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

In the Springtime of Your Grief

by Judi Fischer Cleveland
Gratefully borrowed from Ohio Bereavement Magazine

Spring has fragile beginnings; a tiny shoot of green that emerges from the cold earth, a hint of pastel against the brownish grass, a bud that awakens with the morning sun. Sometimes spring comes so quietly we almost miss it, but once it begins, it is impossible to ignore the daily growth and change. The morning sun brings sounds that were not there before. The breeze carries warmth that invites us to venture outside of ourselves. A promise is released with the budding and blossoming surrounding us. Hope emerges for the beginning of a new season; change is in the air.

What we experience in the springtime of the year is what we can experience in the springtime of our grief. There begins to be a growing radiance. The radiance is not just around us; it is within us. A gradual warming of the heart silences the chill of intense pain. The natural unfolding of the grief process moves gently to remind us that we will survive. Life is changing and growth emerges through the changes. The song of our hearts that seemed off key begins to experience a harmonious blend of the past and the present. The songs of the birds invite us to join them in a celebration of a new life. In the springtime of our grief, there can be a new song for us to sing. It will be a song we composed through the heartache of loss.

Optimism for a better day may awaken us one morning. Hearing laughter and discovering it is coming from within ourselves gives us promise for today. Dreams and hopes for a better tomorrow shine brightly with the morning sun. Surviving the winter of our grief with the openness to embrace change is a decision to embrace loss and integrate its impact into the fabric of our lives. It can be a willingness to explore new possibilities that create a different landscape to behold. We can make a decision that we will begin to appreciate what we still have, not just focus on what is missing.

We will know when we have made that decision. Something buds; something opens. The harshness of winter is softened with new life and new growth. It is not something we can force; it is something that unfolds when the time is right. The springtime of grief arrives with no dramatic entrance, no flashing lights. The stillness of the beauty unfolds and captures our attention. It is happening around us, but it is also happening in us.

If spring has already crossed the path of your personal journey of grief, rejoice! But, if the chill of winter remains in your heart, be encouraged; spring is on its way. Look for it, expect it and it will be yours to experience around you and in you!

I had a bud so very sweet – its fragrance reached the skies
The angels joined in holy league – and seized it as their Prize
They bore it to their realms of bliss – where it will ever Bloom
For in the bosom of their God – they placed my rich Perfume

Written on the death of my Grandchild
Grace Seixas Nathan, January 19, 1819, New York

[Among Ms. Nathan’s other grandchildren is Emma Lazarus whose poem, The New CoLOSSUS, adorns The Statue of Liberty]

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From our President:

Greetings and hope bless you in the coming year. After an exhausting winter, as experienced anywhere on the continent, we have an opportunity to meet together and renew ourselves and our organization.

First, nominations for election to our Board of Directors is in-progress to fill three positions. Two board incumbents face re-election, while a third position needs to be filled. Interested persons may self-nominate or be nominated by a member. Nominee information is sent to eligible voting chapters. Returned ballots are counted and the new board is announced at our annual National Gathering.

Next, the annual National Gathering will be held July 24-26, 2015 at the Sheraton Hartford Hotel at Bradley Airport in Hartford, Connecticut. Gathering activities provide Bereaved guest speakers in providing a message of hope, helping and lings in rebuilding their lives after the death of a child.

Additionally, we have the opportunity to nominate and presenting. Our awards are: The Peterson Award; The Humble Servant Award; They Really Made a Difference Award. Nominations for awards 15, 2015.

Please see our website, “bereavedparentsusa.org” for additional election, National Gathering and award information.

Finally, our organization may see enhanced artwork and messages in the services we offer. We want to reveal our message of hope through an appealing, updated presence. Our helpful topical brochures and printed material will also be available soon bearing the new look.

Thank you for “being there,” helping newly bereaved and more seasoned, in their time of need as you honor your child.

I hope to see you in Hartford.

Mike Francisco, President BP/USA

Spring Promise

Spring promises hope and healing. The death of a child is a terrible blow to the body and the spirit, crumbling belief systems, social networks, dependable patterns. Nothing prepares us for the death blow and what the loss forces us through. Lost in pain we stumble, striving to survive in this world of constant pain, despair, confusion. Daily life suddenly seems overwhelming. Decisions take forever. Goals no longer matter. Human comfort withdraws, avoiding the fog of pain surrounding us. Then Spring comes. Just as we don’t notice the first hints of spring, we don’t realize, ever so slowly, we are getting better.

The first steps are small. We don’t cry at breakfast, maybe later; but we don’t start the day crying. We smile at a picture of our child, remembering laughter. We don’t flinch at our child’s name. We take a walk or visit a gym. We eat a healthy meal. We realize our living children need us. Spring promises that life and love do not die. We do not have the life we wanted, but our children expect. We take little steps testing our new life, growing, stretching, until we bloom. We return to today. With Spring, life, and love we move forward.

Keith Swett, Seymour, WI

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BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA

A Journey Together is a national newsletter published quarterly by Bereaved Parents of the USA. You may subscribe or unsubscribe to this newsletter by going to www.bereavedparentsusa.org, and clicking on National Newsletter on the menu on the first page. You will find the proper forms through that site. You will also find articles, locations of chapters, and links to other organizations on that web site.

For other information, contact:
Bereaved Parents of the USA
PO Box 622
St. Peters, MO 63376

Visit: www.bereavedparentsusa.org
The 2015 National Gathering will be held at the Sheraton Hartford Hotel at Bradley Airport
1 Bradley International Airport
Windsor Locks, CT 06096

Please join us July 24-26, 2015 for a weekend of Hope and Healing!

www.bereavedparentsusa.org
Practical Advice

Time to "Spring Clean" Your Grief

By Megan Meade-Higgins, LMSW

Megan Meade-Higgins is a Licensed Master of Social Work (LMSW) specializing in bereavement issues and grief management.

Winter is finally almost over! Trees are budding, animals are coming out of hibernation—even people are "thawing out" after the long, cold days of winter. It's time to get ready for spring!

AFTER A LOSS

The death of a loved one can feel like the bitter days of winter. You go into hibernation, and turn inside yourself to cope with your pain and sorrow. It may be months before you pick your head up and look around and realize you've been immersed in your grief for so long that you've tuned out everything else—your family, your friends, even the change of seasons. You can only just now start to look around and move a little more outside yourself. This is what I call the heart and soul's "spring awakening." It is the time in your grief journey when your heart and soul begin to "bud" with little shoots of hope—where you can recall your loved one's death and still feel sorrow, but you also begin to remember the joy of your relationship.

"SPRING CLEANING" YOUR HEART AND SOUL

You will feel a momentum inside you when it is time to start "spring cleaning" your grief. Many people in your life may think they know when it's best for you to start this process. Friends and family may tell you to "get over it and move on," often before you are ready. But only you will know when the time is right. Respect your own timeline for grief; it will be different from everyone else's.

One suggestion for everyone, however: DO NOT DO ANYTHING DRASTIC FOR ONE YEAR. The first year after a loved one dies is full of "firsts:" first holidays, birthdays, anniversaries, etc. Your loved one's death is often too new and the grief too overwhelming for you to make any major decisions such as moving, changing careers or beginning new relationships. Let yourself ease back into life. How you feel right after a death and how you will feel in a year will be different. Commit to the one-year rule, and when that is over, take a deep breath and take stock of your life. Where are you now?

THE "STUFF" DOES NOT EQUAL THE PERSON

When you are ready to begin to "spring clean" your grief, you will begin to go through your loved one's "stuff," clothes, belongings, etc. It will be a sort of "life in review" for you. As you look through those papers and clothes and files and personal items, the things they loved and used and cherished, don't be surprised if it opens up the sadness all over again. The intensity of this grief may take you by surprise, like an unexpected snow in April. This is normal! Remember: as you go through their belongings, you are NOT giving away the person; you are only giving away and throwing out the stuff. You can never give them away; your love for them will always be with you and comfort you. It is actually very healthy for you to reminisce and cry and daydream of your loved one. While you are literally cleaning out your house, you are also cleaning out your heart and soul...and that is healing.

"SPRING CLEANING" TIPS

One really great way to do this "spring cleaning" is with someone who loves you and understands this bittersweet time. Reminisce about your loved one. As you go through their belongings, tell stories of the life you shared with that person. There is comfort in the shared joy and sadness this task will bring. Sometimes, knowing you are helping others can relieve some of the grief you are feeling. Many people give away some of the stuff they clean out to charities so that the gift of your loved one's life can go on. Keep your most treasured, favorite items to celebrate the life of the person who has died, and if you want, display them proudly!

Time by yourself can often be good for "spring cleaning" your heart and soul, too. Alone time gives you the chance to reflect on your life with your loved one, and to start thinking about where you are headed. Lots of people will tell you it will take time, but you'll get "back to normal." A very important thing to understand about losing a loved one is that you will never be "back to normal." Things can never be exactly the same as when your loved one was alive. Instead, you will have to go on without that person physically in your life and create a "new" normal. Your loved one will always be with you, but now, it will be in a different way as you learn to live in the world without them there. How will it all turn out? No one knows...you cannot control the future or plan too far in advance. Make small changes, lean on your friends and family for support, and take it one step at a time. You CAN do it.

SEASONS CHANGE, BUT LOVE NEVER DIES

The death of a loved one is devastating. But death and loss are NOT the final word. Seasons change, and with death, relationships change, too. But in the circle of life, spring always follows winter, and new life grows from the greatest despair and loss. Embrace your pain, and when you are ready, do some "spring cleaning" and start letting it go. Your emptiness will be filled with new gifts and ways of loving your loved one, and you will be able to move on to the next season of your life.
The death of a loved one is devastating. But death and loss are NOT the final word. Seasons change, and with death, relationships are renewed or transformed in new ways. When your loved one dies, it can feel like the bitter days of winter. You go into hibernation, and turn inside yourself to cope with your pain. It is normal to feel frozen, isolated, and numb. However, spring always follows winter, and new life grows from the greatest despair and loss. Embrace your grief, and remember that the love you share with your loved one will always remain with you.

**TIME DOES NOT BRING RELIEF**

Time does not bring relief; you all have lied
Who told me time would ease me of my pain!
I miss him in the weeping of the rain;
I want him at the shrinking of the tide;
The old snows melt from every mountain-side,
And last year's leaves are smoke in every lane;
But last year's bitter loving must remain
Heaped on my heart, and my old thoughts abide.
There are a hundred places where I fear
To go - so with his memory they brim.
And entering with relief some quiet place
Where never fell his foot or shone his face
I say, 'There is no memory of him here!'
And so stand stricken, so remembering him.

Edna St Vincent Millay

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**Oh He gives to us his joy,**
**That our grief He may destroy:**
**Till our grief is fled & gone**
**He doth sit by us and moan**

William Blake

---

**After Great Pain, A Formal Feeling**

After great pain a formal feeling comes—
The nerves sit ceremonious like tombs;
The stiff Heart questions—was it He that bore?
And yesterday—or centuries before?

The feet, mechanical, go round
A wooden way
Of ground, or air, or ought,
Regardless grown,
A quartz contentment, like a stone.

This is the hour of lead
Remembered if outlived,
As freezing persons recollect the snow—
First chill, then stupor, then the letting go.

Emily Dickinson

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**THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM**

There’s an elephant in the room.
It is large and squatting,
so it is hard to get around it.

Yet we squeeze by with,
“How are you?” and, “I’m fine,”
and a thousand other forms of trivial chatter.

We talk about the weather;
we talk about work;
we talk about everything else—
except the elephant in the room.

There’s an elephant in the room.
We all know it is there.
We are thinking about the elephant as we talk together.

It is constantly on our minds.
For, you see, it is a very big elephant.
It has hurt us all, but we do not talk about the elephant in the room.

Oh, please, say her name.
Oh, please, say “Barbara” again.
Oh, please, let’s talk about
the elephant in the room.

For if we talk about her death,
perhaps we can talk about her life.
Can I say, “Barbara” to you
and not have you look away?

For if I cannot,
then you are leaving me alone
in a room—with an elephant.

Terry Kettering
A Child’s Death & the Marital Relationship
by Dr. Reiko Schwab

Adjusting to the death of a child is among life’s most challenging tasks. Parental grief is extremely intense and takes many years to resolve. Resolution of grief does not mean that parents put their loss behind them; it means that they come to accommodate the reality of their child’s death into the way they live their lives, moving forward even though they grieve the death of their child as long as they live.

Research supports what grieving parents have long acknowledged: that the marital relationship often becomes strained in the aftermath of a child’s death. All marriages and close relationships require continuous care. However, when a child is killed, as in deaths due to a sudden illness, accident, murder or suicide, marital suffering often manifests itself as withdrawal and lack of incentive or ability to attend to each other’s needs. Some grief stricken parents entertain thoughts of their own death in order to be reunited with the deceased child and to end their suffering.

Even though parents share a common loss, they express their grief and cope differently given their unique gender, personal characteristics and past experiences of loss. The couple’s sex life is often compromised as well. Anger can be displaced onto the nearest target, all too often the spouse. Communication is hampered and behaviors are misunderstood. If one parent blames the other for their child’s death, the relationship can suffer additional trauma. If the parents had marital difficulties before their child’s death, the tragedy deepens their rift.

Well-meaning victim assistance providers, grief counselors, thanatologists, and even researchers frequently report that bereaved parents experience an unusually high rate of divorce, such as 50, 70 or even 80 percent. Such alarming statistics, particularly if they are quoted as prognostic, add additional anxiety to bereaved parents who fear that their marriage is now doomed and another catastrophic loss is inevitable.

However, a thorough review of research, which I conducted a few years ago, produced no evidence that the rate of divorce among bereaved parents is as high as is often claimed.

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When I followed up with 110 couples that were married at the time of their child’s death, 92 were still married and three were divorced. The time that had elapsed since the death ranged from two to 14 years and the cause of death varied from stillbirth to murder. The remaining 15 couples could not be located and their marital status was unknown. If I made the assumption that about half of the unlocated couples (7) were divorced, the total number of divorces would be 10, or 9% of the original 110 couples. Converted into a yearly divorce rate, it was 1.1%, which was comparable to the yearly divorce rate of 1.2% in the general population of Virginia during approximately the same period.

It’s possible that the figure may not accurately reflect the divorce rate of all bereaved parents because, for one thing, one or both marital partners in the study attended the support group, and it is quite possible that taking part in the group helped them understand and cope with their marital conflicts, thereby preventing divorce. Nonetheless, the number of divorces in my follow-up study, as in other published studies, was small.

The extremely high rate of divorce often reported in the past is obviously a myth. I do not know the precise original of the myth; however, my research review suggests that a number of professionals failed to carefully examine the sources cited in their work and continued to pass on erroneous information to others.

Not only do you lose a person to death, but you lose their noise too—their noise and smells, gestures and facial expressions. You lose the way they talk and phrase things and laugh, the way they fill in your blanks without ever thinking about it or having to try. You lose things you love about them they don’t even know they possess.

From Bathing the Lion by Jonathan Carroll, 2014:
BOOK review

The Grieving Parent’s Book of Hope
Norma Sawyers-Kurz
Dogwood Publishing, 2014

Ms. Sawyers-Kurz, in this thin volume, covers a lot of territory. She describes the stages, or changes, bereaved parents encounter on their grief journey. She gives sage advice on navigating depression, panic, guilt, anger and physical issues. The author uses various grief writers as references and quotes them when appropriate to make a point. If you are feeling lost on your grief journey The Grieving Parent’s Book of Hope will help you find your way. Additionally, if you are seeking some spiritual comfort, she ends each chapter with her take on how to allow God to be a part of your recovery.

Jeff

It’s always good to see him. He was Brad’s best friend. Virtually inseparable since they were little boys.

When Brad died in his twenty-first year it was he who delivered the truest eulogy, sharing the antics and secrets of teenage boys.

He showed up at my door today.

He lives in another state now. He’s in town visiting his parents and dropped by. He catches me up on his life, tells me about his work and how smart his little ones are. A proud parent. I’m so happy for him. Brad’s death affected him deeply and still has reverberations. He tells me this.

He tells me he still thinks about Brad every day. I’m grateful beyond words.

Our visit ends.

He returns to his world full of future and promise.

As I watch him drive away I sigh, and the tears start falling.

Editor

DID YOU KNOW THEY WERE BEREAVED PARENTS?

One small step for… a man with a hole in his heart

Long before his three year old daughter, Karen, died from a brain tumor Neil Armstrong was already pursuing a career as a test pilot. His love of flying began when he was a small lad growing up in rural Ohio. His appreciation for the work ethic was instilled in him by his parents and his own natural desire encouraged him to complete every task to the best possible level. He became a test pilot at The Flight Research Center at Edwards Air Force Base. After Karen (“Muffie” to family) died in early 1962, Armstrong switched to the Astronaut program at NASA. “I thought the best thing for me to do in that situation was to continue with my work, keep things as normal as I could and try as hard as I could not to have it affect my ability to do useful things,” he told 60 Minutes. His experience flying the X15 (beyond 200,000 feet) at Edwards made him the only astronaut with that degree of experience.

The future “first man on the moon” was somewhat reticent about his move to NASA. But it is clear he needed something to divert his attention from the unrelenting grief. The challenges offered by the space program along with President Kennedy’s goal of landing on the moon by the end of the decade gave Neil Armstrong that distraction. Neil and his wife, Janet, had two more children, both boys, who grew up out of the spotlight as Neil refused all offers to exploit his fame.

Toward the end of his career he taught aerospace engineering at the University of Cincinnati where he was able to share his passion for high altitude, high speed flying with the next generation.

Arguably the most famous explorer in human history succeeded even with (or perhaps because of) a hole in his heart.
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.