

A Journey Together



National Newsletter of the *Bereaved Parents* of the USA

VOLUME XIII NO. 1 Winter 2008 (January, February and March)



HOPE DWELLS EVER IN THE SOUL

From Becky Kovacic
Greenbrier Valley WV BP/USA

Life is never hopeless,
Never wholly without joy;
For Hope dwells ever in the soul,
And nothing can destroy
The power of Hope to rise again
In spite of tragedy. It can't be
crushed

By circumstance or broken utterly.
Sometimes it may seem to fail
When Fortune strikes a blow;
But ends are only new beginnings
Where we start again.
Much is taken with the years
But many things remain.

Bleak and bitter life may look
When we have suffered loss,
But there are consolations
In the shadow of the cross.
Sorrows come but not to stay;
The door is left ajar.
And every time a lamp goes out,
God lights another star.

This is from the "Treasury of Faith and Inspiration" which can be found at www.eastonpressbooks.com. Becky sent it to us, before realizing that SEEDS OF HOPE is the theme of the 2008 Gathering which the WV Chapter is helping to sponsor.



MY ANGEL

By Nicki Rix

From the Central Arkansas
BP/USA Newsletter

If I had known I held an Angel in my
arms each night
I would have rocked a little slower
and sung until daylight.

If I had known an Angel had crawled
across our floor,
I would have gotten on my knees and
watched her crawl some more.

If I had known an Angel's tooth
waited for the fairy,
I would have left all the money her
little hands could carry.

I would have knelt beside her bed as
she said her little prayers. And lis-
tened to her talk to Jesus just like He
was there.

I would have looked a little harder
and watched her make believe,
As she talked to no other and poured
her friend some tea.

Her lunch would have been packed
with love notes and fun-stuff
everyday,
Instead of peanut butter and jelly
and "got to go or I'll be late."

If I had known I saw an Angel kick a
soccer ball,
I would have gone to every game and
watched her play them all.

If I had known an Angel's tears fell
upon my skin,
I would have found a silver locket to
keep them safely in.

If I had known an Angel was
planning to go fishing,
I would have packed my pole to go.
Instead...I'm left here wishing.

Written in loving memory of my
daughter Alicia Nicole Rix

FROM THE BP NORTH TEXAS CHAPTER

Shirley Ottman wrote to tell us this story. "A balloon lift-off was featured during our September meeting. After we members wrote cards to our children and attached them to brightly colored balloons, we walked outside at dusk, about 7:40 p.m.. Music played while a short essay was read as we held our balloons. As we released our balloons, we silently watched them soar heavenward. When all the balloons were almost out of sight, an exceptionally brilliant meteor streaked across the sky where the balloons had been moments before. "A response," was the immediate cry of several members. It did seem as though our children were acknowledging our messages to them. Anyway, it raised goosebumps on both my arms!"



**BEREAVED PARENTS OF
THE USA**

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**FROM THE-
DESK OF
THE
EDITOR**

The holidays, Candlelight Memorials, and all that goes with those events are over. The new year is here and the long months of winter stretch ahead. During the winter months we have time to relax from the holidays and the weather often gives us some time to catch up on reading and doing jobs that have been put off when we were rushed with other activities. Bereaved persons need to use this time to refresh themselves too. We hope some of the articles in this newsletter will help you to do just that.

THE 2008 GATHERING: It is not too early now to think about the 2008 Gathering. It will be July 11-13 in St. Louis, MO at the Crowne Plaza Hotel at the airport. Watch your mail in late January for materials about the speakers, programs, etc. and registration materials. Chapter leaders will also be getting information about the Leadership Training on July 10. Be sure to open each of these mailings as they arrive because they will have valuable information.

If you want to be assured of having a room at the hotel for the Gathering, you may make your reservation at any time by calling 314-291-6700. Ask for In House Reservations. Be sure to tell them that you will be with BP/USA to get the special rate. Rooms are \$75 per night plus tax. Up to four persons may be in the room for this charge. The deadline to receive this rate is June 8.

We are planning an exciting time with many helpful speakers and workshops. This is a chance to see old friends and a chance for newly bereaved persons to meet other bereaved persons and share and receive helpful ideas.

NATIONAL BP/USA BOARD OF DIRECTORS NOMINATIONS: There are two vacancies to be filled on the Board of Directors in 2008. These will be three year terms. Nominations are now being accepted and may be

sent by e-mail to Martha Honn at marthahonn@charter.net or by calling her at 618-244-1203. Deadline for nominations is February 29, 2008.

NOMINATIONS FOR THE ANNUAL PETERSON AWARD: Nominations are now being accepted for the Roy and Juanita Peterson Award for 2008. Please send these nominations to Beverley Hurley at bee.hurley@gte.net or call her at 813-832-3175. This person should have been active in some way in BP both at the local level and at the national level

A NEW YEARS RESOLUTION: Let us all resolve to reach out to those in our communities who have suffered or will suffer in 2008 the loss of a child, grandchild or sibling. Not only parents but entire families are devastated. I have been especially moved lately as I read about the families of our service personnel who have died in the current war. We even hear now of women who are mothers who have been killed. There are many who need our concern and help. Remember that, when we help others, we find that we help ourselves too.

There is a movie coming out soon about a father who faces how to tell his two young daughters that their mother has been killed in Iraq. The reviews say that it is a very moving insight into grief. When the service persons come to the door to inform him and ask whether they may come in, he refuses to let them in, thinking that, if he doesn't let them in, it hasn't happened. Some of us can understand that feeling. Those of us who have other children also can understand his struggle to tell them what has happened. Again, he tries to avoid it by taking them to a fun park but the inevitable time comes. This movie may be too much for some to see just now but it might be helpful to others. The title of the movie is **GRACE IS GONE.**



HUGGING

This poem was read at the National Gathering this year by one of the speakers. The author is unknown.

Hugging is healthy.
It helps the body's immune system,
It cures depression,
It reduces stress,
It induces sleep,
It's invigorating,
It's rejuvenating,
It has no unpleasant side effects,
And hugging is nothing less than
a miracle drug.

Hugging is all natural.
It's organic,
Naturally sweet and 100%
wholesome.
It contains no pesticides,
No preservatives,
And no artificial ingredients.

Hugging is practically perfect.
There are no movable parts,
No batteries to wear out,
No periodic check-ups,
No insurance requirements,
And no monthly payments.

It has low energy consumption
And high energy yield.
It is inflation-proof,
Non-fattening,
Theft-proof
Non-taxable,
Non-polluting,
And, of course, fully returnable.



THE MYTH OF CLOSURE

By Ashley David Prend,
Hospice of North Idaho

"When will I begin to feel better?"
"When will I return to normal?"
"When will I achieve some closure?"
grievors often ask. Closure, our culture tells us, will bring about a tidy ending, a sense of completion. Some grievors hope that the desired magical closure will occur after the

funeral or memorial service. Others are confident it will come once they have cleaned out their loved one's room. Or maybe after a special personal ritual. Or, perhaps, after the first anniversary comes and goes...

The reason we long for closure, of course, is because we would like to neatly seal away all of this pain. We would like to close all the sad, confused, desperate, angry feelings out of our life. We would like to put all of this behind us...Closure is for business deals. Closure is for real estate transactions. Closure is not for feelings or for people we love. Closure simply does not exist emotionally, not in a pure sense. We cannot close the door on the past, as if it didn't exist, because, after losing someone dear to us, we never forget that person or the love we shared. And, in some ways, we never entirely get over the loss. We learn to live with the loss, to integrate it into our new identity.

Imagine if we really could end this chapter in our life, even more because the attachment would be severed. And this attachment is vital to us-the memories are treasures to be held close, not closed out. Perhaps it is better to think in terms of healing. Yes, we can find ways to move on and channel our pain into productive activities. Yes, we can even learn to smile again. But let's not ever think that we'll close the door completely on what this loss means. For, if we did that, we would unwittingly close the door on all the love that we shared. And that would truly be a loss too terrible to bear.

A THERAPY DOG

Betty R. Ewart, Editor

We are pleased to have the Centering Corporation doing our 2008 Gathering Bookstore this year. They told us they would be bringing Bailey, a Therapy Dog. My immediate question was "What is a Therapy Dog?" That may be your question too and you may wonder why one would be at a gathering of bereaved persons.

I was told that Bailey's job is "just to be". I have seen two articles about these animals in the last weeks that explain better what the dogs are and what they do by just being.

One article was in the USA Today and was about two Labradors who are trained to help stressed troops in Iraq. The paper reports that "They are a vital part of the medical team that helps troops struggling with stress, sleep disorders and event related trauma." People come to recognize them as "a safe haven of communication." The paper also reported that "these types of dogs are working with frail or ailing adults and children in hospitals, nursing homes, medical offices and other care facilities..."

The second article I read confirmed that last sentence. It was in SLATE on the web and was about a dog's amazing gift with hospice patients. There dog is Izzy and has done amazing things. People very depressed with their cancers have responded to the dog very well. One patient they reported on had not talked to them and, indeed, could not stand to have them touch her. She realized it was a dog and they reported that they saw her smile for the first time and the woman is now participation in her care by the staff.

I remember how much help Ruthie's dog was to us after she died. When I would come home to an empty house, she would jump on my lap and dry my tears and comfort me. So I guess Becky was our Therapy Dog.

So, come to the Book Store at the Gathering and meet Bailey with her healing powers.



I KNOW YOU BY HEART

By Alan Pederson
In Memory of Ashley

There's time and space between
Where we are and where we've
been.

I grieve for what I cannot have
Or ever hold again.

Just when I think I'm all alone
'cause you're so far away,
It suddenly occurs to me
I see you every day.

You're that hint of inspiration
Urging me to carry on -
A boost of needed energy
When all my strength is gone.

You're a single shining ray of hope
When faith is hard to find
And twenty-twenty vision when grief
has left me blind.

You're a lonely road's companion
When it's hard to find a friend-
A much-needed reminder
That good-bye is not the end.

You're calm and reassurance
When I scream for answers why-
A gentle voice that whispers,
"Daddy, it's okay to cry."

You're part of everything I am
And all I'll ever be -
The one who, when I'm at my worst,
Still see the best in me.

And though you're just outside my
reach
We are never far apart.
I recognize you everywhere,
Child, I know you by heart.



Editors Note: I have received several books during Dec. and early Jan. but, with the holidays, have not been able to read them for review yet. The next newsletter will contain those reviews.

ROOMS AND THINGS

By Mary Cleckley
BP/USA Member

How many people have suggested to you, in subtle and not so subtle ways, that you'd be better off if you'd only go ahead and get rid of your child's things and redo the room? You see, they think that the holding on to these things is morbid. These people who have never suffered the loss of their children, really do not understand that you have to do your grief work and whether you do this sad task now or later really doesn't affect the length nor depth of your pain.

Some parents need to make the changes and decisions about personal belongings as soon as possible after the death. Having the chore ahead of them is more painful than the doing. These parents are advised, however, to go slowly when disposing of belongings. It may seem to you also that not seeing or having anything around to remind you of your dead child will somehow make your pain less. Later though, when your grief has softened, you may find you need that special something but, by then, it's too late.

On the other hand, you may try to keep everything and it may take many months and several acts of sorting through the belongings at intervals before you're able to decide on just the special things you want as mementoes. As time goes by, you will be able to let go of the less important things without having it rip you to pieces. Not everything will forever have the same value to you. You may change in how you feel and find that it comforts instead of hurts to see your subsequent child wearing some of the baby's clothes or that catching a glimpse of an old familiar shirt on one of your teenagers brings a warm feeling.

Whether you've made changes or haven't been able to make changes, it's okay. There's no rule about when you do it and don't let well meaning friends or relatives make you feel

Guilty because your needs don't meet their timetables. What we would like to suggest to you though is that there are no rules about when you do it but that you do have as a goal eventually making the changes. Otherwise the room and things become a shrine and if you have surviving children or a spouse, they may find it very difficult to live in this atmosphere forevermore. If the children could just be honest with you, many would tell you that they don't want their dead sibling punished; instead, bring the record player and records into the den or use the back-pack and tent, or whatever, because it comforts them to feel that their sibling has once again become a part of the family and not relegated to "the room."

I don't think I know of anyone who hasn't kept some belongings of their dead child, so that must be normal. What we learn after the death is that life is tenuous at best and, rather than hanging on to an unchanged room, try to value the important people who are left in this life, be they family or friends, and savor them along with the memories of your dead child. For, when all is said and done, those memories are truly the important part of your dead child. That's a truth that doesn't need changing.

A CORRECTION

We had an article in the last newsletter called PSST which we identified as written by Joan Liljedahl. She had given us permission to use it but, when she read our newsletter, she realized that she had, in fact, not written it! This has probably been passed down from newsletter to newsletter and, somehow, her name got attached to it. Joan has written some very fine articles but this one is, for now, by "anonymous."

If you know who, in fact wrote this article, please let us know. In the meantime, PSST is a good article and we look forward to reviewing some of Joan's writings in the future.

A GRIEVING PARENT IS.....

By Judy Skapik

From the Sept. 2004 Newsletter of the Tampa Bay Chapter of BP/USA

- A grieving parent is someone who will never forget their child no matter how painful the memories are.
- A grieving parent is someone who yearns to be with their dead child but cannot conceive leaving their living ones.
- A grieving parent is someone who has only part of a heart as the rest of it is buried with their child.
- A grieving parent is someone who begs for relief from the memories which plague them and then feels guilty when they get it.
- A grieving parent is someone who pretends to be happy and enjoying life when they really are dying inside.
- A grieving parent is someone who holds the lives of their remaining children as the most precious gift they have.
- A grieving parent is someone who can cry or laugh at the drop of a hat whenever they remember their beloved child.
- A grieving parent is someone who feels as if they just lost their child yesterday no matter how much time has passed.
- A grieving parent is someone who fears for their remaining family because they cannot bear to have any more loss.
- A grieving parent is someone who sits by their child's gravestone and feels a knife stabbing their heart.
- A grieving parent is someone who wants to help others who have lost loved ones because somehow their loss is theirs all over again.

WINTERSUN

By Sascha
From her book "Wintersun"

There are those days in winter
when your world is frozen
into a vision of eternal ice,
when earth and air
are strangers to each other,
when sound and color seem
forever gone.

There are those days in winter
when you feel like dying,
when life itself surrenders you
to anguish,
to total mourning and to
endless grief.

And then it happens: - from the
bitter sky,
A timid sun strides to his
silent battle
against the gray and hostile
universe —
It changes ice to roses, sky to song.

And then it happens that your
heart recalls
some distant joy, a gladness
from the past.
A slender light at first, then
larger, braver
until your mind returns to
hope and peace.

Let memories be beauty in your life,
like song and roses in the
wintersun.

Dedicated to Randy Misita, son of
Bernie and Tony, bother of Angela.

"So generous a heart
So kind and forgiving"



ENDOWMENT

By Sascha
Also from "Wintersun"

Hope gives us vision for regaining
the tenderness of memories.

Hope carries us through
to survival and healing.

Hope offers us courage
for acceptance and overcoming.

Hope gives us
new spirit and new laughter.

Hope is among the greatest gifts
to be found in time of sorrow.

But hope cannot restore
what is lost to death.

Hope can only go forward
and make us new.

Give space to hope in your life.

ROCKS

By Roy Peterson
Beloved Past Member of BP/USA

A teacher pulled out a one-gallon, wide-mouthed mason jar and set it on a table in front of a class. Then he produced about a dozen fist-sized rocks and carefully placed them, one at a time, into the jar. When the jar was filled to the top and no more rocks would fit inside, he asked, "Is this jar full?" Everyone in the class said, "Yes."

"Really?" he said. He reached under the table and pulled out a bucket of gravel. Then he dumped some gravel in and shook the jar causing pieces of gravel to work themselves down into the spaces between the big rocks. Then he asked the group once more, "Is the jar full?" By this time the class was on to him. "Probably not," one of them answered. "Good!" he replied. He reached under the table and brought out a bucket of sand. He started dumping the sand in and it went into all the spaces left between the rocks and the gravel. Once more he asked the question, "Is this jar full?" "No!" the class shouted. Once again he said, "Good!" Then he grabbed a pitcher of water and began to pour it until the jar was filled to the brim. Then he looked up at the class and asked, "What is the point of this illustration?"

One eager beaver raised his hand and said, "The point is, no matter how full your schedule is, if you try really hard, you can always fit some more things into it!"

"No", the teacher replied, "that's not the point. The truth this illustration teaches us is, "If you don't put the big rocks in first, you'll never get them in at all."

What are the "big rocks" in your life? Time with your loved ones, your faith, your education, your dreams, a worthy cause, teaching or mentoring others? Remember to put these big rocks in first or you'll never get them in at all!

OUR NICOLE

Sent to us by a father who wrote this in memory of his daughter. You can see more of his work on www.dziuma.com

A fresh picked flower, from a neighbors yard
"I love You, Pop" on a hand made card

A goodnight kiss and a hushed "sweet dreams"
"I love you, Mommy," her sweet face beams

Her talking, her laughter, her sometimes whine
Oh, to hear them one more time

The stories she told, they were so much fun
All her chores, that were rarely done
Her two older sisters, she loves them so

The messy room, we're afraid to show
All the dreams in a young girls mind
This and more she leaves behind

Her little friends, her teachers, her pets,
The dentist appointments she always "forgets"

Her smile, her braces, her smudged up glasses
These memories grow fonder as each day passes

The love in her heart, we can never measure
These memories and more we'll always treasure.



WE NEED EACH OTHER

By Steve Goodier
BP/USA of Springfield, IL
Found in the Newsletter of
TCF of Los Angeles

Many living things need each other to survive. The Colorado aspen tree does not grow alone. Aspens are found in clusters or groves. The reason is that the aspen sends up new shoots from the roots. In a small grove, all the trees may actually be connected by their roots! Giant California redwood trees may tower 300 feet into the sky. It would seem that they'd require extremely deep roots to anchor them against strong winds. But, we're told that their roots are actually quite shallow, to capture as much surface water as possible. And they spread in all directions, intertwining with other redwoods. Locked together in this way, all the trees support each other in wind and storms. Like the aspen, they never stand alone. They need each other to survive.

People, too, are connected by a system of roots. We are born to family and learn early to make friends. We are not meant to survive long without others. And, like the redwood, we need to hold one another up. When pounded by the sometimes vicious storms of life, we need others to support and sustain us.

Have you been going it alone? Maybe it's time to let someone else help hold you up awhile. Or, perhaps someone needs to hang on to you.

PROMISE

Grief walks with you today,
your constant companion.
but in the morning,
tomorrow,
the sunrise of hope waits for
you.

Sascha
From WINTERSUN

BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA MEMORIAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Mary Sullivan
Shirley Basil
Mary Murphy
Don & Barbara Cook
John & Therese Goodrich
Russ & Linda Horn
Greenbrier Valley WV BP/USA

In loving memory of the Domzalski Family
In loving memory of Henry Domzalski
In loving memory of her son, Dylan Thornton
In loving memory of their children David, Ashley and Ann
In loving memory of their daughter, Paula Marie Goodrich, & A. C. Sontgerath
In loving memory of their son, David
In loving memory of their children: Donation to cover printing cost

If we missed listing a donation, we apologize. If you will notify the Treasurer, David Hurley, at 3805 West San Juan Street, Tampa, Florida 33629-7819, by phone at 813-831-2588 or by email 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. 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 is sent by mail at no cost; to help to keep costs of attending the Annual National Gathering as low as possible; and to maintain a web site (www.bereavedparentsusa.org) . You may designate a donation to any of these areas or to the general work of the BP/USA by giving 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.

REMEMBERED VALENTINES

By Shirley Ottman
BP/USA North Texas
From "The Slender Thread"

Little hands, dimpled and fair,
you're pasting lace on chair and hair
and everything else within your reach.
But oh, the smile that lights your face
when you bring your valentine and place
it in my hands: Look, Mom; for you.

You pause to watch for my delight.
I'll never know as fair a sight
as seeing love shine in your eyes.
I hope as age creeps up on me
I'll never lose my memory,
for that's where I still play with you.

It's not just that you're grown; you're gone!
Except in memories and dreams at dawn
of you and us and happy times.



IT IS A TIME FOR LOVE

By Margaret Gerner
BP/USA St. Louis, MO

February has fewer days than most months and that may be of special significance to us, as our children had fewer days than most. When we think of this month, the most outstanding day, perhaps, is St. Valentine's Day. It is a time for love. When we were school aged, we had a special chance to give and receive cards in those decorated boxes in our primary classrooms. Perhaps it is the one holiday that children can really do something for everyone. Addressing a card to each and every classmate made you think of how you felt about each one and wonder about how they felt about you.

Love is found in every day of every year, but February and Valentine's Day is very special. I wish I could remember just how it felt to get a "nicer" Valentine from someone I had sent a "nicer" one to. It is so long ago, and there have been so many much more significant happenings in my life. But sometimes I'd like to remember just how it felt. I am sending along this Valentine Love Note to each of you right now and hope that you know it is one of the "nicer" ones. Because each of you is very special to me. Somehow I don't wonder how you feel; somehow I know.

As we grieve the loss of our children and one another's, we begin to find a different kind of love that we never expected to experience.