another year has gone by without you…

this burning candle is our firework to wish you a happy new year in heaven

DARE TO BE

When a new day begins, dare to smile gratefully.
When there is darkness, dare to be the first to shine a light.
When there is injustice, dare to be the first to condemn it.

When something seems difficult, dare to do it anyway.
When life seems to beat you down, dare to fight back.
When there seems to be no hope, dare to find some.
When you’re feeling tired, dare to keep going.
When times are tough, dare to be tougher.
When love hurts you, dare to love again.
When someone is hurting, dare to help them heal.

When another is lost, dare to help them find the way.
When a friend falls, dare to be the first to extend a hand.
When you cross paths with another, dare to make them smile.
When you feel great, dare to help someone else feel great too.
When the day has ended, dare to feel as you’ve done your best.

Dare to be the best you can –
At all times,
Dare to be!
~ Steve Maraboli

Where there is sorrow, there is holy ground.
Oscar Wilde
I write this note to everyone tonight from a very cold Midwest. The holidays are behind us...personally, I’m relieved. It is a difficult time for most of us. 2016 is filled with hope and healing as we are planning for the National Gathering to be held in Indianapolis, Indiana. The theme this year is “Crossroads of your Heart” with all roads leading to Indy.

It is at the National Gathering, July 1-3, 2016 where we will see old friends, meet new friends, hear Speakers and Workshop presenters as they weave hope and healing throughout their talks. It is where we laugh, cry and REMEMBER our children, our grandchildren and our siblings who died much too soon. It is where we find a renewed sense of spirit in us. It is where we learn how to mourn well that we might live well.

The BP USA Board of Directors are here for you. You told us what you need, and we have listened. There are several new “programs” we are implementing this year. Sarah Kravits is the Sibling Coordinator on the Board. Sarah is a bereaved sibling who graciously stepped up and answered the call. Our Mission Statement includes reaching out to Siblings and we’ve heard for several years that it has been an unmet need. Thank you Sarah! The Board of Directors welcomes input from everyone on what your needs are and what you might like to see at the Gathering this summer.

Other opportunities that will be available for you at the Gathering, if you choose to participate, are Yoga, a Craft room, adult coloring and, as always, a Reflection Room for brief meditation/quiet time. It has been requested that we provide more down time to visit with each other and share stories of your children/siblings. With these new offerings, we hope that you will find that time.

Until then, take good care of you. The Board of Directors are available; our information is on the website at www.bereavedparentsusa.org Look for our pictures and then come and find us in Indianapolis.

Warmest regards,

Delain Johnson, President
SURVIVING THE WINTER GLOOM
Darcie Sims

Why does January seem so empty? Just as the world is stiff and frozen outside my window, I feel dead and cold and scattered inside myself. I managed to make it through the holiday season, though the hows of that feat are truly beyond my recollection. I can’t even remember eating the holiday meals. (I do, however, remember doing the dishes-again and again and again. Next year we are eating out or on paper plates!) In those glittering days, I managed to smile and even to find a few moments of peace and joy. But here in the gloom of winter, all I seem to see are the scattered pieces of my life, cast before me on the card table, waiting for me to pick them up and make the picture. But what picture do all these pieces form? I used to think I knew. I used to know who I was and where I was going and how I was going to get there. But now, now in the chill of winter, I can’t even remember where the puzzle begins and I end.

I think I’m still grieving, and that surprises me! It’s been too long (regardless of the time frame you insert) and I should be getting better. Why do I still ache from the sunburn I got years ago when we were together on the beach? Why is there still sand in my shoes and why does your name still stick in my throat? Who am I now that the memories grow cold in winter’s chill?

Am I still a mother if there is no child to tuck in at night? Am I still a dad if there is no one to loan the car keys to? Am I still a wife if there is no one to snuggle up to in my bed? Am I still a husband if there is no one waiting at home for me at the end of the day? Am I still a sister or a brother if there is no one to tease? Am I still a child if my parent has died? Am I still a human being, capable of loving and being loved, if the one person I loved more than anything has become frozen in time? WHO AM I NOW that my loved one has died?

The gloom has permeated even my toes, and my whole body seems icy. Why can’t January be warm and gentle-after the struggle of the holidays? I need some sunshine, some warmth, some help in turning over the puzzle pieces and putting them back together. I need some spring.

But spring is a ways off and I must (somehow) get through these days. If you’re feeling like I am, perhaps these few suggestions will help you find the pieces to your new puzzle.

Identify specific feelings. Do not generalize. Try to figure out exactly what is bothering you. Look for the tiny grains of sand that are still hiding in the bottom of your shoes. Acknowledge them. Be honest with those feelings, whatever they are. If you’re angry, be angry. If you’re sad, be sad. Be specific in your sadness.

Pick your worries. Focus on only one worry at a time. Give up being worried about being worried. Prioritize your worries. This helps combat feelings of being overwhelmed and you can decide which worries to keep and which to send to your: 1) mother; 2) children; 3) family; 4) neighbor; 5) enemy.

Keep a picture or two of the sand castle where you can enjoy it every day. You may decide not to make a shrine out of your memories, but don’t lose the joy that you had in making that marvelous moat! Keep the sand you found in the shoe-you just don’t have to keep it there! That’s what memories are for—a place to stash the important stuff that we need.

Become as informed and as knowledgeable as possible about this new world in which you live. We fear what we don’t know, what we can’t see, what we can’t touch. Read, listen and learn all you can about grief. It’s not where you planned on being this winter, but it is where you are. Look around.

Listen to everyone. You will receive enough advice about how to do it (grief) to sink a fleet of battleships. Be grateful. At least someone is talking with you! But, follow your own music.

Be kind to yourself. You survived the holiday season, and now it is the beginning of another season, another way of living. Learn to forgive yourself for living.

Set small goals first; accomplish them. Then, set bigger goals. Try starting with getting the garbage out on the right day. Then, open the closet, the drawers and the heart. Try going out. The next time you might be able to get farther than the driveway. Take your time. It’s a long way to the beach. You’ll get there again-someday.

Remember that life requires effort on your part. Make friends with the vacuum, the checkbook and the car. Become determined to learn to remove the box before microwaving the dinner. Don’t wait for happiness to find you again. Make it happen. Build another sand castle, maybe on a different beach this time. Don’t lose the memories just because they hurt. Look at the pictures, listen to the song and remember the love-
you haven’t lost that. How could you possibly lose the love you shared?

Keep turning the puzzle pieces over. But don’t keep trying to put them back into the same picture. That picture is gone. There is a new picture to be made of those scattered pieces. Search for that scene. Search for the new you. Search for the new person you are becoming.

Don’t forget how to dream, how to laugh, how to dance. The music is different but so is the season. The room may be empty, but the heart is not. The spirit may be filled with sand, but the shoes remember the steps. One day at a time is okay if you can manage it, but know that some days all you can manage is one minute at a time. But minutes add up to years, eventually, and each grain of sand adds to the strength of the castle. Build the sand castle again, if only in your memory. Just because it’s January, doesn’t mean the beach is closed forever. Build your new castle in the middle of winter. Find the new occupant—the new you.

Be gentle this winter season. Turn the pieces over slowly, experiencing each piece as a newly found treasure. We can fill our days with bitterness and anger that the picture will never be the same. Or, we can hope for the spring that will surely come if we let it.

I know there are good things on the horizon. Winter can’t last forever. If those things turn out to be less than we hoped, we will simply have to make whatever we get into something livable. Perhaps that is the secret to melting winter into spring. The challenge is to always carve out something beautiful from the icicle. There is joy in living, if we allow time in the winter to reassemble the thousand-piece puzzle.

This article originally appeared in a 2008 edition of Grief Digest.

The heart stops briefly when a child dies
A breathless pain as you
acknowledge the news.
And that one who held your hand
Moves from your outside
To your inside...

Slowly,
your heart adjusts to its new weight.

~Author Unknown

A loved one is a treasure of the heart and to lose a loved one is like losing a piece of yourself. But the love that this person brought you did not leave, for the essence of the soul lingers. It cannot escape your heart, for it has been there forever.

Cling to the memories and let them find their way to heal you. The love and laughter, the joy in the togetherness you shared will make you strong.

You’ll come to realize that your time together, no matter how long, was meant to be, and that you were blessed to have such a precious gift of love in your life.

Keep your heart beating with the loving memories and trust in your faith to guide you through. Know that though life moves on, the beauty of love stays behind to surround and embrace you.

Your loved one has left you that to hold in your heart forever.

~ Debbie Burton-Peddle
Greetings everyone. I am honored to have been asked to join the Board in a new position as Sibling Representative.

I grew up with only one sibling, my brother Frank, two years younger than I. We had our moments through childhood, I suppose, but overall got along extremely well with each other and with our parents. We had even spent several years living together as adults in Manhattan, and later lived in New Jersey just one town away from each other, with our respective spouses and children. We were true friends.

In 2010 Frank got a job offer in Austin, Texas and moved there with his family. In June of 2014, he and his wife and four-year-old daughter began an early-morning car trip to pick up their two older children from camp. Their Honda Pilot was hit head-on by a severely impaired driver who was going the wrong way in their lane on a highway. Both my brother and the drunk driver were killed instantly. My life fell apart that day.

By some miracle, people drove up moments after the accident and called emergency personnel who delivered my gravely injured sister-in-law and niece to hospitals that saved their lives. I flew to Austin with my father and went about the business of planning a funeral for my brother that most of his family could not even attend. I now continue the long process of coping with my loss, day by day, sometimes hour by hour.

(For more about my family and my experience, read this piece I wrote about becoming an only child at the age of 48: http://modernloss.com/my-sudden-onset-only-child-syndrome/)

Sometimes called the "forgotten mourners," bereaved siblings have a significant -- and frequently unmet -- need for support. There is a sense that the loss of a sibling is somehow less intense than the loss of a child, a parent, or a spouse. I am here to report that this is not at all the case in a general sense. Individuals may have more or less intensity around any loss they experience, depending entirely on their own circumstances, but siblings often feel a devastating loss. In many cases, as in mine, I never knew a time when my brother was not a part of my life, and I could not conceive of him being gone. Logically I expected to lose my grandparents and parents as they grew older, but I never imagined losing my brother until we were both well along in years. This tremendously confusing loss can deeply shake one's trust and faith.

I am heartened by the Bereaved Parents of the USA's intention to increase support and programming for bereaved siblings. Not only is the need great, but different ideas and types of support are necessary to suit the widely-varying circumstances of sibling loss -- an adult losing a sibling like me, for example, has different needs than a young child who has lost a sibling, or an adolescent suffering the same loss. In addition, the circumstances of the loss -- sudden or after a long wait, illness or auto accident or suicide or homicide, varying levels of connection among the siblings, and more -- can affect what a surviving sibling needs to cope.

Together with BP/USA I will help to build support tailored specifically to the needs of bereaved siblings, involving in-person connections through chapter meetings, programming at the national Gathering, and opportunities to interact using social media. I also plan to contribute sibling-specific pieces to the newsletter and to connect bereaved siblings with helpful resources. I can be reached by e-mail on the BP/USA website and blog regularly on coping with grief and crisis at www.lifewithoutjudgment.com. I look forward to serving you.
NOT EVEN IN OUR DREAMS...
www.facebook.com/mitchellsjourney

Last night Natalie and I went on a wooded walk. We wandered through the crunchy leaves and just began to talk.

The air was crisp and fragrant, rich with earth's deep tones. If only we could have a bottle to keep and call our own.

So there we shared some gentle words about life and other things. Then our souls went where words don't exist, nor can they … not even in our dreams.

It's strange to live in such a place, where peace and grief reside. The loneliness of longing forever at your side.

I saw my wife, two lives rolled into one. Arms filled with love and family, yet empty in search of our little son.

Yet something happened in the woods last night – something we didn’t quite see. We knew the season was changing, and suddenly we realized so were we.

Grief evolves. How could that be? I think I see it now, it isn't grief that changed, but me.

Yet there is still a deep, dark wood. A place that is felt, not seen. Where words of grief and anguish do not exist, not even in our dreams.

From past editor Richard Berman:

Nobel Prize winner (for literature), Albert Camus writes about people of a city that was shut off, allowing no one to enter or leave, when disease racked their town in, his novel, The Plague.

I think his description of the emotional trauma experienced by those cut off from their loved ones rings true for us…

“Thus, too, they came to know the incorrigible sorrow of all prisoners and exiles, which is to live in company with a memory that serves no purpose. Even the past, of which they thought incessantly, had a savor only of regret. For they would have wished to add to it all that they regretted having left undone, while they might yet have done it, with the man or woman whose return they now awaited; just as in all the activities, even the relatively happy ones, of their life as prisoners they kept vainly trying to include the absent one. And thus there was always something missing in their lives. Hostile to the past, impatient of the present, and cheated of the future, we were much like those whom men’s justice, or hatred, forces to live behind prison bars. Thus the only way of escaping from that intolerable leisure was to set the trains running again in one’s imagination and in filling the silence with the fancied tinkle of a doorbell, in practice obstinately mute.”

CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

The Nominating Committee is seeking applicants to fill two positions on the Board of Directors in 2016. You can help by identifying potential nominees from your chapter -- or from other chapters -- who you believe would be qualified and interested in running for election. Self-nominations are encouraged as well!

The future of BPUSA depends on the quality and dedication of people like you. There is much work to be done over the next few years and we need your help! Please consider joining us on the Board – your ideas and talents are most welcome and needed as we move forward.

The Board of Directors is composed of ten members, including our newly appointed Sibling Coordinator, Sarah Kravits, each serving three-year, staggered, terms. Under our bylaws a Member of the Board can serve for only two terms -- a total of six years.

In July 2016, Keith Swett, Board Member, will be completing a 3-year term and is eligible for re-election and Bill Lagemann, Board Member and Treasurer, will finish his fifth year of service (two appointed and 3 elected). Under our bylaws, Bill is not eligible for re-election. Any BPUSA member in good standing will be considered for nomination. The Board meets face-to-face twice a year; once during the fall and again at the time of the Annual Gathering. Other meetings are held by teleconference throughout the rest of the year.

If you have questions about what being a board member entails and how you might serve at the national level, please feel free to contact one of us on the Nominating Committee: Delain Johnson, bppresidentusa@gmail.com; Carolyn Jones, board3@bereavedparentsusa.org or Kathy Corrigan, secretary@bereavedparentsusa.org or Michael Rima board1@bereavedparentsusa.org.

Nomination forms can be found online on our national website at www.BereavedParentsUSA.org. We look forward to hearing from you!
REBOUND GRIEF
By Keith Swett, BPUSA Board member
and Matthew’s Dad

I have been a coach for 45 years and every year I learn more. One of the latest fears is a rebound concussion. Often the initial injury goes unnoticed but if the athlete is hurt again they can have profound problems. Bereaved Parents face this same situation except that our initial injury is already profound. Then repeated injuries lead to more and more damage.

What do I mean? I have been missing Matt for 13 years now but the grief does not get easier. I get better at dealing with grief but the pain remains. Now smaller injuries can have large effects. Having to put the cat down is difficult and the tears flow as though for a human family member. Christmas ornaments mix smiles and tears. Happy events recall past celebrations.

Right now I am stuck in the mud. Any movement forward or back requires energy that I do not have. Like the concussed athlete I stumble around in my own world out of step with my neighbors hardly aware that life is moving forward.

So what caused all this? I had some physical challenges added to my plate. I faced new problems at work. I was not meeting my own standards. Matt had another birthday. I have overcome each of these challenges in the past so that gives me an action plan.

The concussed athlete wants to return right away but needs to follow a rigorous plan before he can return. So time is part of my healing. Time will not replace work but the work takes time. There is no magic fix. I always attack the physical first. I increase my workouts, improve my diet, get more sleep. That is a good start. Work is just work. It is not life. At 65 I know when I walk out the door someone else will walk in. So I need to do my best and forget the rest. I need to learn how to say no. Sometimes sacrificing my needs for others is a joy, but always putting others first is deadly. Matt will always have a birthday and we will always celebrate. Matthew means gift from God. I need to celebrate the gift of Matt’s life.

None of this is easy or quick but what real choice do Bereaved Parents have? Our child’s life was a great gift. Gathering helps us appreciate that gift. Our loss is profound. Gathering gives us the tools to heal. Alone we are broken. Together we are able not only to survive but to thrive. Let’s sit together while we enjoy our children. Did I tell you the story about how Matt and I went fishing and forgot the bait? We remembered the Oreos and coke.

PULL EACH OTHER TO THE LIGHT
BY LEXI BEHRNDT

No one likes the darkness. The darkness adds no merit and no depth to the amount of love that we have. Grief doesn’t have to exist only in the darkness. Grief will last as long as love does, but grief can be felt in the light. Grief can coexist with joy. Grief can be a slow, lifelong mending. Grief doesn’t have to be always associated with anger and constant pain. Grief can sometimes feel more like a constant melody, sometimes loud, and sometimes, the soothing tune of love that follows you through your days.

There is something to be said about sitting together in the darkness, but if you ask me, I don’t want to stay there; I don’t like the darkness that much. I would rather pull each other to the light, hand-in-hand, even in the face of brokenness, even in the face of fear, even in the face of apathy and depression, because even when our hearts are laid waste, the light is where we belong, we sometimes just need a little help finding our way. That’s why we have each other.

We need to pull each other to the light.

This doesn’t mean that we act like the pain doesn’t exist. That’s called being numb. But in the light, like a flower opens in the sun’s warmth and nourishment, the light can make a broken heart come alive, shedding the frost, shedding the numb from the winter’s cold, and blossoming, even if it hurts sometimes, and even if it’s hard, it’s also beautiful.

Pull each other to the light.
On the day when
The weight deadens
On your shoulders
And you stumble,
May the clay dance
To balance you.
And when your eyes
Freeze behind
The grey window
And the ghost of loss
Gets into you,
May a flock of colours,
Indigo, red, green
And azure blue,
Come to awaken in you
A meadow of delight.
When the canvas frays
In the currach of thought
And a stain of ocean
Blackens beneath you,
May there come across the waters
A path of yellow moonlight
To bring you safely home.
May the nourishment of the earth be yours,
May the clarity of light be yours,
May the fluency of the ocean be yours,
May the protection of the ancestors be yours
And so may a slow
Wind work these words
Of love around you,
An invisible cloak
To mind your life.
~ John O'Donohue

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.