



# A JOURNEY TOGETHER

## NATIONAL NEWSLETTER OF THE BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA

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(April, May and June)

### SPRING- A TIME TO GROW

By Lorraine Weaver  
From the Anne Arundel MD  
Chapter Newsletter

After the snow, sleet and ice of winter, spring is a welcome season and one of new beginnings. If you are like me, there is a feeling of elation as the sun slowly warms the earth. I eagerly search for the first buds. Perhaps it is a tree groaning with sap, sending new life to the branches or a tulip leaf bravely searching for warmth as it peeks above ground, but when it happens, I rejoice. Spring is here!

Now is the time to come out of hibernation – buy seeds, prune vines and start afresh. This is symbolic of our lives after we come through a period of winter in which loneliness and heartache plagued or stagnated us. We cherish each new glow of warmth. Or perhaps the winter of your life has been a time of contemplation and rest in which you felt you could catch your breath and relax.

Whatever way we view the winter-time of life, spring will come. New relationships develop, projects that have overwhelmed us before we now have the energy and courage to begin. Volunteer work, making new friends, swimming, golf, tennis – among other activities – are all ways we can use to break the barrier that kept us immune to the rest of society in “our winter time.”

However spring may come, it requires work and it is no different

with our grief. In order to function again, we need to break the soil, smooth out the rough spots and fertilize in order to see new growth. At times this may cause more hurt, but, remember, just as in the garden, we will not see growth without special effort on our part, so it is in our lives. We need to cultivate and weed to encourage a healthy garden. The areas which need fertilization get special care while other areas seem to grow smoothly without effort on our part. As we rejoice in the spring of the year and in each new bud that appears, let's appreciate the good moments and, when hard or stagnant times come, affirm one another in love and share each other's joys and burdens.

Happy gardening to you all!



### COUNTING

By Sascha  
The Sorrow and the Light

Time to count the crocus on the lawn  
(seven white, four yellow,  
thirteen blue).

Windy sunshine breathing ice away,  
and the trees are trying to be new.

You are not ready for spring, you  
say?

But spring is ready for you!

### SPRING HAS SPRUNG

By Mary Cleckley  
Former BP/USA Board Member

How in the world could anyone not enjoy the beauty of spring? The dogwoods and azaleas are in full bloom. The trees are becoming green again and the weather is nice and warm – just right. So, why is it that some of us are finding this a painful time? Our child has died, that's why!

The Easter and Passover seasons are upon us. They are special family times and that makes it more obvious that one is missing. Some parents are struggling with what they believe anymore. The pretty new dresses and hats don't seem to matter as much as they once did. There are more important things on our minds now. We are facing the renewal of life all around us – and yet the missing child's life is not renewable. We hurt because life is going on and his or hers is not.

These are normal reactions for some when grief is fresh, for changing of seasons is a poignant time for many. Those of us who have had the necessary time, wish to convey to those who have not that it won't always be this painful. When your grief softens (and it will), so will many of the hurtful responses. Get out in the sunshine, go for a walk, smell the fragrance of flowers and allow the warmth and beauty of the season to permeate your being. It just may make your day a little lighter and a lighter day is worth trying for.

## BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA

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### FROM THE DESK OF THE EDITOR

With deep sadness, BP/USA has lost a dear friend and worker. Renee Dudnikov of the Metropolitan Baltimore Chapter of BP/USA died January 18, 2007. She and her husband Mitch were many years the guiding light in the Baltimore chapter. They never missed contacting a newly bereaved parent and spoke to hospital groups, ambulance groups and many others about the grieving process.

They were among the founders of BP/USA. Mitch served on the Board of Directors and they both were recognized by receiving the Roy and Juanita Peterson Award in 2001 for their work. One of my favorite pictures is one of Renee standing on a chair so that she could talk face to face with Roy. Though a little person in stature, she was large in the love she showed to all. She and Mitch never missed a Gathering and they could be seen walking the halls and rooms spotting those who especially needed comforting and taking care of that. All was done in loving memory of their son, Marc (I can still hear Renee saying, "That is Marc with a "c" not a "k.")

Renee could never understand why many of us had trouble understanding her because "I do not have an accent. You have an accent." Her chapter called her voice a "strong, steady (Belgian) voice." It was the first voice bereaved parents heard when they called her chapter. I will always remember that she always called the BP/USA Presidents, "Madame President." The Gatherings will not be the same without Mitch and Renee physically present but I have no doubt that they will, nevertheless, be with us in spirit.

The ashes of all three were scattered on the mountain in Washington State where Marc died. We know that Renee, Mitchell and Marc are now

together again. As Mary Cleckley said, "I hope that mountain in Washington State blooms profusely and is lovely, for it has two special people who have spent a good part of their lives remembering Marc in their own special way."



### NOMINATIONS

It is not too late to send nominations for vacancies on the Board of Directors. Also, it is time to send nominations for the Roy and Juanita Peterson Award for 2007. Please send any nominations to Beverly Hurley, 3805 West San Juan Street, Tampa, FL 33629-7819 or by e-mail to her at [bee.hurley@gte.net](mailto:bee.hurley@gte.net).

### CHAPTER DEVELOPMENT

Beth Reynolds is the new person in charge of chapter development for BP/USA. Beth has been active in the Chapter in North Texas and with National. She is already at work and available to anyone wishing to start a new chapter or anyone already in a chapter who might want information or help. Please note her addresses. You may reach her at 8 Crest Court, Hickory Creek, TX 75065 or by e-mail at [bethreyn@centurytel.net](mailto:bethreyn@centurytel.net).

All of us appreciate the years of hard labor that Pat Moser put into this position. She helped start so many new chapters and kept touch with all of them, encouraging and advising them. She continued doing this while serving as President for two years also. She is looking forward to "kicking back" and enjoying some time in her pool and at the second home she and Pete have on the river near Ocala. Knowing both of them, we know they will still be with us and active in their chapter and in the National BP/USA.

## A PRAYER FOR SPRING

By Janis Heel  
BP/USA Chapter, Ocala FL

Like Springtime, let me unfold  
and grow fresh and anew from  
this cocoon of grief that has  
been spun around me.

Help me face the harsh reality  
of sunshine and renewed life  
as my bones still creak from  
the winter of my grief.

Life has dared to go on around  
me and, as I recover from the  
insult of life's continuance, I  
readjust my focus to include  
healing and growth as possi-  
bility in my future.

Give me strength to break out  
of the cocoon of my grief, but  
may I never forget it is the  
place where I grew my wings,  
becoming a new person be-  
cause of my loss.

## CAN YOU REMEMBER?

By Sascha  
The Sorrow and the Light

With winter tumbling snow  
—the roses silent  
and the water ice...

With trees so barren  
that your mind refuses  
to picture leaves  
and green and even blossoms...

Can you remember,  
Can you feel again,  
that spring did come  
From winter, every year?

## THE CLASS OF 1996

By Paul Balasic  
BP/USA Anne Arundel MD Chapter

Spring has finally arrived. The sun is warm, the grass is green, the trees have leaves and the world once again seems to have come alive. As a bereaved parent, this has traditionally been a difficult time of year for me. Somehow all the signs of spring were not able to warm my heart and I often found myself hating the fact that they tried.

One sign of spring that was always painful was school graduations. You see my daughter died as a freshman in high school and never did get to graduate. The excitement of graduation, the moving on to a new era, another stage of life, was something that she looked forward to. She was excited to graduate from elementary school and move on to middle school. She was ecstatic about graduating from middle school to move on to high school and, although she was only a freshman, she was already getting excited about and looking forward to graduating from high school and going on to college. Since her death, however, there wasn't no new era for me to move on to.

I became a member of BP/USA in the spring of 1996. That same year was the graduation year for several other members of our chapter. We all graduated from a "normal life" into one that was full of unknowns, grief and darkness. I think of this group as my "graduating class" or the "Class of 1996."

My graduating class started its journey on New Years Day and finished it up on Labor Day weekend. We seemed to have hit most of the holidays of the year, including Easter and the 4th. As I look back on that year, somehow this seems to have added some extra significance to our losses.

It has now been nine years since our class was "formed up." During those nine years we've all been on a journey none of us wanted but one which we've all traveled and learned from. Many times we've learned from each other. Many times we've learned from "classes" that came ahead of and behind ours. I think, in our own minds, we don't think that we've come very far. But this graduation season, I've taken the time to reflect on our class and our journey and my observations have been surprising.

In actuality, I find that we've all grown probably to a much greater extent than any of us would give ourselves credit for. We've addressed legal challenges to gain access to our grandchildren. We've gone back to school and earned advanced degrees. We've taken on new and more responsible job challenges. We've had many successes and some failures. We've had some victories and some defeats. We've had some joys and also some new sorrows. But somehow we've kept moving forward. And, through it all, we've remained active in our chapter. To a large extent I think that the special bonds that are developed and the support we have been able to receive and give through our BP/USA Chapter has been one of the biggest factors that has gotten us to where we are. Still standing and moving forward!!!

So, in this graduation season, I'd just like to say "Congratulations and Thank You" to my fellow class members and to those in the classes that have come ahead and behind ours. Ours is a hard road but it is the one we must travel. We have all graduated with the loss of our children into a life we did not choose but into one in which we have, somehow, found a way not just to live and survive but also, in some way, to thrive.





## BOOK REVIEWS

**HEARTFELT: A COMPANION FOR BEREAVED PARENTS** by Jeri Rae Miller is a book about the author's experiences when her 7 year old son was killed in an automobile accident. She could not find a support group nearby so she founded HEARTFELT, a nonprofit organization. The book is in short , concise chapters that one can read and re-read in minutes and covers the many aspects of parental grief. She reminds us that "You will survive and you will smile again." The book is published by Cypress House in Fort Bragg, CA. You may reach them at 800-773-7782 or through their website at [www.cypresshouse.com](http://www.cypresshouse.com).

**WHEN LIFE GOES ON** by Jimmy Egan is a book written by a grieving father. This too is in short articles that can be easily read. A poem he wrote at the end of the book closes by saying,

"It is just as hard today  
as it was that Spring Day  
to whisper the words  
She is gone to stay.

I believe stay is a place  
I will again see her face  
I can't wait for the day  
When I'm gone to stay.

The book is available from Book-Surge, LLC, an Amazon.com company. You may learn more at [www.booksurge.com](http://www.booksurge.com).

**FOREVER OUR ANGELS** by Hannah Stone is a book about pregnancy loss. The author had three pregnancy losses and she also presents information from other mothers who lost babies at or before birth. Hannah says, "So to every man and woman who has had a pregnancy loss, read these stories over and over again and know that you are not alone. This book may be obtained from Amazon or from [www.Lulu.com](http://www.Lulu.com).

**THE ANGEL LETTERS** by Norman J. Fried is about "Lessons That Dying Can Teach Us About Living". The sub title of the book is "Turning Grief Over the Loss of a Sick Child into an Inspiration for Living." It is a collections of letters to children he has known as their counselor on the oncology unit of a NY hospital and each one deals with a lesson learned from that child. The lessons are friendship, love, strength, understanding, belonging, family, believing truth and acceptance. As he tells us, dying children speak in metaphor and symbols. He also says, "In helping children come to terms with loss, there is much we ourselves can learn about our own fears, wishes and beliefs." He also tells us that, "No story ends in death, not in this book and not in life." This is a very inspirational book. The book is available from Ivan R. Dee, Publisher, Chicago, IL and through [www.ivanrdee.com](http://www.ivanrdee.com).

**WHEN A CHILD HAS BEEN MURDERED** by Bonnie Hunt Conrad is a very comprehensive book dealing with the murder of a child and the many things to be dealt with during the grief journey. Other parents whose children have been murdered also have contributed to this book. One parent, Chet, says "If I can help ease the pain of another parent, then my sons will not have died for nothing." The information in this book is applicable to the death of children from other causes too. This book is a little more expensive than many of the other grief books I review, but it would be an invaluable addition to any Chapter library or Public Library and a meaningful gift parents of a murdered child could give to one of those libraries. The book is published by Baywood Publishing Company, Inc in Amityville, NY, who can be reached at 1-800-638-7819 or by e-mail at [info@baywood.com](mailto:info@baywood.com).



**RAINBOWS AFTER THE STORM** is a book by Sherry Boyd Neu. Although I do not usually review a book unless I have read it myself, Sherry will be presenting a workshop at the Gathering and her book will be on sale there so I am including background material from her website. "Rainbows After the Storm" is the journey of a grieving mother. From cover to cover, author Sherry Boyd Neu shares the intimate story of her shattered soul. It encompasses each step taken from the initial phone call of the accident, the nightmare words the doctor spoke, the first days and the first years. These pages consist of a realistic, truthful guide on how to survive through the grief, how to deal with inappropriate comments and actions from people who are trying to comfort and, finally, having the will and strength to live a new life. If you listen to her journey and find some knowledge, comfort or even a few ideas that make sense to you, then you have hope to survive and her experiences have not gone in vain. The words that are shared are a must read for grieving parents, grandparents, loved ones and friends. There is hope – there are Rainbows After the Storm." You may contact Sherry at [sherryneu@excite.com](mailto:sherryneu@excite.com) or look at the book at the Gathering.

### UPCOMING EVENTS

May 19 is the 9th Annual Hope & Healing Conference in Annapolis, MD. For information contact e-mail [ChapterLeader@aacounty-md-bereavedparents.org](mailto:ChapterLeader@aacounty-md-bereavedparents.org).

July 13-15 is the BP/USA Gathering in Chicago. Winds of Healing...Wings of Hope is the theme. For information go to the website, [www.bereavedparentsusa.org](http://www.bereavedparentsusa.org).

July 28-30 is the TCF Annual Conference is in Oklahoma City, OK . For information, check [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org).

## MOTHER'S DAY AND FATHER'S DAY

By Kay Bevington

This time of year is a bittersweet time for bereaved parents. Many are grateful for their surviving children and, at the same time, mourn for and wonder what it would be like if their deceased child had lived. It is difficult to be joyful when part of us is saddened due to the death of a child. This is especially difficult for bereaved parents whose only child or all children have died. Am I really a mother or father now? It is especially appreciated by these parents to be remembered at this time of year by friends and family members.

Grandparents hurt for themselves and also for their bereaved children. Many wonder what role to play when this time of year rolls around once again. Bereaved parents wonder how to handle the celebrations. Do I attend these functions to honor my parents while I'm mourning my child? Do I make a spectacle of myself if I become unraveled during these ceremonies? Should I attend the gatherings or simply avoid them to save my sanity? I do not wish to hurt my parents' feelings and how long will they be alive to honor them?

There are no easy answers to these problems. Each individual must decide what he/she can handle and that decision will have to be made on a yearly basis. What is helpful for one might be detrimental for another. Time may help to ease the pain and alter the decisions that are made. An honest discussion about the situation with those involved will help to ease hurt feelings. Try to plan other times with grandparents and let them know you love them even though you may not be able to celebrate these special days. Wherever you are in your grief, may you know that many of us are journeying with you along this difficult path.

Kay Bevington will be doing workshops at the Gathering for those who have lost an only child or all children.

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### HAPPILY EVER AFTER

By Erma Bombeck

If you're looking for an answer this Mother's Day on why God reclaimed your child, I don't know. I only know that thousands of mothers out there today desperately need an answer as to why they were permitted to go through the elation of carrying a child and then lose it to miscarriage, accident, violence, disease or drugs.

Motherhood isn't just a series of contractions; it's a state of mind, from the moment we know life is inside us, we feel a responsibility to protect and defend that human being. It's a promise we can't keep. We beat ourselves to death over that pledge. "If I hadn't worked through the eighth month." "If I had taken him to the doctor when he had a fever." "If I hadn't let him use the car that night." "If I hadn't been so naïve, I'd have noticed he was on drugs."

The longer I live the more convinced I become that surviving changes us. After the bitterness, the anger, the guilt and the despair are tempered by time, we look at life differently. While I was writing my book, I WANT TO GROW HAIR. I WANT TO GROW UP. I WANT TO GO TO BOISE, I talked with mothers who had lost a child to cancer. Every single one said that death gave their lives new meaning and purpose. And who do you think prepared them for the rough, lonely road they had to travel? Their dying child. They pointed their mothers toward the future and told them to keep going. The children had already accepted what their mothers were fighting to reject.

The children in the bombed out nursery in Oklahoma City have touched more lives than they will ever know. Workers who had probably given their kids a mechanical pat on the head without thinking that morning

were making calls home during the day to their children to say, "I love you."

This may seem like a strange Mother's Day column on a day when joy and life abound for the millions of mothers throughout the country but it's also a day of appreciation and respect. I can think of no mothers who deserve it more than those who had to give a child back. In the face of adversity, we are not permitted to ask, "Why me?" You can ask, but you won't get an answer. Maybe you are the instrument that is left behind to perpetuate the life that was lost and appreciate the time you had with it.

The late Gilda Radner summed it up pretty well. "I wanted a perfect ending. Now I've learned the hard way that some poems don't rhyme and some stories don't have a clear beginning, middle and end. Life is about not knowing, having to change, taking the moment and making the best of it, without knowing what is going to happen next. Delicious ambiguity."

### A FATHER'S PAIN

Written by Plutarch – a Greek Writer, 46-125 A. D., on the death of his son who completed suicide.

Should the sweet remembrances of those things which so delighted us when he was alive only afflict us now? Since he gave us so much pleasure when we had him, so we ought to cherish his memory and make that memory a glad rather than a sorrowful one. Because one page of your book is blotted, do not forget all the other leaves whose reading is fair and whose pictures are beautiful. We should not be like the miser who never enjoys what he has, but only bewails what he loses.

(It should not surprise us that a Father's pain is the same in 2007 as it was all those years ago.)

## PANACHE

By Keith Swett,  
Father of Matt

My cousin is a saint. She is the keeper of the family. She always knows who has just been born, who died and who is in between. She also lost a son, Matthew, just like we did so she reaches out frequently to let us know that we are not alone. For Mother's Day she sent an article by a woman asking if you are still a mother after you child dies. Reading the article I came to the strangest realization. In some way I'm luckier than that woman is because my Dad died before Matt.

I know I'm still Jay Swett's son. The fishing trips, the hugs, the games of catch didn't just disappear when Dad died. A few schools even still call me Jay's kid. I've reached a point in life when I even see Dad when I brush my teeth. The Lion King says, "Of course, he lives."

He lives in you. I never drive past Point without remembering a rainy football game. I never bait a hook without listening carefully to Dad's instructions. I can even shut my eyes and feel him lifting me off of the football field in Rhineland. So, I see my Dad, I hear my Dad, I feel my dad's arms. Of course, Dad is with me and I will always be his son.

The same logic applies to Matt. I always see him playing with ants, singing in the musical, dancing with Sharon. His voice is still on my answering machine. When I'm scared or discouraged, we still hold hands just like we did for 24 years. I will always be Matt's dad.

So, on Mother's Day or any day embrace your mother, your grandmother, your daughter. What we build today follows us through eternity. Of course some of you think I'm crazy or at least good at rationalization. Would I rather have Matthew sitting down to supper and discussing

Javon Walker's hold out? Of course I would but in that way lies madness. The woman asked if she were still a mother not if she'd like her child back.

We'd all like our children back and our parents back and our brothers or sisters back. No one wants to be alone or lonely on life's journey. All loss is painful. Some loss is devastating. Healing begins when we choose life over death, beginnings over endings and friends over isolation.

Using new muscles is painful but necessary for recovery after surgery. Exploring new ideas is equally painful and equally necessary. After surgery, Matt walked me around the block. The hand that I held when he learned to walk now held me as I slowly recovered. We went around the block, then two, then three, then on to life. That hand is still there urging me forward. "Come on! Come on! There's more to see!" I have a deep faith that there is more to see. Matt wouldn't leave me behind. You see, I'm his father.

(Keith will also be presenting a workshop at the Gathering this year. His son, Matt, died in January of 2003.)



The most painful death in all the world  
is the death of a child.  
When a child dies,  
when one child dies...  
not the 11 per 1,000  
we talk about statistically...  
But the one that a mother held  
Briefly in her arms...  
He leaves an empty pace  
In a parent's heart that will never  
heal.

Thomas H. Kean  
Governor of New Jersey

## THE SUPER BOWL

By Betty Ewart  
BP/USA Greenbrier Valley Chapter

By now the Super Bowl is history and many of you who watched it may not have known the story behind the winning coach, Tony Dungy. Jon Saraceno, writer for the sports page of USA Today, wrote a tribute to Tony on Friday, December 23 that told it all very well.

He started by saying, "Tony Dungy will spend this Christmas knowing that nothing ever will be the same. It can't be. In a very real sense, it no longer matters if the Indianapolis Colts win another game – or even the Super Bowl."

You see Tony's son James completed suicide just before Christmas. He and his father had been very close and the team and many others had both James and Tony on their minds.

Saraceno tells how the father and son had been close but also how Tony worried that he was away from home a lot and how he worked to help be a better dad and to help others be better dads. The players commented on how James was on the field with his father often and how they always saw him around his kids and he was an example to them. One player said, "He showed us what it took to be a special dad. This is a sad day. It made me want to go home and hug my kids and love them up. You never know when they might not be around – or you might not be around for them."

The Dungy family had a strong faith. As Saraceno said, "There is no blueprint for bereavement, but many who know the Dungys are confident that strong faith will support them through their despair."

As I saw Tony Dungy accepting the Super Bowl trophy, surrounded by the team, I thought how James was there too – proud of his Dad.

## BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA MEMORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Russ & Linda Horn  
Tanya & Rodney Carlson  
BP/USA CSRA Chapter, South Carolina  
BP/USA CSRA Chapter, South Carolina  
Matt Reis  
BP/USA Central Arkansas Chapter  
Mary Murphy  
Celeste W. Cheatham  
William & Florence Wolfel

In loving memory of their son, David  
In loving memory of their son, Troy  
In loving memory of Renee Dudnikov  
In loving memory of all their children  
In loving memory of David Lasher Reis  
In loving memory of all their children  
In loving memory of her son, Dylan  
In loving memory of her son, Owen  
In loving memory of their daughter Sandra

If we missed listing a donation, we apologize. If you will notify the Treasurer, Dave Hurley, 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 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. Thank you.

The work of BP/USA is financed entirely by contributions. All the leaders, national and local, are volunteers. Donations go directly to help found chapters : there is no charge to found a chapter and each new chapter is given a group of books to help them start a library, some copies of our brochures and the quarterly Newsletter without charge to help in the sending of the quarterly Newsletter which sent by mail ( to over 400 persons) or e-mail (also over 400 people) at no cost; to help to keep costs of attending the Annual National Gathering as low as possible in order; and to maintain a web site (www.bereavedparentsusa.org) . This web site provides a means to find a chapter, read the newsletters, read special brochures and articles, find information about the Gathering and find links to other organizations serving the bereaved . You may designate a donation to any of these areas or to the general work of the BP/USA or give an undesignated gift. Please always designate carefully how you wish a memorial or gift listed. We thank our chapters, individual members and other friends for their generous support of BP/USA and its work.

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### PLAN NOW TO ATTEND THE 2007 NATIONAL GATHERING OF BP/USA!

Registration Fee is \$25 per person, Maximum of \$60  
Per family.

Meals: Complete package only: \$118.00 – 3 meals  
on Friday and Saturday and breakfast on Sunday.

Rooms: \$89 per night for 2 or \$99 for 4. Same price  
two days before and two days after Gathering.

For full information and registration materials visit  
[WWW.BEREAVEDPARENTSUSA.ORG](http://WWW.BEREAVEDPARENTSUSA.ORG)

