh, WI

Sometimes I hear you in the wind
Other times I feel you there
It seems so real
You seem so real
So very, close
If only it could be everyday
Your presence comforts me
Even if only for a moment
The distance disappears
And we are us once more.

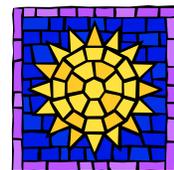
Deb Kosmer is a Bereavement Support Coordinator at the Affinity Visiting Nurses Hospice in Neenah, WI. This was dedicated to her son, Shawn Jeremy Schmitz who was killed after being struck by a car at the age of 14.

I did something today that no man
should have to do.
I weeded around your grave.
The sun was starting to set.
I could hear the crickets in the trees.
I could feel the coolness of the
autumn on the evening breeze.
The same coolness I can feel creeping
Into my heart.
As I bent to kiss your stone good-bye.
It was warm.
Once again, you have told me your
love still lives.
Just in a different place.

Written by Daryl Hutson, father of
Gregory M. Hutson

People are like stained glass windows.
They sparkle and shine when the sun is
out, but when the darkness sets in,
their true beauty is revealed only if
there is a light from within.

By Elisabeth Kubler-Ross



NURTURING YOUR GRIEF CHILD

By Mitch Carmody

What is a grief child? A grief child, simply put, is the product of your grief. Active grieving utilizes massive amount of energy. Energy is not consumed; it is only transformed. What it is transformed into is dependant upon you.

When you experience the loss of a significant loved one, you not only lose their presence in your life, you lose all the people and potentials that would have come into your life because of who they were. Because of their loss, you may lose in your life friends and relatives of the deceased. You may also, in your grieving process, lose some of your own friendships and significant relationships in your life. You also may lose the ability to concentrate, lose control of emotions, have no stamina, experience memory loss and job problems, lose the ability to attend social functions, lose your home, a lifestyle, your financial security, companionship, intimacy, capacity for caring, your motivation and even the will to live. Grief is complicated. Grief is hard work.

With a significant loss comes a huge void in your life, seemingly impossible to fill, so it is filled with unbridled grief. You cannot live in total grief forever; it will ultimately damage you and those around you. If you fill the void with total despair, apathy, anger, resentment, guilt, extra hours at your job or addictions, it will eventually consume you and then two lives are wasted.

Initially you will be swallowed up by despair and memories. You will welcome their presence and perhaps want to die yourself. That is normal and expected. Memories hurt. They are supposed to. They are your grief. It may last for months or years. Everyone's journey is different and it takes as long as it takes. It takes a lot of hard work to climb out of the pit of despair

and self pity and rejoin the human race. You may have heard the expression a "cocoon of grief". Your soul crawls into the fetal position, wrapping itself in pain and memories. Some day, at it's appointed time, it breaks free of the confines of intense grief and emerges a whole different creature (your "new normal").

It is recognizing this metamorphosis that leads us on the road to acceptance. What does this new creature have to offer to the world? Victor Frankle, a survivor of the Holocaust, once said, "To live is to suffer; to survive is to find meaning in the suffering." We have suffered. Now we must find the gift encapsulated in the grief and find the meaning and purpose this loss has for our life and the lives of others. At the last moment of His life, Jesus said, "It is finished." He meant the mission was complete that God had set forth in His life. Whatever your belief system or religious background, one can see the gift in the grief for Jesus that has changed the world as we now know it. So also can your grief bring something to the world.

You can choose to stay in the cocoon and suffocate or emerge a beautiful new creation of God, spreading your newfound wings in the sun and adding beauty to this earth. Fill that enormous void with compassion for others. Do something positive for the world in memory of your loved one. When you give, you receive and, in receiving, you are healed. Move from loss to legacy and make a positive difference in other's lives.

Your loved one can live on through your heart and your hands and your words and still affect change in this world. Love never dies. We have to learn to accept our new relationship—that they live in our hearts forever.

As they live in our heart, our heart has to grow to accommodate their presence in it. Find your own grief

child, nurture it and you nurture the world. We substantiate our lost loved one's life by the way we live ours. Let their legacy live on through us and they will live forever. This not only keeps them alive, it heals our heart. It is a glory to God and, like dropping a pebble into a pond, ripples of love are sent out into the world ad infinitum. The concept of *Pay it Forward* becomes very real.

Editor's note: Mitch has been an important part of many of our Gatherings. He will be doing a workshop again this year at the New York Gathering.



I KNOW WHERE YOU ARE

By Debbie Trepanier
Springfield IL BP/USA Chapter

3 years ago you left this earth
but I know where you are.

You are in my heart, in my
breath.
You are in every part of my day.

You are in my dreams
and my thoughts.

I know one day I will see you
again
and, oh! what a day that will be.

We can laugh with each other
again,
and cry with each other again.

I may have to suffer many years
before that glorious day.

But, for now, it gives me hope.

For now

I know where your are.

BE GOOD TO YOURSELF THIS SUMMER

Adapted from **THE HOPE LINE**
From the Newsletter of the Tampa
Bay Chapter of BP/USA

Whether you are grieving or not, it is wise to get away and “recreate” yourself. When you are grieving it is even more important to relax and take time to be good to yourself. Grief work takes an amazing amount off physical, emotional and spiritual energy. The following are some random thoughts which we hope you will find helpful.

Get outside as often as possible, even if only in the backyard. The warmth of the sun, soft breezes against your skin, the scent of grass and flowers and the chirping of birds all fill your senses and help to make you feel better and more alive.

Read a good book. Light reading helps to take your mind off grief.

Exercise helps to work off anger, frustration and depression. Search out local parks and nature trails—even walk around your own block. Brisk walking, bike riding and swimming are all great ways to reduce tension. Be sure to observe safety rules and, if you can, invite a friend, family member or another grieving person to join you.

Try to visit places where there is water. Watching water and hearing it lap against the shore is soothing. As the waves recede, try to envision your grief receding; as the waves return, think of them as bring peace and comfort.

Spend some time alone. Possibly go for a drive and observe pleasant surroundings—or roll up the windows and yell and scream and vent your anger. Or go somewhere comfortable where you can just sit and reflect.

Plan a vacation that will be a peaceful, restful time. Don't try to do too much. Try to take a respite from your grief work, knowing that, un-

doubtedly, there will be more grief work waiting for you when you return home. Sometimes it's easier if we can put the grief work aside for a bit and, when we come back to it, we see it in a different light.

Attend a support group meeting. Groups keep regular schedules all summer. The newly bereaved will gain helpful ideas on coping. For those who have been bereaved a longer time and who have not attended in awhile, go back to visit your support group and lend a hand to the newly bereaved.

Above all, hold on to HOPE!



VACATIONS

By Betty Ewart, Editor
Adapted from a former article

There is not a lot written about vacation time even though this can be a very difficult time. I remember so well the first July vacation we took after Ruthie's death in April. I could not face going and leaving her and going to all the places we had been in the past with her. That is one of the firsts—here are some hints that may help if you are dreading vacation time. By the way, there is never a time that you don't think of vacations past but the memories get less painful and you begin to force new memories.

WHERE DO WE GO? There is no answer to that. Yes, if you go where you have always gone on vacations, memories will flood in. But if you choose a totally new place, you will find that you will just wonder how she/he would have liked it there, what would she/he have done, etc. So, you take your choice and expect the feelings and plan for them!

WHAT DO WE DO IF WE VISIT RELATIVES: Talk to them. Tell them that it is hard and that it is all right to talk about your child—when they see

that you welcome hearing the name and having them share memories they have, everyone can relax.

WILL I FORGET HER/HIM?: Don't fear! You can never forget the experiences or him or her just because you are away from memories. Don't be afraid to talk about him/her and let them be a part of your vacation still.

WILL I HAVE GRIEF AS A TRAVELING COMPANION?: Remember that you can not really leave your grief at home when you go anywhere. It will always go with you. Plan for it and pack for it. Don't over schedule the days and activities—you won't feel like doing as much, perhaps, as usual and you may tire more easily. Take along some reading material—perhaps on grief but some light reading is good too.

Remember that bereaved families and people need a respite from the daily stresses of work and of life and grief. Know also that often the, vacation, etc.—is often worse than the actual event. If you have been through Christmas, a birthday or death anniversary, you may remember that the weeks and days before may have been worrisome and you may not have been sure how you would get through the time but, suddenly, the day is there and over and it wasn't as bad as you expected it to be.

So, decide when and where the vacation will be. Then make plans for what you will do. Then Go. Allow yourself to enjoy it! Often we feel guilty if we are having a good time.

Remember how much your child enjoyed trips and life and vacation times. Know that she or he would want you to do the same.



BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA MEMORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Marsha Becher/Volleyball Team

Gina DeMarco

Jennifer M. Batman

Paul Kincs

Chuck and Marlise Prestwood

Baltimore Metropolitan Area BP/USA Chapter

In loving memory of Griffin Douglas Heiney

In loving memory by a bereaved Aunt

Given through the United Way of Treasure Valley, ID

A General Donation

In Loving memory of Krissy Prestwood

In Loving memory of their children

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. Some donations go directly to help start new chapters. There is no charge to found a chapter and each new chapter is given a group of books to help them start a library. Other money is used to print and send copies of our brochures. This quarterly newsletter costs about \$5.25 per year for each one mailed. Donations are always welcome towards that cost. We welcome donations to help with the costs of our Annual National Gathering as well as to maintain a web site (www.bereavedparentsusa.org). You may make a donation to any of these areas by designating it with your donation or you may make the donation to the general work of the BP/USA by giving an undesignated gift. Please always note carefully how you wish a memorial or gift listed. We thank our chapters, individual members and other friends for their generous support of BP/USA and its work.

LIVE ONE DAY AT A TIME

By Rabbi Earl Grollman

From "Living When a Loved One Has Died"

Memories—

tender, loving, bittersweet.

They can never be taken from you. Nothing can detract from the joy and the beauty
you and your loved one shared.

Your love for the person
and his or her love for you
cannot be altered by time or circumstance.

The memories are yours to keep.

Yesterday has ended,
though you store it in the treasure-house of the past.

And tomorrow?

How can you face
its awesome problems and challenges?

It is as far beyond your mastery
as your ability to control yesterday.

Journey one day at a time.

Don't try to solve all the problems of your life at once.

Each day's survival is a triumph.

