



A JOURNEY TOGETHER

NATIONAL NEWSLETTER OF THE BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA



Volume XVI, Spring 2011

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

The Law of the Highway



When my dad would drop us off at school he would call to us as we ran from the car, "Learn something." He would use the same entreaty whether we were going to a downtown museum or on a visit to New York City. My ten year old sister once went to a friend's for a pajama party. "Learn something," dad called as she headed for the door. "What could I possibly learn at a pajama party," my sister queried? "Who snores," he answered.

Learn something became so entirely associated with him that it is the epithet on his grave marker. Our son Brad, I hope, was greeted at the Pearly Gates by his grandfather. Upon seeing him, I truly believe, Dad looked down from Heaven and called out to me, "Learn something."

The grief journey is peppered with way stations. At each stop we sigh, cry and say good-bye, but we always learn something. We learn something about life and about ourselves. Sometimes the lessons are simple (putting your fist through a wall fixes nothing and leaves other problems in its wake); and sometimes the lessons are

more profound (just when your spouse is the most in need of your support, you are the least capable of providing it).

These pull-offs along The Grief Highway are often magnificent vistas with penetrating views down into the abyss of our souls. We stop at these overlooks because we are unable to advance without stopping. Whatever lessons are waiting for us at each station must be experienced. We have no choice. Inner peace cannot be achieved without these stops. It is the law on this highway.

If you are just starting this trek these pull-offs are many. You may feel you've just started moving, just started getting some control of this grief when you are forced to stop at yet another overlook. Progress is painfully slow. But, progress you will, eventually traveling days, weeks, and months between stops.

Now, when I see a sign 'OVERLOOK AHEAD' I simply pull in and try to learn something from whatever has upset my equilibrium. To do otherwise is futile. Besides, Dad would expect no less from me.

Richard Berman
BP/USA Baltimore

The Singing of the Birds

When the night is past and the dawning of the new day is about to break with fresh hopes and dreams,

Then you will hear...

the singing of the birds.

When storm clouds break to drift away leaving bright patches of blue with golden shafts of sunlight on flower and leaf sparkling with fresh drops of diamond rains,

Then you will hear...

the singing of the birds.

Yes, there are those times and places when the cold winter ends.

Springtime returns.

The dark night of the soul is dissolved in a happy daybreak. The storm is over.

Then you will hear...

the singing of the birds.

Robert H. Schuler

*Sorrow and sighing shall flee away.
The waves of grief will come, as they do,
but they will pass quickly if I let them,
surrendering to their enormity.*

Meg Tipper



The Easter ladder

Last year we were invited to an Easter egg hunt the Saturday night before Easter. The kids would have theirs the next day, but this one was for grown-ups. Our friends had hidden plastic eggs all around their home. Under the couch; on top the fridge; in a flower pot; they hid them everywhere. Each had a little trinket or prize inside. Some of the prizes were useful (key-ring flashlight), some were silly (all day sucker) and some, depending on who found them, made you blush or laugh uproariously. The party was a lot of fun and all agreed a great success.

For many years after Brad died, my life was not unlike that party. I was constantly searching for the egg that would contain the magic potion that would take away all the sadness. I looked in libraries, bookstores, support groups, on line sites, church, friends, family and even the faces of strangers. Not surprisingly I never found that egg. What I did discover was it took all of those things to make me feel like living again.

The death of my child was not a bump-in-the-road; it was a brick wall blocking me from future happiness. Each "egg" I collected on my search added another rung until my ladder was tall enough to scale that wall. My hope for you this Easter is you keep collecting eggs and maybe this year you'll find your re-awakening.

— Richard Berman, BP/USA
Baltimore, MD

Triumph and Tears

Passover has been called our favorite holiday because it operates on so many levels. It is a time of triumph, but it is also a time of tears.

Perhaps at no other time do we feel the absence of our child more than at this holiday. As we gather around the Passover table, we cannot help but recall those who were so dear to us in life and who are with us no more. We recall them in friendship and love, for Passover is time for family.

Even as we mourn their loss, we understand that the life of the dead is now placed in the memory of the living. Spring and Passover are a time of new hope and new life.

Rabbi Earl Grollman

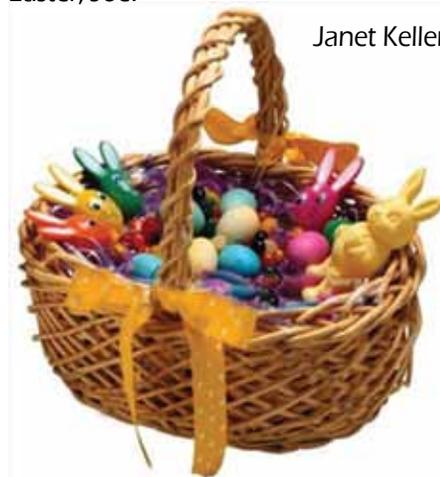
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Basket of Memories

Everybody wonders what to do with the Christmas stocking; my dilemma was what to do with the Easter basket. As I looked at the Easter basket, I decided then and there to use it to decorate my kitchen table. I also use it to take snacks along to a gathering, a nice seasonal touch and a small quiet reminder of my wonderful son! Happy Easter, Joe!

Janet Keller



Silent Tears

Let the silent tears flow
And when your eyes clear
Perhaps you will glimpse
How your eternal child
Has become the unseen angel
Who parents your heart
And persuades the moon
To send new gifts ashore

John O'Donohue

Seasons by Eloise Cole

My life has known the change of many seasons. I have experienced the spring of life; Love, fresh and new and bright with promise. I have come to know the warmth of a family's laughter. Life's way has taken me through the change of fall and winter storms of challenges and pain. Through the seasons your love has been with me. I am now faced with a new season of change, pain-filled is our parting. Goodbye—a word I can barely stand yet I know as I continue along life's way the gift of your love and the gift of your memory will be my warmth and strength. Your gift of love will remain. I know I will move through the seasons of pain and challenge with your memory locked safely within my heart.



**2011 BP/USA NATIONAL GATHERING
RESTON SHERATON HOTEL
RESTON, VA
JULY 28-31, 2011**



*Thursday Evening "Kick Off" Program:
Concert by Singer, Songwriter & Bereaved Parent,
Cindy Bullens
Award Winning Documentary
"Space Between Breaths"
presented by Rosemary Smith*

***Featured Speakers:**
Darcie Sims, Rosemary Smith, Mitch Carmody,
Drs. Gloria & Heidi Horsley,
Becky Greer, Dave Roberts & Ron Villano
with Alan Pedersen providing Inspirational Music*

***Gathering Highlights: Workshops, Sharing Sessions, Butterfly Boutique,
Program for Siblings age 9 to Adult, Reflection Room, Bookstore,
Hospitality Room and a Candle Lighting Ceremony with a
Slide Presentation of our Beautiful Children.***

For more information check out the Bereaved Parents of the USA website at:
www.bereavedparentsusa.org. For questions or more information contact Jodi Norman at
703-910-6277 or e-mail: bpusa.nova@yahoo.com

Reservations at the Sheraton Reston 703-620-9000
To get the gathering rate tell them you are with Bereaved Parents of the USA



Practical Advice

Grieving Mothers: Dealing with your grief on Mother's Day

Whether you are newly grieving or have lost a child years ago, Mother's Day can be one of the most difficult days of the year. A holiday that symbolizes the relationship and love between a mother and her child, this day can bring waves of tremendous grief and pain.

Be active with your grief. As strange as that may sound, those parents who avoid thinking or feeling their loss often get "stuck" with their grief and do not move towards healing. Employ healthy grieving techniques, but remember what works for you may not work for your spouse.

To help get you through this day, here are some suggestions:

- Grief is as individual as a fingerprint. Know that the "ingredients" for your grief will often be different than your family members. Remember: the healing process takes time; everyone heals at their own pace.
- Do what has worked for you in the past. If you have already gone through this holiday since your child has died, do whatever has helped you in the past and stay away from unhelpful activities or people.
- If this will be your first Mother's Day since your loss, rally your support network. Have people around or "on call" that can help support you. Have a plan for things you will do today.
- Find a support group you feel comfortable with. Check out your local Bereaved Parents USA or Compassionate Friends chapters.
- Sometimes well intentioned loved ones can say very unhelpful and even hurtful things. Let your friends and family know what you need and what

kind of support you are looking for (e.g., someone to just sit with you, someone to cook a meal for you).

- Engage in self-care. During difficult anniversaries and holidays, extra pampering can be helpful. Do things that bring you a sense of joy, or at least distract you from painful feelings. Take a warm bath, read a good book, exercise, cook, go out with a friend.

- Plan a way to memorialize and celebrate your child's life. Some mothers will go to the gravesite this day, or read the child's favorite book, or look through their child's drawings. There are many different things to try. If you are at a loss for ideas, talk to other parents that have lost a child.

- If you like to read, consider reading a book on how to get through your grief.

- Breathe deeply. Taking deep breaths rather than short, shallow breaths promotes a sense of well-being. Breathe in for 4 seconds, hold the breath for a second, then exhale for a count of 4.

- Treasure your time with your other children. Share memories of your lost child together.

Things to AVOID doing:

- Using alcohol/drugs or abusing prescription medication and sleep aids. These will offer a temporary respite if that, and often will prolong your grief as well as lead to additional problems.

- Staying isolated. While some time alone may be beneficial, isolating yourself and withdrawing from others can intensify your grief and lead to depression.

- Ignoring your feelings. As intense as they may be, ignoring your loss and resulting feelings will only lead to more suffering. Suppressing negative feelings often leads to increased internal distress. Finding a good psychologist can help you do this if you feel unsure of how to explore your grief.

- Pretending to be OK when you are not. Get the support you need. Let those around you know that it is a difficult day for you.

Keep in mind — grief does not follow a linear path — there are many ups and downs in this journey. Going through a holiday such as Mother's Day can be one of the more difficult days, but remember, tomorrow is another day. Many people will get through their grief without professional help, but others find it difficult to work through their grief or find their loss leads to other problems such as depression. Find a psychologist to work with that you feel comfortable with. See links below for locating a mental health professional near you.

For more information:

Online relaxation/breathing exercises: [http://students.georgiasouthern.edu/counseling/relax/OnlineRelax07.](http://students.georgiasouthern.edu/counseling/relax/OnlineRelax07.htm)

htm

http://www.hws.edu/studentlife/counseling_relax.aspx

Psychologist/Mental health professional's locator links:

www.psychologytoday.com

<http://locator.apa.org/>

Article written by licensed psychologist, Dr. Bernadette Peters

Email: bpeters@wnypsychology.com

Website: www.wnypsychology.com



BOOK REVIEWS

NOW

*Overcoming Crushing Grief by
Living in the Present*

*Jack Cain
JJC Publishing, 2009*

Jack Cain has written a narrative of his personal journey through grief brought on by the deaths of his wife and two of his children over a twenty month period. The title NOW refers to his understanding that in order to re-engage in living, to enjoy the remainder of his life he must neither dwell on the past nor fret over the future; rather he must live for today. This is, of course, easier said than done. Mr. Cain provides, in the final chapter, a ten step guide to accomplish that goal. I think these steps will not help those who are not ready to leave the all encompassing grief behind. It may assist those bereaved parents who feel it's time to rejoin the living, but seem unable to do so.

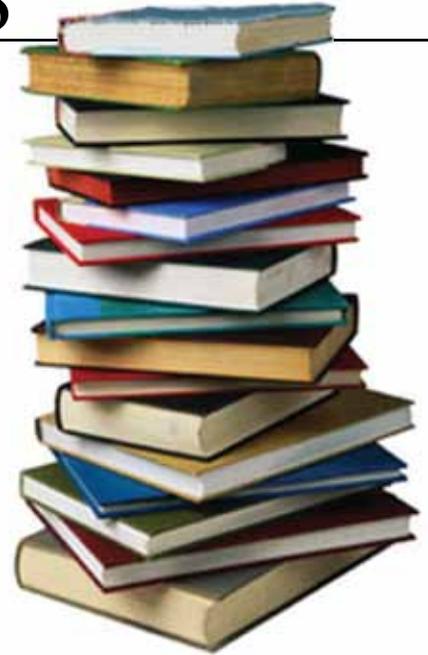
The Andrew Poems

*Shelly Wagner
Texas Tech University Press, 1994*

Using excellent prose, Shelly Wagner, tells us the story of her young son's drowning and her emotional roller coaster that followed. She shares her approach on some issues common to many bereaved parents: How do you answer the question, "How many children do you have?" "Two," my hard-headed Heart always says. One is dead. Must I say only one? Absolutely not – I have two Sons.

So much of her life reflects on her loss. While working in the yard, she writes: ...I'll pour grass seed into a small blue cart, walk back and forth slowly as though strolling a baby carriage.

As you read this thin volume you will



find Ms. Wagner has put beautiful words to your own thoughts and emotions. The rawness of these emotions make it hard to read, but even harder to put down.

MY SISTER'S INFLUENCE

I will never forget that horrid moment. The day the loud banging on the front door broke the silence. The loud cries and screams filled my house. To this day I cannot believe that horrible news: my older sister, Genevieve, had died.

In the past five or six years, my sister and I were getting very close. She would always tell me that I better be doing my best in school. She would make sure I was doing my work, and helped me if I needed her to. When she wasn't home, and I would talk to her on the phone, she would always tell me, "No matter where I am, if you slip up in school, I will find a way back and kick your butt." Then we'd both laugh. I knew, however, she was not kidding. Gen would tell me that I better graduate from high school and go to college. I always promised her I would. That promise makes me work hard every day. Gen starting smoking at a young age, dropped out of high school, left home at sixteen, began drinking and got into drugs. In the last two years of her life she started to get it together. She found a job working with horses and seemed to be turning her life around. I now know those wrestling with the bane of addiction sometimes falter on the path to recovery. Gen died of an accidental overdose. Despite all of this, she was, and still is, one of the biggest influences on my life. She always pushed me to do better. She made sure I learned from her mistakes. She

wanted me to lead the life she couldn't.

I learned from the decisions she made for herself. I learned to re-think every decision; to make sure it is the best one for me and my future. Gen taught me to choose my friends wisely. She taught me to take school seriously, to do my best, and to always ask for help when I need it. With all of what she taught me, and what I learned from watching her, I can better my life to make sure I have a great future. After all, it's the promise I made to my big sister; it's the promise I made to myself.

Whenever Gen was home, or even if she was all the way across the country, she would always find a way to help me. Whether it was home work, relationships, 'boy trouble,' or general advice she was glad to give it. She always had the best advice when mom and I were fighting. I knew I could go to her with almost any problem. For that I will always be thankful.

When my sister died, it made me want to work harder to make sure I kept my promise to her. I know she would be proud of how far I have come. With Gen pushing me to do better, teaching me from her mistakes, and helping me when I needed it, I know how well I can do. She will always be in my head telling me to work harder, or do better. Even though she is not here now she is still the greatest influence on my life.

Katie Wilson, Baltimore



DID YOU KNOW THEY WERE BEREAVED PARENTS?

Although it was common place for children to die in 16th century England, the grief felt by their parents is quite similar to the emotions bereaved parents experience today. Shortly after William Shakespeare's eleven year old son, Hamnet, was laid to rest, Shakespeare depicted a mother (King John; act III) so frantic at the loss of her son that she is driven to thoughts of suicide:

*I am not mad: this hair I tear is mine;
My name is Constance; I was Geoffrey's wife;
Young Arthur is my son, and he is lost:
I am not mad: I would to heaven I were!
For then, 'tis like I should forget myself:
O, if I could, what grief should I forget!*

Also in King John the Bard, like so many of us, was affected by the constant thoughts of his dead son when he wrote:

*Grief fills the room up of my absent child,
Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me,*

*Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words,
Remembers me of all his gracious parts,
Stuffs out his vacant garments with his
form.*

Hamnet had a twin sister. It is theorized that his death influenced the writing of Twelfth Night, which centers on a girl who believes that her twin brother has died. In the end, she finds that her brother is alive and well. Was Shakespeare wishing out loud?

After our child dies we wonder how the world can still be turning. Shakespeare has the same thought in one of the most painful passages he ever wrote. At the end of King Lear where the ruined monarch recognizes his daughter is dead:

*No, no, no life!
Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,
And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no
more,
Never, never, never, never, never!*



Shakespeare, of course, went on to be a prolific poet and playwright. Although death and grief are frequent themes, he did apparently learn to enjoy life again; consider: Mid Summer's Night Dream, The Merry Wives of Windsor and Taming of the Shrew.

On the death of the Beloved

by John O'Donohue

Though we need to weep your loss,
You dwell in that safe place in our hearts,
Where no storm or might or pain can reach you.

Your love was like the dawn
Brightening over our lives
Awakening beneath the dark
A further adventure of colour.

The sound of your voice
Found for us
A new music
That brightened everything.

Whatever you enfolded in your gaze
Quickened in the joy of its being;
You placed smiles like flowers
On the altar of the heart.
Your mind always sparkled
With wonder at things.

Though your days here were brief,
Your spirit was live, awake, complete.

We look towards each other no longer
From the old distance of our names;
Now you dwell inside the rhythm of breath,
As close to us as we are to ourselves.

Though we cannot see you with outward eyes,
We know our soul's gaze is upon your face,
Smiling back at us from within everything
To which we bring our best refinement.

Let us not look for you only in memory,
Where we would grow lonely without you.
You would want us to find you in presence,
Beside us when beauty brightens,
When kindness glows
And music echoes eternal tones.

When orchids brighten the earth,
Darkest winter has turned to spring;
May this dark grief flower with hope
In every heart that loves you.

May you continue to inspire us:

To enter each day with a generous heart.
To serve the call of courage and love
Until we see your beautiful face again
In that land where there is no more separation,
Where all tears will be wiped from our mind,
And where we will never lose you again.

More precious was the light in your
eyes than all the roses in the world.

Edna St. Vincent Millay



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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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.