



A JOURNEY TOGETHER

NATIONAL NEWSLETTER OF THE BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA



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We, as bereaved parents, help grieving parents and families rebuild their lives following the death of a child.

FATHER'S DAY REVISITED

Now I can look back upon that first Father's Day, the first after the death of our son, Jeff. I was a mess, a man without hope, with little or no reason to continue living, deep in my own depressive grief. I could not share any joy with others.

I look back now, wondering how I could have treated my wife and children as I did while they were trying to celebrate in my honor. Inside I was crying out, "What are these useless gifts? Don't you know the only gift I want is to have my son back?"

But it was the love, caring, understanding and nurturing of those loved ones which has brought me so far from that first Father's Day. Now I can enjoy the joy of others. I can laugh once again.

There is a life worth living.

For all those fathers for whom this is the first Father's Day without your child, have the best day that you can, with the understanding other fathers are with you on this day. One day, you too will be able to revisit this first Father's Day.



*Paul Kinney, Jeff Kinney's Father
(Paul is a founding member of BP/USA)
Louisville, KY*

THE HOPE



A close friend, the other day, asked me why bereaved parents often talk about hope. "After all," she inquired, "isn't it a little too late to be hopeful?" In one sense, of course, she's right. We hoped our sick child would recover. He didn't. We hoped our daughter would live a long and happy life. It wasn't to be. What then is this hope bereaved parents speak of?

Most national anthems extol the beauty of their country or the pride of military victories. The Israeli's sing HaTikva. It speaks of a deep spirit yearning in one's heart. It sings of the desire to be free. I think this is the essence of the hope bereaved parents seek. We hope the spirit of our children, if not their presence, will continue to live on in our hearts. We hope for the day we will have the emotional freedom to reconnect with life, enjoy the beauty of the world, and appreciate, without caveats, the memories we carry of our precious sons and daughters. We hope to be reunited with our children in the hereafter.

HaTikva, as you might have guessed, means The Hope. Perhaps there is a lesson here for us. The people who sing HaTikva have been the subject of so much suffering and sadness and yet they still sing of hope.

Can we not also sing?

Editor



FORTH of JULY

Each Year on the 4th of July we celebrate the birth of a great nation - a nation of people "united" in a dream. It was through hope, determination and a bonded strength that the people of America strived to achieve their dream of freedom to be a free nation.

Nothing, however, is achieved without a strong will. We, too, as bereaved parents are fighting a battle to be free - free of the pain that has become a part of our waking days. We want to be happy. We want to be able to enjoy life again. You are one of those proud Americans. Refuse to give up. Fight for your dream. There is peace to be found in freedom!

~written by a member of TCF, Homdel, NJ



My small daughter, my little Elizabeth has died. How strongly wretched it has left my spirit, almost like a woman's, so that I am moved by the pity of it, for I would never before have believed that a father's spirits could grow so tender towards their children.

Martin Luther,
(From a letter to a friend) 1528



Death leaves a heartache no one can heal
Love leaves a memory no one can steal

Thanks for a Job Well Done

Bereaved Parents of the USA has been blessed with dedicated parents who serve on our Board of Directors. Recently one such individual, Dave Alexander, resigned in order to devote his time to the needs of his family.

Dave and his wife Sue joined our BP/USA family after the 1998 death of Dave's 28 year old son James William Henry Alexander. Dave's work in the Anne Arundel Chapter and on the National Board was dedicated to Jamie's memory.

Dave was first elected to the Board of Directors in 2008, and was re-elected to his second term in 2011. He served as President of the Board from 2009 until the time of his resignation on May 1, 2012. During his tenure on the Board Dave's thoughtful problem solving and attention to detail resulted in the development of many new processes and procedures, always with the thought of better serving the needs of Chapter Leaders. Under his stewardship Bereaved Parents of the USA developed and implemented a strategic plan; with the goal of assuring that our organization remains a viable resource for parents who have experienced the death of a child. One result of the strategic planning session was a mission statement for Bereaved Parents of the USA: *"We, as bereaved parents, help grieving parents and families rebuild their lives following the death of a child."*

Dave has certainly helped many parents and families as they struggled to rebuild, and now we wish him luck as he enters this new phase of his life. Our thanks to Dave for his hard work and friendship.

Theresa Valentine

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Richard A. Berman, Editor

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BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA

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Bereaved Parents of the USA

2012 National Gathering

Wyndham Tampa Westshore Hotel

Tampa, FL

June 29-July 1, 2012



**VOYAGE TO STRENGTH
ON SUNNY SHORES**

***Thursday Evening
“Kick-Off Program”
Concert by Inspirational
Singer/Song-writer &
Bereaved Parent
Alan Pedersen***

Featured Speakers

Keynote by Bruce Murakami

***Inspirational story captured in the Hallmark Presentation of
CROSSROADS A Story of Forgiveness.***

***Darcie Sims, Alice Wisler, Jan Howard, Becky Russell, and
Donna Corrigan***

Gathering Highlights

Wonderful Workshops & Sharing Sessions

7- Meal Plan available.

***Bereaved Sibling Program ages 9 to Adult, Special Candle Light
Ceremony with a slide show presentation of our beautiful
children, Fantastic Butterfly Boutique, Silent Auction & Raffle
Items, Angel of Hope Memorial Garden, Tampa Bay Visit***

For more information visit the National BP/USA Website

www.bereavedparentsusa.org

or

Call 813-661-0680 or 813-495-7539



Grief Model

There are many models that describe the grief journey. Here's one that seems to closely parallel the experience of many bereaved parents. Let me know if you agree. [Editor]

Year 1... The year of firsts; the first birthdays, anniversaries, holidays. The worst holidays are Christmas and Mother's Day. It's all new and awful. We mostly agree that the anticipation of these events is usually worse than the actual days.

Year 2... Hands down, universally agreed, the worst year. We think we made it through all those firsts and its been a whole year we should be "getting better", but soon discover that we now know just how empty and sad life has become. Also the support we had, dries up and the feeling of abandonment is huge.

Year 3... The year of irrational anger. We made it through the worst year so why aren't we happier? Instead we're short fused and find ourselves constantly angry over relatively insignificant issues. We need to step back and remind ourselves this (year 3) is a strange and complicated country we're passing through on the grief journey. In group, the veterans assure the newer members that year 3 does end.

Year 4... The breakout year with mixed results. We think we're ready to start living again and try. To the rest of the world we seem normal, but still we wrestle with giving up the grief, making plans and being happy. As much as we want to fully participate in life's pleasures, something deep inside is holding us back.

Year 5... The year of engagement. At last we are ready AND able to engage life in earnest. This is the year we truly understand (not just giving lip service to) that the loss we suffered will always be a part of who we've become, but our child's death need not make the rest of our lives joyless.

*When we have lost part of ourselves and can continue rolling through life and appreciating it,
We will have achieved a wholeness that others can only aspire to.*

Rabbi Harold Kushner

Did You Know They Were Bereaved Parents?

Born in Texas during the Great Depression, Roy Orbison grew up immersed in musical styles ranging from rockabilly and country to Tex-Mex and the blues. His dad gave him a guitar for his sixth birthday and he wrote his first song, "A Vow of Love," when he was just eight. In high school, Roy Orbison played the local circuit with a group called the Teen Kings. When their song "Ooby Dooby" came to the attention of Sun Records, Orbison was invited to cut a few tracks. In addition to a highly collectible album called *Roy Orbison at the Rockhouse*, their collaboration yielded a re-recording of "Ooby Dooby" that became Orbison's first minor hit. Unable to sell "Only the Lonely" to a named artist he decided to record it himself. Orbison used his vibrato voice and operatic style to create a recording unlike anything Americans had heard at the time. "Only the Lonely" has since been deemed a pivotal force in the development of rock music.



Roy Orbison, who didn't have the Beatles' looks, Sinatra's swagger, or Elvis's pelvis, was perhaps the most unlikely sex symbol of the 1960s. He dressed like an insurance salesman and was famously lifeless during his performances. "He never even twitched," recalled George Harrison, who was simultaneously awestruck and confounded by Orbison's stage presence. What Orbison did have was one of the most distinctive, versatile, and powerful voices in pop music. Elvis Presley declared him "the greatest singer in the world."

As his star was ascending tragedy struck when Orbison's wife, Claudette, was killed in an accident in 1966 and again when his two oldest sons died in a house fire in 1968. A devastated Orbison failed to generate many hits for a long time. His career came back from the dead, however, in 1980 when the Eagles invited Orbison to join them on their "Hotel California" tour. That same year, he rekindled his relationship with country music fans by performing a memorable duet with Emmylou Harris on "That Lovin' You Feeling Again," which went on to win a Grammy. When Van Halen covered "Oh, Pretty Woman" in 1982, rock fans were reminded of the debt of gratitude they owed to one of its true innovators. Roy Orbison was able to set aside his personal grief and find a way to continue to produce his unusual style of music. By the time of his death, at only 52, from heart failure (a broken heart?) his place in music legendry was assured.

A Name of Our Own

We have all been united by the loss of a child; going against the status quo of life's cycle. Since my son's death I would continually hear how a name does not exist for the bereaved parent. There probably is not a bereaved parent who has not experienced the glassy eyed look of someone who had just found out what you were. They are dumbfounded as to what to say. Etymology tells us "orphan" is a parentless child and that "widow" is to divide. We may not have experienced either, but we can hold that picture in our mind. A name contributes to softening the impact. People identify with a name; therefore we can be identified in an understanding nature.



Believing there must be *something* out there, I began to search. I didn't know what a term would look or sound like, only that it would 'sit right' once I came upon it. I searched for a long time. The answer came to me in an article written by Professor Karla FC Holloway whom, years earlier, had also pondered a name. She referenced the Sanskrit language finding the word 'vilomah' - "to go against a natural order."

Vilomah sits well with me. In a very gentle way, vilomah describes us. Life's natural order has been upset. Regardless whether the baby had just been from the womb or past the age of fifty we have had the unfathomable task of burying our child, leaving a branch of the family tree without a leaf.

As a newly bereaved parent I remember the feeling of isolation. Seemingly from nowhere, others soon appeared offering support. We shared our stories, we consoled each other, and we reinvented a future without our children. We spoke of the nescience of many in society. The death of a child is inconceivable to most, and many are ill prepared to be around us. It has been said that we belong to a club no one wishes to join, a club that wants no new members, however our numbers still grow. Still, throughout history, this "club" has no name. How can this be so?

We have been bonded by deep and profound grief. Adopting a name for our grief lends an underlying sense of unity. Not everyone will want to be labeled or be comforted by 'vilomah'. Not everyone believes we need a name to call our own, but I feel there are many more that do. Because we hold a sense of power over something we can name, the process of grieving and stepping into healing becomes more tangible.

I will forever mourn the loss of my child but I will not be forever mourning. I remain fluid in coping with the continuum of difficult times and I have learned how to celebrate his short existence. I am learning how to live in a future without my child. I am a vilomah.

Lynn M. Gurt,
Mokena, IL

Grief walks with you today, your constant companion.
But in the morning, tomorrow, the sunrise of hope waits for you.
Sascha



PRACTICAL ADVICE

Clip this out and share it with your family and friends

Just be there for them

While speaking with people who have lost someone of great value to them, I've learned so much about what they want (and don't want) to hear in these situations. Most often, people who have experienced a tragic loss simply want you to "be there." They need you to remain present in their lives and available if they need you. They don't want you to try and cheer them up. One of the worst things you can do is to (inadvertently) make light of their sorrow by saying things like, "You'll get through this," or, "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." These statements might be true, but that doesn't make it the right thing to say. One of the most idiotic things I've ever seen was a sympathy card in a store that read, in flowery script, "He is only sleeping." Imagine receiving THAT when you're trying to endure the anguish of a loss!

You can't "make" someone feel better. They will almost certainly get better on their own and in their own time. Human beings are a resilient lot. A grieving friend cannot, in a certain sense, be consoled. He or she just needs you to be the same person you always were; a soothing reminder that they still have something valuable, even if one of their relationships is now gone. The best you can do is to provide stability and familiarity in their time of sorrow.

It's hard to watch a friend or loved one suffer. But, in a desperate attempt to "do something," you can often do more harm than good. Don't preach to them. It might make you feel better, but they'll respond by thinking, "How can he (or she) understand what I'm going through?" Any attempt to make things right applies a subtle pressure that they have to get over this quickly. But why? I regularly tell people in grief counseling, "You're never going to get over this, and that's OK. You're not always going to feel like you do right now, but whenever you think about the loss, you'll feel sad. Forever allowing a part of yourself to grieve is a way to stay loyal to your lost loved one. And, over time, you'll begin to see that it's equally loyal to go on with your own life as well." My clients appreciate this, because rarely is anybody else saying it to them. Most people either preach to them or back away; the two worst things you can do in their time of need.

Funerals, viewings, wakes and other social rituals are fine and certainly a necessary part of the grieving process. However, because they occur so soon after the death — before the shock wears off and the real grieving sets in — they don't provide everything that's needed. This isn't the time to escape the sadness and get back to normal. They need you more after the ceremony than they did in the initial two or three days. If you want to truly be there for them, that's the time. Forget about, "What can I say to help them feel better?" It isn't your job, and it isn't possible anyway. Just be present, without unintentionally pressuring them to get over it. Your gentle silence can effectively communicate everything you feel.

This applies most dramatically to the death of a loved one. The demise of a close family member is undoubtedly the worst kind of loss for most people. But other kinds of loss can also bring sadness. People lose their jobs, they lose beloved pets, they lose their homes to fire or natural disasters, and they lose friends. Although most of these situations may not be as drastic as the events following a death, the same general themes apply.

You don't have to offer clichés and empty platitudes to pressure them to get through it. They feel what they feel, and that's fine. Your job is to simply be yourself; the trusted friend or family member that you always were. In doing so, you help them appreciate the fact that, despite their loss, life still has good things to offer.

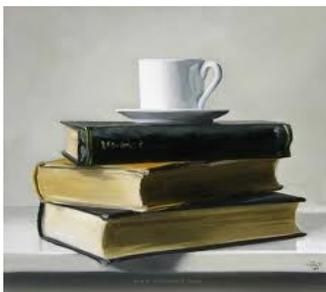
From the DE Wave column, "Life's a Beach!," by Michael J. Hurd, Ph.D., www.DrHurd.com, (c) 2012 Living Resources, Inc.

Many different kinds of love touch us; the very best kind last forever.





Find your way with **BOOKS**



A Grace Disguised
Jerry Sittser
Zondervan, 2004

It is no secret that most bereaved parents hope that they reach a point on their grief journey where life, once again, holds joy and promise. *A Grace Disguised* explores that hope. Jerry Sittser writes about chasing the sun, trying to find some reason to live, some way to make the rest of his life meaningful after his mother, wife and daughter died in a horrific auto accident.

What he learned and explains throughout the book is he had to stop seeking the light; stop chasing the sun. Rather he had to walk eastward, straight into the 'dark night of the soul' facing his losses head on until he meets the approaching dawn.

The epilogue, written for the re-print when Sittser is ten years out, talks about the blessings that are now part of his and his surviving children's lives. He tells us these blessings would be different if the accident had not occurred. He credits God for helping him find joy after such a devastating tragedy. Towards the end of this effort Sittser gets a little too preachy, but his points are valid and his emotions genuine. Consider reading this book. It can help you through the rough times.

Solace *Finding Your Way Through Grief and Learning to Live Again*

Roberta Temes, PH.D.
AMACOM, 2009

Solace is a general grief book as opposed to one specifically for bereaved parents, but I think Dr. Temes has covered rather well most of the issues we face on our grief journey. She offers good explanations for some of the emotional pitfalls and solid advice for getting out of them. Here's one example:

The explanation: "When you do something to relieve your feelings and to give yourself a sense of achievement, you are accomplishing your journey through bereavement."

The advice: "The structure of getting up and [going to work], the obligation to greet fellow workers, and the need to keep yourself together for a requisite number of hours is good for you."

She covers the entire spectrum of grief including self help therapies, finding help from others, understanding the proper place and value of rituals, helping children, looking to the future and other areas. Both the newly bereaved and those further along will find this a useful and helpful book.

My only disappointment with this effort is that even though Dr. Temes says that everyone must progress through grief at their own pace, she still suggests that at two years after a loss we should be well on our way to returning to a happy life. I can forgive her that error as only a bereaved parent (which she is not) understands that the grief journey, for us, is way, way longer.

Those who pass by and touch us with their love, give us reason to live.

STAMPED FOREVER

In my mail box, this morning, was an envelope with Gregory Peck depicted on the stamp. Below his photo the word "forever" was printed. I know that forever meant that the stamp was good for, well, forever, but I think there is a double entendre here. Gregory Peck's performances will keep his memory alive as long as there are audiences to watch Atticus Finch defend Tom Robinson and Captain Ahab battle the whale.

The memories of our children stored in our thoughts are in episodes, like movies, each with a theme or story that brings smiles or sighs whenever we let the projector role. Our children's faces are not likely to ever appear on a U.S. postage stamp, but our memories of them will last as long as the movies of their lives play on in our minds. Some of those are comedies that make us laugh even though we've seen them a million times. Some are dramas from all those 'growing pains.' More than a few are adventure stories that we re-watch with disbelief. And one, alas, is a tragedy. All of them are stored forever where they can be recalled whenever we want or need. It is how they stay with us.

We honor the famous by pasting their countenances on envelopes. We honor our children by stamping their memories: *forever*, on our hearts.

Editor





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BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA

CREDO

We are the parents whose children have died. We are the grandparents who have buried grandchildren. We are the siblings whose brothers and sisters no longer walk with us through life. We come together as Bereaved Parents of the USA to provide a haven where all bereaved families can meet and share our long and arduous grief journeys. We attend monthly gatherings whenever we can and for as long as we believe necessary. We share our fears, confusion, anger, guilt, frustrations, emptiness and feelings of hopelessness so that hope can be found anew. As we accept, support, comfort and encourage each other, we demonstrate to each other that survival is possible. Together we celebrate the lives of our children, share the joys and triumphs as well as the love that will never fade. Together we learn how little it matters where we live, what our color or our affluence is or what faith we uphold as we confront the tragedies of our children's deaths. Together, strengthened by the bonds we forge at our gatherings, we offer what we have learned to each other and to every more recently bereaved family. We are the Bereaved Parents of the USA. We welcome you.