



BEREAVED
PARENTS
of the USA

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.

Stepparents - Invisible Grievers

R&D, BP/USA Maryland

When our 28 year old daughter died in an automobile accident, I was devastated. What I did not realize was that my wife was equally devastated. I assumed that she was sad too, but that since she was "just" our daughter's stepmother, she would not feel the same depth of grief that I and my ex-wife felt.

JUST... It wasn't until several months later that I came to realize how wrong I had been.

Immediately after the accident, my ex flew into town. She was, of course, in deep pain and highly emotional; she could hardly stop crying. All through the immediate weeks after our daughter's death, my wife remained in the background, doing all she could to support me, my ex-wife, and our other children, but showing few outward signs of her own grief. I totally missed that she was feeling as much pain as I and my ex-wife were.

My wife and I were lucky. A couple of months later she flew back to her hometown and spent a long weekend with a group of long-time women friends with whom she had remained close over the



years. They spent the weekend talking about our daughter, the accident, the terrible loss, and supporting my wife and allowing her to fully express and outwardly experience her own deep grief.

After that weekend my wife began to talk to me about how deep her grief was. I began to realize that she and I felt the loss much the same.

The research into bereaved parents indicates that the depth of one's grief is directly related to the length and extent of the relationship the person had with the child who has died.

In our case, my wife and I married when our daughter was just 7 years old. Our daughter lived with us until she moved out to live on her own 15 years later. My wife had the primary role of raising our daughter, helping her with school, with her social life, everything. They had a wonderful relationship. Of course, in retrospect, it is no wonder that my wife deeply misses and grieves the death of our daughter.

Stepparents – the invisible grievers.

Love recognizes no barriers. It jumps hurdles, leaps fences, penetrates walls to arrive at its destination, full of hope. Maya Angelo



Did You Know They Were Bereaved Parents?

A few months ago Alice Munro won the Nobel Prize for literature. I was a little ashamed that I knew nothing of her work so I got a couple of her collections of short stories. Mostly she writes fictional stories about the lives of Canadian women. Her ability to describe the raw, sometimes gritty, emotions of her characters must be, at least in part, what makes her Nobel worthy. When I read the following in *Dulse*, one of the stories in [The Moons of Jupiter](#), I suspected she had experienced some great, crushing loss of her own. As it turns out I was right. The Munro's second child lived only a few hours.

Clearly Ms. Munro understands what it's like going through the motions of daily life in a dense fog. Eventually, for her, the fog lifted and she went on to become an exceptional writer. I don't know how, or how much, Alice was changed by her baby's death, but I do know she never forgot.

Her description of the effects of grief, after a crushing loss, ring true for me. Do you agree?

Editor

She had walked along the street in Toronto, knowing that she had to get to the bank, she had to buy some food, she had to get on the subway. She had to remember directions, and the order in which to do things: to open her checkbook, to move forward when it was her turn in line, to choose one kind of bread over another, to drop a token in the slot. These seem to be the most difficult things she had ever done. She had immense difficulty in reading the names of the subway stations, and getting off at the right one, so that she could go to the apartment where she was staying. She would have found it hard to describe this difficulty. She knew perfectly well which was the right stop, she knew which stop it came after; she knew where she was. But she could not make the connection between herself and things outside herself, so that getting up and leaving the car, going up the steps, going along the street, all seemed to involve a bizarre effort. She thought afterwards that she had been seized up, as machines are said to be. Even at the time she had an image of herself. She saw herself as something of an egg carton, hollowed out in back.

When she reached the apartment she sat down in a chair in the hall. She sat for an hour or so, then she went to the bathroom, undressed, put on her nightgown, and got into bed. In bed she felt triumph and relief, that she had managed all the difficulties and got herself to where she was supposed to be and would not have to remember anything more.

She didn't feel at all like committing suicide. She couldn't have managed the implements, or aids, she couldn't even have thought which to use. It amazed her to think that she had chosen the loaf of bread and the cheese, which were now lying on the floor in the hall. How had she imagined she was going to chew and swallow?

Life is not a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well preserved body, but to slide in broadside, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming "WOW . . . What a ride!"

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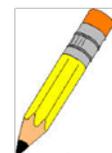
BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA

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BP/USA
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ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI | JULY 24-27

The Sheraton Clayton Plaza is in close proximity to the Galleria Shopping Mall, The Art Museum, The Science Center, The Botanical Gardens, St. Louis Zoo, Muny Opera, Shaw Park and a 5 minute walk to the Metrolink.

Start planning now to attend by visiting the National website

Bereaved Parents of the USA

(www.bereavedparentsusa.org)



Practical Advice

Missy Lowery Throckmorton's Not Just Another Day, a resource pamphlet from the Centering Corporation, is an excellent guide for taking care of yourself and your family after a great loss. Here she provides some sage advice.

Taking Care of Yourself

Grief brings a flood of physical and emotional feelings that seem to attack you and your children as holidays and special days arrive. It's not uncommon to have:



- *Nausea
- *Headaches
- *Sweating
- *Dryness of mouth
- *Shortness of breath
- *Weakness
- *Exhaustion
- *Insomnia

*Strong feelings of sadness, anger, depression, aggression, despair, hostility, apprehension, numbness and shock, lack of sensation, confusion, listlessness, denial and disbelief.

*Feelings of stress, outbursts of panic, hyperactivity, disorganization.

*Daydreams of the person who died, searching for that person.

*Nightmares.

*Increased heart rate and muscle tensions, being increasingly prone to infections.

If you experience some of these, it's a lot to handle.

Relaxation

Relaxation can help get rid of stress and fight off the physical symptoms of grief. You may need to learn to relax and to put your thinking and doing on hold for awhile. Find a quiet place and try to think positive, pleasant thoughts. Starting at the top of your head or bottom of your feet, concentrate on slowly relaxing every part of your body. Listening to a relaxation CD or download can help, too. If you like the sound of the sea, a gentle rainstorm or soft music, treat yourself. If you fall asleep, a short nap is a good thing. You'll have more energy later.

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*Till the Future dares
Forget the Past, his fate and fame shall be
An echo and a light unto eternity!*
Percy Bysshe Shelley



Some Thoughts About Father's Day

This time of year we are told that fathers can cry, they can mourn, they don't have to be "strong," nor hold back or "bottle it up." That is good advice because there are men who are inhibited and hold back. They bottle up their grief, deny themselves expression, they may appear to be weak to themselves or others, or because they feel it is their duty to be strong. They need to know they can grieve, any way they must. They need to know that expressing their grief produces an added healing dimension to their life, with no penalty in cost, pain or time. Many fathers grieve, but not openly, but I think privacy is involved. Long ago, I decided I would mourn as I pleased, but I would do so in private. I don't care; how I mourn is no one else's business but mine. I'm sure other fathers feel the way I do and keep their mourning private.



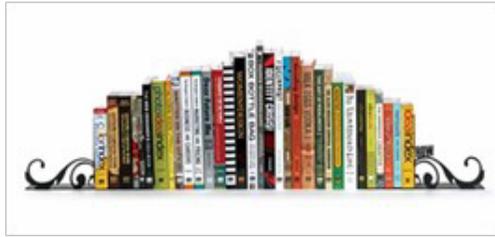
I do grieve and I intend to keep on grieving as long as necessary. And I will go to great trouble to maintain my privacy while I grieve. If that is being inhibited, well, I just don't care.

As a father you must be careful not to be trapped by one stereotype while trying to avoid another. You need not go about wailing and gnashing your teeth in order to avoid being labeled as cold and unresponsive. If you feel comfortable crying in public, by all means do so. But if you want to be private, by all means be private. That's okay, too. This Father's Day and any day, mourn as you please.

Robert Lierman
Rockford, IL



BOOK REVIEWS



More Good Words

Beth L. Hewett, Ph.D.

Grief Illustrated Press, 2012

Grief is an internalized emotion. Mourning allows us to walk the journey of grief and to be enriched by it. These two simple explanations by Dr. Hewett are the basis for an exceptional book designed to help people who have suffered a great loss. Instead of telling us to see grief as a horrible trip that we want to get through as quickly as possible she teaches us to embrace all the emotions and incorporate them into our inner being. "We are helpless," she tells us, "to its initial impact because grief is the emotional byproduct of lost love, and it is completely unavoidable when we have ourselves to love." She describes the "liminal space" as the place between the before and after and then goes on to help us understand how practical mourning activities can help us in that 'after.'

Mourning with our Emotions, Mourning with our Spirits, Mourning with our Bodies, and Mourning with our Minds are some of the chapters where the author helps us with a hands-on approach to developing good mourning practices. She includes in this effort a fill-in-the-blanks chart which when completed becomes a poem the reader has created about their feelings for their loved one who died.

Beth Hewett is not afraid to refer to her own personal experiences as examples to help make her points. Some poetry by family members is included. All of it works together in a beautiful and useful guide to grief and mourning for the newly bereaved, those further along grief's trail, and friends who want to understand and help.

All The Presidents Children

Doug Wead

ATRIA Books, 2003

This book focuses on the triumphs and tragedies in the lives of America's first families. Mr. Wead tells us about the children who were able to find their own place in the sun even in the shadow of their famous fathers and those who withered under the intense scrutiny of the public. He also shares with us the anguish of so many of our presidential families who buried one or more of their children, some before election, some after leaving the White House, and some while serving and how those losses affected government policy. This is a history rather than a grief book, but bereaved parents will recognize the emotions and struggles of these presidents and first ladies common to every parent whose child has died. The difference is their grief and grieving took place on a very public stage and often had a direct effect on our country.

In The Midst Of Winter

Edited by Mary Jane Moffat

Vintage Books, 1982

Mary Jane Moffat has garnered prose and poetry from the works of well known writers who have suffered personal losses. This book is a gathering from world literature of the words of those who have suffered the death of someone they love. Many are widows, widowers and parents whose child or children have died. She has separated this collection in to categories such as Shock, Anger, Sorrow, Distractions, Misunderstandings, Winter, Spring, Coping, Memory, and Dreaming. The words come from such renowned writers as Emily Dickinson, William Shakespeare, D.H. Lawrence, William Wordsworth, Pearl S. Buck, Walt Whitman, Washington Irving and scores of others.

Moffat seems to have a knack of selecting just the right poem, phrase or sentence to express a particular feeling or emotion. These selections often say in the most beautiful language exactly what the reader is thinking. If you are at a loss for words to express your deep grief this book will help you put voice to your thoughts.



Rending and Mending

There is an interesting discussion in the Talmud, an ancient Jewish writing. Those Jews had the custom of rending their garments – literally tearing their clothes – to symbolize the ripping apart that death brings. But the question was raised, after the period of mourning, could you sew the garment up and use it again? The teachers answered yes, but, when you mended it, you should not tuck the edges under so it would look as if it had never been torn. This symbolized the fact that life, after grief, is not the same as before. The rend will show.



The next question was, can you sell that garment? The teachers answered no. The rending and mending of our life is ours and others cannot wear it.

No, we don't get over it. We change and grow. Our life has a difference which is ours alone. Perhaps we can help each other make that difference the kind of difference that increases the world's supply of compassion, love and healing.

Dennis Klass

BP/USA, St. Louis, MO

The journey from grief to hope does not happen swiftly. But it happens if you will let your heart ride along.

Sasha from WINTERSUN

To Vacation or Not To Vacation

by Shirley Cognard Ottman, "The Slender Thread"

Summer is often the time of family reunions, vacation, family outings at nearby lakes or other places of recreation. Such occasions may be difficult for bereaved families especially those recently bereaved. Sometimes one asks *why take a vacation when I really cannot enjoy it? Or if we go on vacation for the sake of our surviving children, how can I be certain that that is the best decision for us to make? Or if we attend our family reunion, will the rest of my family make me uncomfortable if I cry or if they deliberately refuse to use my child's name?* Unfortunately there is no one answer to any of these questions. It is a gamble whatever decision one makes. But my personal experience, one's worst fears are seldom realized.

If you really do not want to leave home, then don't. Use your vacation time to work in your yard, to go to a movie every day if you want to do so, to redecorate a room or two, to curl up with several good books, to begin some project your son or daughter once mentioned if you would like to do it for him or her, or to write down feelings and perceptions about your grief to assist your own healing. Some persons benefit from returning to a favorite vacation spot, while others find release for their pain in new and different surroundings they have never before visited.

Still others may look forward to family reunions to garner support and love from other family members whom they do not see often. Some, however want to avoid extended family members until they themselves have regained their equilibrium. To some, familiar haunts at beaches, lake-side cottages, or mountain cabins are tied to beautiful memories of their children which they seek repeatedly while others avoid such places because the memories are too overwhelming until the intensity of their grief has subsided.

The point is that each of us is different. What helps one bereaved family member may not be helpful to another. To find the best path for your family, discuss alternatives with your spouse and your surviving children. If each family member expresses his or her desires and apprehensions about the customary summer family activities, they share the decision-making process and discover truly creative ways to help each other.

Those who live alone with their grief may find friends to be valuable listeners. Such friends may, even unwittingly sometimes, help one to find the better path. In any event, be kind to yourself. Choose well for yourself. Remember, too, that it is all right to change your mind at any time. Next summer will be less difficult, you can count on that. I have been there, I know.



Where Flowers Bloom, There is Hope

So Drew and I did our Easter basket shopping over the weekend. We dared to go fight the throngs of people to make sure we had the perfect candies, baskets, and goodies for the kids. It was hard. It was so, so hard.

We went for a quick lunch afterwards and I lost it. For a while I was kind of keeping tabs on anywhere I had shed tears, thinking I would save myself the embarrassment of going back there for a while, but quickly realized I would run out of places to go. On this day, it happened to be Jason's Deli. I lost it because I knew what I needed, and I am stumbling over my words, scared to death my husband will think I'm crazy that I need to buy a gift for someone who isn't even with us anymore. When I finally got it out that I needed another gift, he knew it was for Dylan without even being told and he knew the perfect thing. We went next door to Earl May and he explained very carefully to the sales clerk, "We need a houseplant, a hearty houseplant that my wife can't kill because it is of unexplainable significance to her and she would be devastated." She patiently took us through the aisles pointing out our choices. Drew looked up and saw one lone plant and said, "That's it." He got it down and explained that it was the most different plant he had seen in their stock and it was perfect to signify this most different time in our lives. I was given the task of finding my own pot for it, and when I did I could no longer choke back the emotions. It was hand painted perfectly to match our plant and on the front said, "Where flowers bloom, there is hope." I handed it to Drew and the tears just came.

Excerpted from: Andrea Rea's April 17, 2014, blog <http://aleighrea.wordpress.com/>

From our president.....

This time of year our family reflects and remembers our Aunt Betty Jane Spencer and the gift of Hope she unknowingly was giving our family.

Feb 14 1977 four local boys broke into the Spencer home and laid Betty and her four sons face down execution style and began shooting. Betty survived and was left for dead as she listened to her four sons die, Greg 22, Ralph 14, Reeve 16 and Raymond 17. After the four boys left, Betty was able to get up and ran through the cold winter snow, severely injured, to the neighbors to get help. For weeks Betty begged God to let her die. One day Betty changed, she wanted to live, she wanted to take a stand for other victims, she was living through a hell and wanted to change things. She stood up, took a breath and began the healing part of her grief journey. Talking, talking and more talking. She talked all the way to the White House and was awarded and recognized for her accomplishments. Betty was a survivor.

On April 29, 1992 our son Greg was born, in the hospital the phone rang and it was Betty, she was crying, she said, "Thank you for making the name

Greg no longer a bad word to say." 15 years she had lived needing to hear her son's name spoken. I didn't realize the impact of that until after my Greg was dead, and I yearned to hear his name. So many bereaved parents have experienced this feeling.

During Betty's last few years of life, we would sit for hours and talk. She talked about what she went through, the trials, the grief and the tears. Betty was able to give her last TV interview and this time it was about hope. During those last two years, I listened to Betty. I listened to her, up to her death in 2004. But it wasn't until Sept 19 2005 that I understood what she was saying. Our son Greg died and all of Betty's words began washing over us. To the end Betty talked of HOPE. She showed everyone around her what Hope was.

Finding Hope is not always easy, we each make a choice to seek it out for ourselves and to share it with others. Betty made the following comment, when asked about her legislative experience at both state and national levels, "I didn't even know which door to use at the Statehouse" Betty found her door and walked through it, just as each of

us make those choices. Betty stepped through those thresholds and found hope for her and for so many others along the way. I have come to many doors, just as I know you have, we have opened some and some we have decided to keep shut.

Betty Jane Spencer "I have learned many valuable lessons since the boys were murdered. On the night of their death, I learned that I am not afraid to die and since then the most important lesson learned, is that I am not afraid to live."

I get up every morning and take a step because Betty talked and I listened to her Hope. I am living, breathing and learning more about grief every day. BP/USA is a door of Hope I have chosen to open up.

I wish you small steps of healing and hope and one day you will see yourself passing it on to others.

In memory of Betty, Greg, Ralph, Reeve, Raymond and Gregory

Lee Ann Hutson Greg's mom
President, BP/USA



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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.