



A JOURNEY TOGETHER

NEWSLETTER OF THE BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA

VOLUME X NO. 2 Spring 2005
(April, May and June)

This is a repeat from a 1997 newsletter. It was written by our beloved Mary Cleckley who was on the Board of Directors of BP at the time. It is well worth repeating. We have had another bad winter. Mary has had another loss – her husband, John. We hope that this Spring will bring her and us peace and hope healing again and that we will all be oak trees again soon !

SPRING MAGIC AND YOU!

As I sit and admire the beautiful and lush growth of the trees this spring, I feel renewed. The long and arduous winter we had all over the country had made me wonder if, indeed, the trees would be able to perform their magic this year. A late Spring freeze, after many trees had budded out, had hurt. Some trees were also showing the results of a storm late last fall. In the woods back of my home, the tops of several oaks were broken by the intense winds. The damage is obvious. The still hanging dead limbs and leaves stand out by comparison to the chartreuse color of the new leaves.

We have learned from past experiences that the pines, so plentiful in the South, are particularly vulnerable to the forces of nature. We are accustomed to the wind and ice storms taking the tops out of many of them. But it was a surprise when the storm didn't affect the pines; instead, it took the tops out of many oaks. The oaks are sturdy and, as a rule, can stand much of what nature has to offer. They are dependable and deep rooted.

Does what happened to the trees not remind you of what happens to a bereaved family after the death of a child? It takes even the oaks among

us and tears the heart out of us, leaving us damaged. For a long time, the damage done is obvious. Our links are not necessarily broken but our hearts surely are. The most dependable and sturdy among us are brought to our knees and it is hard to imagine that new growth will ever take place again.



As I look at the oaks back in my woods, I know that one day those dangling dead limbs and leaves will no longer be obvious. They will eventually fall to the ground and nature will set out to repair as much as she is able. As with broken tree limbs and broken hearts, nature will not be able to repair everything perfectly; scars will remain and the shape of the trees and our lives will never be the same. Our recoveries will differ, however, for the trees will continue doing what only they know how to do: grow acorns and replace limbs. We, on the other hand, not only have the opportunity to grow, but also to change in many ways. One does not suffer through such pain without learning valuable lessons about what is important and

about priorities. As the spring revived the trees, let some of the magic spill over on you. Learn to grow in important ways. The pines among us will not learn, but the oaks surely will. When you say your prayers, pray to be an oak.

SPRING WAITING

By Sascha
THE SORROW AND
THE LIGHT

Winter's end is almost here.

Crocus struggle in the snow.

Sunlight has a softer glow.

Is the winter long this year?

Spring waits, watching for a cue...

not to rush your grief away
but to be there, when you say,

“ Spring is waiting, friend,
for you.”

**BEREAVED PARENTS OF
THE USA**

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**ELECTION OF NEW BOARD OF
DIRECTORS MEMBERS**

Biographies and ballots will be sent to all chapters and to all members-at-large. Any persons wishing information regarding the persons on the ballot may receive them from the Chair of the Nominating Committee, Theresa Valentine at tavlsv@radiks.net, Pat Moser at PatLMoser@aol.com. On the Ballot are: for Member at Large Representative, Theresa Valentine. Those on for Chapter Representatives, (2 will be elected) are Donna Corrigan of Illinois, Jack Ewart, of WV, Cathy Bender, of NV and Beth Reynolds of Texas.



**FROM
THE
EDITOR**

For some of us, this has been a hard winter with snow, sleet, ice and rain. We have had to deal with each thing as it came and adapt before moving on to the next thing. Sort of like when our beloved child died, isn't it.?

Now, it is getting near Spring and we again adapt and look at the returning hope in flowers, trees, gardens, etc. We hope for the return of our beloved child too but realize that won't happen — except in our hearts and memories. Let it come there — open yourself to the beauty of returning life and look forward to the time when you will reunite with your beloved ones in a true Spring.

Just a word to those of you reading this newsletter. If you need to add or subtract a name from the mailing list or change an address, remember to send that to me at the address in column one of this page. Also, we are getting a large number of persons who take the newsletter on the web site and that saves us a lot of money as well as getting the letter to all of you in a more timely fashion.

One warning about e-mail delivery. If you have a program on your computer that allows you to block e-mails from certain persons or companies, be sure to tell your computer to accept our e-mails. We have several that won't go through and we need you to check on this for us. Thanks.

We were all saddened to hear of the death of Mary Cleckley's husband, John. We also were saddened to hear of the death of a second child of the BP/USA Adirondak, NY Chapter leaders Doug and Debbie Jerdo, their son. We send our sympathy to them all.

We welcome a new chapter, in Johnsville, IL, with Hollie Kelly as leader.

**THE 2005
TENTH ANNUAL
BP/USA GATHERING**

Plans are moving quickly for the 2005 Gathering. The dates are July 15-17, the theme is "The Road To Hope" and we will be at The Imperial Palace in Las Vegas, NV. Housing reservations must be made directly with the hotel.

Five great speakers and 70 workshops are being prepared and a bookstore and a butterfly boutique will be available. Donated items for sale in the boutique would be welcome. As always, there will be evening Sharing Sessions. The annual meeting of BP/USA will also be held at the Gathering.

Chapter chairs and members are reminded that there will be workshops for leaders and a luncheon on Thurs, July 14.

There is a flower pattern that may be decorated and sent for display at the Gathering whether you are able to attend or not. The beautiful program with the pictures of our children will be seen again. If you have been in before, you need only tell us you want to be there again. If you want to add your child's picture, you should send that too.

More information on the hotel, registration, meals, where to send boutique items and/or pictures, the pattern for the flower, workshops and speakers is available by contacting Cathy Bender, Gathering Chair, at 702-655-5538, Pat Moser, President, at 352-854-1275 or from our national web site, www.bereavedparentsusa.org. All bereaved parents, grandparents and siblings are welcome whether they are members of a BP/USA or not. We hope you will plan to join us this year.



SOME REMARKS ABOUT THE 2001 BP GATHERING IN DALLAS

By Mitchell Dudnikov

Renee and I attended the Bereaved Parents Gathering in Dallas, Texas, in late July. As soon as we entered the hotel, we felt at home because so many of our old friends were there to greet us with hugs.

The BP Gathering is not a cold convention or meeting but rather it is more like a family reunion. We all understand each other's sorrows. The newly bereaved are quickly comforted by the other members.

There was plenty of crying and plenty of laughing-but never alone. Whenever two parents got together, it instantly became a sharing session. There were many workshops and sharing sessions and the leaders of these groups offered new ways to help us through our grief. Everything was informal.

During the closing ceremony, there was a slide presentation showing pictures of our children. There were about 170 people in the room. All through the presentation there was a very soft sobbing sound. **NO ONE WAS TALKING!**

To sum it all up, the Gathering was where love and compassion flowed from a never-ending stream. We look forward to being in New Orleans next year and hope that many of you will join us. It is a wonderful experience.

Editor's note: After the 2001 Gathering, I was moved by this article in the Metropolitan Baltimore BP Chapter's Newsletter. I saved it to use in a future national newsletter. I would like to share it with you this year. Through these words, Mitch is still with us. Come to a Gathering and see what he meant!

THE FIRST MEETING

By Martha Honn
So. IL Chapter BP/USA
Mt. Vernon, IL

I remember the first time I attended a support group meeting for Bereaved Parents. I had a positive experience with another type of support group, so I knew how valuable a support group could be. Perhaps that was why I began searching for a support group shortly after my 16 year old son's death. Although I was surrounded by family and friends who supported me, I felt that, if I could just talk to other parents who had experienced the death of a child, I wouldn't feel so singled out for this unwanted experience.

On the one hand, I desperately wanted to go to that first meeting, but on the other hand, I did not want to belong to this group of parents who had experienced the death of their child. Sometimes it felt like I existed in a dream world, where it was only a bad dream that Cameron had died in the accident. Yet, on some level, I knew Cameron had really died. I cried my way through those first meetings but they understood as only bereaved parents can. The meetings allowed me to understand that the thoughts and feelings I had were normal for this set of circumstances. They shared with me that they too thought they would lose their mind at first. They offered insight as to what I might expect in the days and months ahead. They told me that some days would be better than others. They assured me that, as time passed, my grief would get softer, but it would never leave completely. They told me that I would never be the same again and I haven't been. The death of my son, Cameron, changed me. They told me that grief over my son's death was hard work. Fatigue was my constant companion even though I wasn't exerting myself physically. Everything seemed difficult to accomplish. My ab

ability to concentrate was compromised. I had trouble sleeping. I had no desire to eat so I lost weight. Nothing seemed important anymore. I couldn't understand how everyone seemed to just slip back into normal when nothing seemed normal to me. No matter how hard I tried not to cry, tears would well up in my eyes. I learned that grieving parents never know how they'll be emotionally from one moment to the next. I learned that getting mad at God and questioning my faith and beliefs is very normal. I thought that if something this bad could happen then what else could happen. I felt insecure and vulnerable. I worried about Aaron and Jasolyn, my two surviving children. I felt that I somehow had failed as a parent, that if I hadn't let Cameron go out, he would still be alive.

Attending a support group allowed me to understand more about grief than I ever wanted to know. Other parents shared their own experiences and offered suggestions. I applied what seemed to fit in my situation and felt comfortable rejecting other suggestions that didn't seem right for me. I couldn't say anything that shocked them. Usually I would look up and see them nodding to acknowledge that they felt that way too or that they could relate to what I was talking about. When sleep wouldn't come, I read books on grief borrowed from their lending library.

I'm glad that I had the courage and willingness to reach out for help. I'm so grateful Bereaved Parents of the USA exists.

(Martha's son, Cameron, died in an auto accident in 1999 just 11 days after his 16th birthday. She describes so well the need for and the accomplishments of a support group. Thanks for sharing this with us, Martha It first appeared in the Chapter Newsletter.)



UPCOMING EVENTS

May 13-15: "Journey of the Heart" - a conference for mothers who have experienced the loss of a child. This is sponsored by Umbrella Ministries in Palm Springs, CA. For more information contact Joyce Floyd at 928-453-7940 or texaslady@rraz.net or www.umbrellaministries.com.

May 26-29: The MISS Foundation will have a conference sponsored by the Elisabeth Kubler-Ross foundation on prenatal and pediatric death and parental bereavement support. There is also a Kids Camp for bereaved children.. For more information, contact info@missfoundation.org or visit the conference page at www.missfoundation.org/conference.

July 1-3: 28 Annual Conference of The Compassionate Friends in Boston, Mass. The theme is Making a Difference Because We Can. For further information visit their website, www.compassionatefriends.org.

July 15-17: The 10th Annual Gathering of BP/USA will be in Las Vegas. For more information, see the website and names listed there and page 2.



BOOK REVIEWS

FIRST YOU DIE by Marie Levine is a book on how to learn to live after the death of a child. She covers many of the areas of concern and confusion a grieving person faces and suggests ways to incorporate your loss and grief into your new life. She also includes many articles and writings by others that are helpful. A quote from the end of the book says it well: "I realize now that Phil and I have incorporated Peter so totally in our lives, we barely notice if people flinch when we refer to him, which we do all the time." "Peter will never be further away or closer than he is now. Until we meet again." The book is published by BookSurge,

LLC. You may reach them at www.booksurge.com or by calling 1-866-308-6235.

HEY, MR. BIG by David Gasking. This is a book written by a father. It contains his feelings after the death of his son and the thoughts and feelings of his friends also. He is located in Inverness-shire Scotland. It is in diary form and shows time and progress through grief. For more information contact iUniverse, Lincoln, NE at www.iuniverse.com.

THE NIGHT THE ANGELS CRIED, A Mother's True Story by June Proctor is a book that is hard to review because it is really something to be experienced. The story is a truly unbelievable one. Mrs. Proctor was driving her family home from a Christmas Pageant when a drunk driver hit their car and two of her daughters and she were critically injured and two of her sons and three grandchildren were all killed. We have all read stories written by parents about the death of a child but this one, dealing with the death of 2 sons and 3 granddaughters is not like anything you might expect. Of course it deals with her mourning, grief, and the need to heal physically and emotionally but it truly speaks of the human spirit and the ability of a person to go through this type of grief. Matters are further complicated by the fact that the judicial system gave a sentence that did not fit the severity of the accident. Anyone would find this book to mirror what any grieving parent or grandparent goes through and provide inspiration. The book is published by Morris Publishing and may be ordered from June Proctor, Whispering Oaks Ranch, RR 4, Box 1193, Paris, TX 75462 or by phone at 903-785-0229. Cost is \$9.95 plus \$2 postage and \$.82 tax if you live in Texas. Mrs. Proctor will be a workshop presenter at the BP/USA Gathering this year and her book will be available there.

NO MOUNTAIN TOO HIGH, A father's inspiring journey through grief by Ned Levitt and **I AM A ROSE, A Life in Poetry** by Stacey Levitt are two other books which are an experience

to read. When his 18 year old daughter, Stacey, died when hit by a drunk driver while she was jogging, Ned faced the same things we all faced. There are not many books available written by bereaved fathers and this is truly a great addition. Almost immediately he realized that he needed to do something to memorialize Stacey and perhaps help others also. Stacey had written poetry and one of her dreams was to have it published someday. So, very early in his grief, her father got together her poetry and had it published. That book is very helpful and there are poems dealing with many areas including death. Later, he remembered that she had tried to climb a mountain in Mexico and had to turn back because of the weather and she had always wanted to go back and finish the climb. Ned went there and, with a guide, finished the climb. He took a copy of her poetry, a journal and a pen and put them all in a box which he also took. He left the box on the mountain for others to see and read, if they wished. Over several years, he has returned and found countless messages to him and Stacey and has found that many were helped by her writings and many dedicated their climb to her. He also has a video about his experience and it is very moving to watch. He says that he still grieves but that, by fulfilling two of her wishes, he found he and Stacey have affected so very many people. He realizes that, as he says in his book, "...I began to see that this was a unique opportunity to grow as a person and to alter, whether slightly or profoundly, how I would be and who I would be in the future." Again, you would find both of these books helpful. Both books are published by ECW Press, Toronto, Canada, M4E 1E2. You may also read more by logging onto www.iamarose.com.



AN UNFINISHED MOTHER

Clara Hinton
www.silentgrief.com
BP/USA Potolosi, MO Newsletter



When a child loss occurs, a mother goes through a difficult time of emotional turmoil and questioning. “Am I still a mother?” “Does my child still have a birthday each year or does time stand still?” “Can the mother/child relationship continue to grow or am I now an ‘unfinished mother?’”

Loving a child places a mother on a road that begins a lonelier journey than ever expected—one that can never really be explained. There was a beginning, but, with the death of the child, there is no middle and no end. Everything seems so unfinished. Hopes and dreams were stopped far too soon. Joy was snatched away so suddenly. A mother is left with empty arms and an empty heart. Nothing can ever be complete when a child’s life ends.

When the death of a child occurs, a mother is stopped in her tracks and she suddenly feels inadequate and incomplete. She wears a new name. She is an “unfinished mother”, never being able to see the rest of the picture. She will never be able to watch her child mature into a young adult. She will never be able to see all the pieces fit together. The picture will always have part of the scenery missing. It is so painful to be an unfinished mother! Child loss makes everything seem so empty and incomplete.

The reality of child loss is devastating to a mother. There are overwhelming feelings of guilt, inadequacy and most often feelings of failure. These feelings can overwhelm a mother for several months following the death of a child and it can be

quite difficult to build a support system to carry a mother through this roller coaster of emotions. Very few people will understand a mother’s explanation of feeling like she is an unfinished mother.

There will come a critical point in this journey of grief when a mother must reach deep inside her inner resources and make a conscious decision to accept herself just as she is—a mother whose heart has been touched by the pain and grief of child loss. Only then can she start to put together some of the broken pieces and begin to feel like there will be a day when she will feel more like a complete mother than an unfinished mother.

When a child dies, life is suddenly thrown completely off balance. A mother is left feeling like her identity has been taken away. It is often a long difficult journey to find that place of identity as a mother again. It’s hard to understand that there is unfinished living that will never be completed. Peace can finally come to a mother’s heart when she realizes that there is a big difference between having unfinished business and being left feeling like an unfinished mother.

A mother is never “unfinished”. No matter how brief her time was with her child, the bond of love between mother and child was complete. A mother’s love for her child is unending. Dreams may shatter and circumstances may change, but a mother’s love remains strong. As a mother travels the path to healing, it is important for her to remind herself often that she is a mother forever. Her motherhood did not stop when her child died. This understanding of motherhood releases the feelings of guilt and failure and allows a mother to begin to see herself as a whole person again—a complete mother. A mother is never an “unfinished mother”. A mother’s love runs far too deep to ever be called unfinished!

PANACHE’

By Keith Sweet,
Seymour, Wisconsin
Father of Matthew

(Sent by Donna Corrigan of the Hinsdale BP/USA; Keith is her cousin, a high school English teacher and wrestling coach. His 24 year old son died in 2003. This is good reading for Father’s Day.)

Emily Dickinson writes, “Either the Darkness alters or something in the sight adjusts itself to Midnight and Life steps almost straight.” She is talking about the death of a loved one and the depression which follows.

In some ways I’m a better man. I don’t judge as harshly and I have greater empathy. But what I’ve lost isn’t worth what I’ve gained.

I just want my son back, my life back, and my dreams back. So, if sometimes I don’t meet your expectations or I’m not quite what you remembered, have patience. I’m in an “Evening of the Brain when not a moon discloses a sign or star – come out – within.”

I am still learning to see. Some of your urgent needs don’t even show up on my radar. The difference between an A and A– isn’t worth a heart attack. The weight class you’re wrestling in is pretty trivial. Winning is fun but those who lose still get to play the game.

I’m studying ants now and the leaves in fall. Laura (my daughter) and I check out college wrestlers. I read philosophy and visit the great lakes. Jean (my wife) reminds me of obligations. I am thankful for all I have and bitter that I don’t have more. I laugh often and cry when I need to. I see more in Lear than the kids do and I hope they never see as much. I’ve seen the sun and I plan to keep looking until I find it again.

MY BEST FRIEND

By Ryan Auch for his brother Ronny
BP/USA Augusta, GA

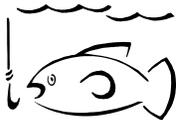
The fishing season's coming,
but no more fishing for me,
Because my best friend's not here,
to share his hooks with me.

We went fishing nearly every day.
Never hooked a thing.
But, oh, what fun we had,
Talking about the one that got away.

The garage holds all the fishing gear,
but I've no desire to fish.
It's not the same without him here.
Oh! If I could have one wish.

My wish would be
to bring my brother back to me,
so we could fish along the shore.
We'd have fun together,
And laugh once more.

All that's left are memories,
for me to think about.
I won't say goodbye;
I'll see you again.
But I will miss you forever,
MY BEST FRIEND.



Sometimes the light goes out,
but is blown again into flame
by an encounter with another
human being.

Each of us owes the deepest
thanks to those
who have rekindled this inner
light.

Albert Schweitzer

THIS I CAN SHARE

By Marilyn W. Heavlin
Author and Bereaved Parent

I have not experienced the death of
my only child,
but some of you have.
I have not experienced a child dying
by suicide,
but some of you have.
I have not watched my child fight a
terminal illness,
but some of you have.

None of us would dare say, "I know
just how you feel."

Even if our experiences are similar,
no two situations are exactly alike.

But I can say
I remember the pain when my child
died.
I remember the feelings of insanity.
I remember the feelings of aloneness.
I remember wishing I could die.
I remember wanting to share
something with my child,
but he wasn't there.

So, my friend, our experiences have
parts in common.

And parts that are different!
So, why should we listen to each
other?

Do we have anything to share?

Do you know what heartbreak feels
like?

All of us do.

Do you know the numbness of grief?

All of us do.

Do you know what it's like to have
empty arms?

All of us do.

So, let's learn what we can of our
commonalities.

We loved a child but our child left
too soon.

THIS WE CAN SHARE WITH
YOU!

MOTHER'S DAY/ FATHER'S DAY

By Shirley Ottman
THE SLENDER THREAD

Mother's Day and Father's Day can be
both heart -wrenching and heart-
warming for bereaved parents. Surviv-
ing children recognize their parent's
loss and their own losses and, in their
effort to regain a kind of normalcy,
they often try to make these special
days as festive and as full of love as
they possibly can. Most parents recog-
nize the efforts of their surviving chil-
dren and try to respond with enthusi-
asm, however difficult it may be at the
time.

As much as bereaved parents love and
appreciate their living children, no
bereaved parent can forget the child
(or children) now missing from the
family circle. Fractured families are
never quite the same as they once
were. Parents whose only child has
died, or whose children have all died,
can be especially saddened when
Mother's Day and Father's Day are
touted in every department store and
gift shop. Yet even these parents (for
parent hood does not die with chil-
dren) may find that memories ease the
stress of these special days when time
has permitted their own working
through the grieving process.

In times of darkness, Love sees...

In times of silence, Love hears...

In times of doubt, Love hopes...

In times of sorrow, Love heals...

But in all things,
Love remembers.

Author Unknown

BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA MEMORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Renee Dudnikov	In loving memory of her mother, R. Zimmerman & husband, Mitchell Dudnikov
Jack & Betty Ewart	In loving memory of John Cleckley
Pete & Pat Moser	In loving memory of John Cleckley
Claudia Teck	In loving memory of John Cleckley
Denise Johnston	In loving memory of John Cleckley
Katherine A. Scondras	In loving memory of John Cleckley
Toula S. Jones	In loving memory of John Cleckley
Mr. & Mrs. B. H. Hargett	In loving memory of John Cleckley
John Wallace	In loving memory of John Cleckley
Reezin & Elise Swilley	In loving memory of John Cleckley
John & Therese Goodrich	In loving memory of John Cleckley
David & Mary Warren	In loving memory of John Cleckley
BP/USA Central Savannah River Chapter	In loving memory of all their children
Mary Murphy	In loving memory of son Dylan
Kay & Cliff Martin	In loving memory of daughter Kimmie Martin
Arlene Priest	In celebration of the life of Marc Priest
Russ & Linda Horn	In loving memory of son, David Horn
Celeste Cheatham	In loving memory of son Charlie Kinnerly
Ruth Duty	A donation to BP/USA
Metropolitan Baltimore Chapter	A donation toward the Gathering in memory of their children
BP/USA Anne Arundel County MD Chapter	In loving memory of their children
Tanya & Rod Carlson	In loving memory of son, Troy Carlson
Bill & Florence Wolfel	In loving memory of their daughter, Sandra Lynn Wolfel
Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham, AL	A donation toward our work – arranged by Don and Barbara Cook

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

A NOTE FROM MARY CLECKLEY

One year my brother's three year-old granddaughter came to visit her grandparents. My brother took her out in their back yard to push her new play toy, a small wheelbarrow. It turned out not to have been a good idea since her grandparents had just put a new load of gravel on their driveway that circled around to the back of their home. The granddaughter struggled to maintain some forward movement through the gravel to no avail. Suddenly, she gave up in utter frustration as she turned to her nearby grandfather and started crying. He quickly turned to her and said, "Please don't cry," and she answered, "Well, pick me up and love me then."

As some of you know, my husband, John, recently died after a long struggle with Alzheimer's disease and, thanks to many of you, I recognized that my niece's solution to her problem was the one that also helped me. My reason for telling you all of this is that those of you who took the time to let me know you cared about me and my family's pain, need to be thanked. I do thank each of you who "picked us up and loved us." Each note was like a soothing balm, knowing that it came from my "family" of bereaved people who truly understand our needs and that it's okay to have them. Bless you!