I found myself in a funk. Not really depressed, but not in good spirits either. I’ve been there before. This time the melancholy had no discernable source. No one cause that put me off my game. The week had its usual problems, but nothing remarkable; just the normal challenges of running a small business. After forty years I’ve learned to not let those issues bother me. Physically I was feeling ok. I managed to get in a racquetball game that week. I was eating and sleeping well. So why the blues?

In the early years after our son died these periods of depression were fairly common. On more than one occasion I looked up out of the pit of sadness only to realize I was in a pothole on grief’s highway. Over the years those potholes have diminished in number and size. Now it takes a fairly disturbing event to send me back into the valley of the shadow. That’s why this disquietude, with no identifiable cause, surprised me.

The weekend arrived with me still down. We had dinner plans with our best friends. I didn’t want to sit in a crowded, noisy restaurant (the one they picked had a 2-fer in the local paper so it was sure to be packed) and listen to them talk about their grandchildren. Don’t misunderstand. They have been wonderful friends for over thirty years and stayed by us through the nightmare when I’m sure we weren’t much fun to be around; but I just couldn’t force myself to be sociable. Not then. Not that night. And I still didn’t know why.

Instead I asked my wife if just the two of us could go to a nearby Chinese restaurant that we frequent. It has big half-round booths we can get lost in under subdued light and sports a relaxed ambiance. Also they have a superb wine list. It was exactly what I needed: quiet time, free from the stresses of life with the one person in the world I know I can always count on; lean on.

By meal’s end I was feeling better. Relaxed and contented. The wine, I’m sure, helped. Then came the fortune cookies. I don’t pretend to know the ways of providence, but I do believe there are reasons, sometimes, why things happen. I cracked the cookie and unfolded the paper: Love is the only medicine for a broken heart. I looked at my wife and smiled. Love is the only medicine for a broken heart. I knew it to be so.

Brad’s death almost eight years ago still has amazing power over my state of mind. Thankfully the periods of sadness now come infrequently. The love of those close to me has helped make those periods short and rare. As you travel your own and personal journey of grief let in the love and support of others. Believe that tomorrow will be a kinder day.

Richard A. Berman
Baltimore BP/USA

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**Halloween**

It is here, this day of merriment
And children’s pleasure.
Gremlins and goblins
And ghosties at the door
Of your house.
And the other children
Come to the door of your mind.
Faces out of the past,
Small ghosts with sweet, painted faces.
They do not shout.
Those children who no longer
March laughing
On cold Halloween night,
They stand at the door
Of your mind
And you will let them in,
So that you can give them
The small gifts of your Halloween—
A smile and a tear.

Sascha Wagner,
Wintersun
A JOURNEY TOGETHER

Just like any large family gathering, the planning for this weekend had been extensive. The Gathering committee had been meeting and working for months to create a friendly, welcoming event. When the Board of Directors came in on Tuesday, the hotel was quiet but that changed quickly. Empty spaces soon became hubs of activity; boutiques and bookstores and hospitality suites appeared; the buzz of activity swelled to a roar and suddenly bereaved parents were everywhere and the magic of The Gathering commenced.

Throughout the weekend we saw many once-a-year friends and reconnected with their personal journeys. New comers were quickly enfolded into the family and there were very few strangers at the dinner table Saturday evening. One Mom wore her college town t-shirt, signaling hello and her desire to meet parents from her area (there was someone there, from the same town!)

And then, just as rapidly it was Sunday morning, and we were reminiscing about speakers and the workshops and the music and the Candlelighting. There were about 200 of us, 2 dogs, and a few hotel workers who had morphed into our group, assembling for a group picture in the hotel atrium. We were rushing to catch planes and tying to copy contact numbers with promises to see each other next year.

As Shirley Ottman, a BP/USA founder and former president wrote, “One of the founding concepts of BP/USA is that of a family of bereaved parents, grandparents, and siblings coming together to offer support, help, encouragement, and hope to each other as we journey through our grief. We are a family, with many of our family members living in various areas of the country; yet once a year we gather to welcome newcomers and to reunite with those family members we see only once a year.”

This Gathering was over. It was time to go back into the real world, but we were different. We had been touched by a weekend with our bereaved family.

Donna Corrigan, Hinsdale, IL BP/USA

Fay Hardin from Songs from the Edge

The colors of life change as we go through grief. We begin black and white, then gray settles over us seeping into pores, surrounding us, smothering us for a long period of time, then slowly the colors change, we may not even be aware of their changing till one day we see a rainbow and know it was meant for us...

BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA

A Journey Together is the national newsletter published quarterly by Bereaved Parents of the USA.

You may subscribe or unsubscribe to this Newsletter by going to [www.bereavedparentssa.org](http://www.bereavedparentssa.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, location of Chapters, links to other organizations and information on that web site.

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2010-2011 BP/USA Board of Directors and Officers:

At the Annual Meeting of Members held July 10th in Little Rock, the results of the election were announced. Linda Fehrman from St. Louis MO and Diane Hunter-Copeland from Mahoning County-Youngstown OH were elected to join returning board members Dave Alexander from Anne Arundel County MD, Donna Corrigan from Hinsdale IL, Toni Holohan from Ft. Smith AR, Lee Ann Hutson from Montgomery County IN, and Jill Theriault from Saginaw MI. Linda and Diane replace Beverley Hurley and Beth Reynolds who completed their terms in July. The board elected its officers for 2010-2011: Dave is President, Donna is Vice President, Lee Ann is Secretary, and Jill is Treasurer. The names, addresses, phone numbers, and e-mails for all of the board members are listed on the web site. Please feel free to contact any member of the board for information about BP/USA or to offer suggestions for issues and programs you would like the board to consider.
Practical Advice

This column is dedicated to providing ideas to help you find your way through the grief.

From: Bill O’Hanlon
While we are hurting, it isn’t easy to envision in concrete and specific ways the achievements of a satisfying, happy life. Such vision, however, is imperative for making the new life possible. Write a letter from your future self (try 5, 10 or 20 years). Describe where you are, what you are doing, and what you have gone through to get there. Tell yourself the crucial things you realized or did to get there. Give yourself some sage and compassionate advice from the future.

From: Janice Harris Lord
A great fear is forgetting some things we don’t want to forget. Many parents find it helpful to write down a half-dozen or so wonderful memories. Get them out and read them often. [This is especially important for parents of children who died after a protracted period of substance abuse. The horrible memories from those terrible months or years need to be supplanted by the happier memories from better times. Ed.] You can save other memories too such as clothing and personal items. Use these, along with your writings, from time to time, to cherish the memory. Remind yourself of the good times when you find yourself walking in the valley of grief.

From: Janice Harris Lord
Use the ‘HAPPY 3’ memory rule: Pick out three of your favorite memories involving your child. If feelings of sadness pop up at inappropriate times, think about these three memories. They will push the sad thoughts away (at least for the moment) and bring a smile to your face. It won’t always work but it’s worth a try.

And the Oscar Goes To...

The Oscars...Oh, the Oscars... This award goes to the best actors and actresses of their time. These awards are broken down into different categories, such as drama, comedy, action, horror and so on. As these awards are given out, there are large screens, so everyone can watch the actors play their parts, to the best of their abilities. They also have tributes to the best actors who appear on stage and screen. While these actors go to collect their lifetime achievement awards for their fame and success, they usually get a standing ovation in honor of their great acting abilities. But I would like to take this one step further.

I know of a group of actors that would put the hall of famers back to square one, with lessons to learn. These people come in all kinds of races, sizes, and ages. They act with the best of the best; but, not only when the cameras are rolling. They have learned to deliver award-winning acts in all categories, seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day, until the final curtain falls. No matter what the role calls for, from drama to comedy, they are the tops. But, to my surprise, there are no Oscars, no recognition, and they ask for none. They are the only ones who know how good they are, and for the most part keep it a secret.

Near the end of 1994 I became part of this group. They have taught me, along with my family, how to act to the best of our abilities. We work on these roles, from the time we awake until we go to bed. Each day we learn a whole new different role. So, I tip my hat to these people who are silent, who taught me well, and I hope to do the same for the newcomers. So, here’s to you, my fellow actors on this journey, may we be together until we meet our children again. “The world is a stage, and life goes on.”

Marlene Boylan

Tears, like rain, fall out of our control.

The object of grieving is not to get over the loss or recover from the loss, but to get through the loss. Over the years you will look back and discover that this grief keeps teaching you new things about life. Your understanding of life will keep getting deeper.

Pat Schwiebert and Chuck Delkyen

His absence is an entity that walks beside me daily

There’s something inside me, not what my life’s about.

I’ve been letting my outside tide me over ‘til my time runs out.

Harry Chapin
On Thursday evening...
We enjoyed a concert by Alan Pederson. Diane Rima, Gathering Host, shared her story about her daughter Stacy DeAnn Rima-Cannon. The Rimas’ had been raising Stacy’s 2 sons; in the months after her death they discovered, miraculously, another grandchild who had been secretely given up for adoption. They have the joy of a granddaughter, named Savana, in South Carolina.

2 Full Days of Workshops...
At each Gathering, it is amazing to find presenters with new topics, outside the customary grief/mourning track we have each year.
“My Grief Started the Day I Got the News: Children with Disability and Long Term Illness;” “Body and Soul Fitness;” “Changing Hats and Faces (women only);” “When Sex and Grief Dance: America’s Last Taboo;” “Do I Really Want to Tell People How my Child Died?” and a book discussion were among the innovative topics.

Speakers...
Becky Russell welcomed us with her positive attitude and energy; she encouraged us to each find our own rock of hope.
Harold Ivan Smith focused on presidential families as bereaved parents and how they coped with their losses.
Hiram Johnson shared his guilt and recovery after being the driver in a fatal car accident
Amelia and Craig Hammaker spoke together about the death of their child from pediatric cancer and the birth of another child on the day of the funeral. Although they both lost Breanna, their own grief for their child is unique.
Kay Bevington as the founder of Alive Alone, always touches bereaved parents with her kindness. Her creative use of containers and suitcases created a visual image of the baggage we carry on our journey.
Keith Swett always has such folksy wisdom. After the death of his son Matthew, he had a grueling, 7 hour drive back home. His focus for the long journey was Matt, as a pre schooler, singing and dancing to “Peanut, Peanut Butter and Jelly!” Keith’s dancing demonstration, on stage, sent us home with a smile!

A unique feature in the Reflection Room was dissolvable paper. Painful thoughts and memories could be written down and dropped into the fountain. You could watch them disappear. The Butterfly Boutique had many unique items; quite a few of them were handmade. The Bookstore featured books by several of the presenters.
Of course, the fellowship at the meals is always terrific. It seems that is where you really get to connect with people. One of the wait staff was also a bereaved parent — Bobby was one of us, and he hopes to join us next year in DC.
We also learned the “HAWG CALL” and practiced it at a few meals! I think the hotel staff was amazed that bereaved parents could laugh!

Like every Gathering, it was unique, wonderful, and overwhelming The 2011 Gathering in DC will be just as good; I certainly hope to be there!
Donna Corrigan
Hinsdale IL, BP/USA

2010 Roy and Juanita Peterson Award:
The Roy and Juanita Peterson Award was given this year to Beverley Hurley. This award is our token of appreciation for the many roles Beverley has played and her many contributions to BP/USA both at the local and national levels. Beverley has served as chapter leader, facilitator, treasurer, and newsletter editor for the Tampa Bay chapter. She has helped with outreach in the Tampa Bay area to educate people about bereaved parents and how they can help their family and friends. At the national level she served as treasurer for the 2000 national gathering held in Tampa. She served on the national board of directors for six years and was President of the Board for two of those years. She has greatly expanded the scope and content of the annual chapter leadership training provided annually at our gatherings. BP/USA has truly benefited greatly from Beverley’s energy, ideas, and contributions over the years.

The melody that the loved one played upon the piano of your life will never be played quite that way again, but we must not close the keyboard and allow the instrument to gather dust. We must seek out other artists of the spirit, new friends who will help us find the road to life again, who will walk that road with us.

Rabbi Joshua Loth Liebman, Peace of Mind
Cemetery Visits

Are you one of those people who have a need to go to the cemetery often? The non-bereaved frown on that as a rule. Many people feel there is something morbid about those visits; that you’re obsessing. Unless you know the pain of losing someone you love better than yourself, you can’t understand that need.

Some people need to visit every day; others go now and then; and still others never go back once the funeral is over. There are no rules. If it makes people uncomfortable when you make your cemetery visits, go alone. Don’t feel you need to get anybody’s permission or approval. Call a friend who won’t judge you by the number of miles you travel to and fro.

It is important to understand that how often you go to the cemetery has absolutely nothing to do with the length and depth or your expression of your grief. Do what comforts you, not what pleases others. Your needs should and must come first, especially right now. You won’t always require visits this often, and when that happens, don’t feel guilty. It means you are progressing. For right now, do what makes you feel better.

Mary Cleckley, Atlanta

I do not ask that you forget your dear departed. I want you to remember. I only ask that you remember more than the moment of death, more than the funeral, more than the house of mourning. Remember life! Remember the whole, not the final page.

Rabbi Maurice Davis, Baltimore

Grave Words

It’s funny how the things I know don’t always intersect with the questions I have about life. I know ritual is important to us as human beings; it’s the basis for holidays and religious rites. It gives us comfort, it’s healthy, it’s normal.

I was asked recently if it was okay for parents to build shrines and immediately replied, “yes!”

In that reply, came an answer to an issue I’ve had for nearly a year. Ross’s things are packed in my basement since he died. He shared a room with his brother, and it became necessary for my surviving child’s mental health that these things be packed away.

I have not looked through them since that first week after his death. I have, however, designed a chest for his things. My dad built it. It’s beautiful, stained, varnished and shoved in a closet where I couldn’t see it.

I pulled it out a few weeks ago and put it crosswise in my hallway where I would be forced to (1) trip or (2) do something with it. I tripped a lot.

During this conversation on shrines and ritual, I realized what I needed to do. There needs to be a special Box-Filling day. I didn’t need to consult the calendar for a date — there is one fast approaching — one of “those days” where the pain of losing him is more intense, a Ross-Holiday, if you will.

So on that day, I will light candles in his favorite color, play his favorite music, and bring his things up from the basement to be placed in a sacred spot. It will be a hard, but necessary day.

Peg Rousar-Thompson, Kenosha, Wisconsin

From the Editor

As the new Editor of A Journey Together I know I have big shoes to fill. Betty Ewart did a masterful job producing this newsletter for many years. I will need your help to make our newsletter as good as possible. Please feel free to send me letters, articles, poems and especially your own stories. Keep them short. Together we will carry on Betty’s work.

Richard A. Berman
newsletters@bereavedparentsusa.org
In Memoriam

Two of our BP/USA “giants” died in the last year, Betty Ewart and Shirley Ottman.

Betty Ewart died November 17, 2009, after being in failing health the last couple of years. Betty was a tireless worker for bereaved parents and BP/USA. For many years Betty was the leader of our BP/USA Greenbrier Valley Chapter in West Virginia. She and Jack were among the founders who helped create BP/USA 15 years ago. Betty took on the task of creating our national newsletter, A Journey Together, and she served as its editor until the time of her death. She was first elected to the national board of directors in 1998, was elected as its vice president in 1999 and then as its president in 2000, 2001, 2002, and 2003. Betty and Jack were the co-chairs with the Southern Illinois Chapter of the 2008 Gathering in St. Louis.

These accomplishments speak to Betty’s dedication to helping others. But they don’t touch on what we will so remember about her — her quick smile; her warmth and compassion; her touch; her unfailing optimism; her encouragement and support of parents and families grieving the death of a child.

Shirley Ottman died on April 9, 2010, after battling gall bladder cancer for a year. Most of us first met Shirley through our work with Bereaved Parents of the USA. Shirley co-founded the North Texas Chapter. She chaired our national chapter in Dallas in 2001. She served on the TCF Board of Directors, and was one of the leaders of the effort that attempted to bring about some changes in that group. 15 years ago Shirley was active in the creation and founding of BP/USA. She served on the national board of directors 1995-1996, 1998-2000, and 2008. She was the vice president of the board in 1998, and was president in 1999 and 2008. She served as BP/USA historian since 2005. Shirley’s dedication and love for BP/USA never flagged.

Shirley touched many lives throughout the years since starting the North Texas Chapter. She continues to touch bereaved parents through her book of essays and poetry, A Slender Thread, published in 2000. Her kindness and generous spirit continue to guide many of us as we carry on her work for bereaved parents.

Dancing in the Rain

by Julie Short

The word dance seems to be etched into my mind. Recently, a friend shared a quote she had come across: “Life isn’t about waiting for the storm to pass... It’s about learning to dance in the rain.”

Wow — what awesome words! The image of a storm is a good analogy in understanding our grief. Storms come from nowhere, like a tornado, seemingly destroying everything in their path and leaving our lives in complete and utter shambles. The darkness and dreariness stay while lightning continues to flash, stabbing our hearts with pain. Thunder clammers constantly, reminding us that our children are gone. We can walk in fog for what seems like years as the sleet and frigid cold freeze us in our tracks. The wind howls, imitating our screams and wailing. The rain seems to be endless.

Others, who haven’t lost their children, who are living in sunshine, cry out to us, “Come in out of the rain.” They don’t understand that often we’re just not able to move. The storm has become our world, for however long we need or choose to live there. My own experience of grief tells me that our lives will always be stormier than they were before the hurricanes came and took what was most precious to us. But, we do have a choice. We can stay hunkered down under the false protection of denial. We can lock ourselves up in a protective shell and never come out. Or, we can learn to dance in the rain. However, each bereaved parent must decide what feels best to them.

I find myself thinking, “It’s hard to crawl, walk or breathe without her and she wants me to dance? She must have forgotten all those times I tried and she said, ‘Mom, you can’t dance!’ Then I realize that she’s not referring to my ability when I hear ‘Dance Mom, dance. Dance in the rain.’ Dance because you can’t change what has already been done. You have the choice to sit it out or dance. Listen for the music, keep your eyes wide open, go forward, follow the music and dance. Follow me. I am not behind you. I am in front of you. I’m free and I am dancing.” She taught me to hear the music and her song continues on. Without it, I couldn’t dance.

I believe if we allow our children to lead us to dance in the rain that they will eventually dance us out of the storms of pain and into the sunshine of peace.

From: I Will Not Say Goodbye

by Danny Gokey

I don't want to feel better
I don't want to not remember
I will always see your face
In the shadows of this haunted place
I will laugh, I will cry
Shake my fist at the sky
But I will not say goodbye

They keep saying time will heal
But the pain just gets more real
The sun comes up each day
Finds me waiting, fading, hating, praying
If I can keep on holding on
Maybe I can keep my heart from knowing that you're gone
“Monumental Journey of the Heart”
2011 National Gathering

“Monumental Journey of the Heart” is the theme for the 2011 BP/USA National Gathering to be held July 29 – 31, 2011 in Washington DC.

The Gathering Committee is working on making the 2011 Gathering a very healing event with outstanding speakers and workshops covering subjects that will appeal to all bereaved parents, siblings and grandparents. Anyone interested in presenting a workshop, please contact Jodi Norman at bpusa.nova@yahoo.com to receive an application.

The Gathering will kick off on Thursday night, July 28th with dinner and an inspirational program. Arrive early . . . you don’t want to miss this awesome event!

The Gathering will be held at the Reston Sheraton Hotel in Reston, VA, near Dulles International Airport. The Hotel has a free shuttle to/from the airport and to the surrounding areas, shopping and restaurants. The room rate is a deeply discounted, $99 per night plus taxes. The hotel will honor this bargain price for three days before and three days after the Gathering . . . so come early and stay late! We are hoping that you will make DC your family vacation destination in conjunction with the Gathering and take full advantage of all the wonderful sites of our Nation’s Capital before and after the Gathering. The committee is also planning an extensive program for the siblings so make this a family event.

The Gathering Committee welcomes any ideas or suggestions that would improve this monumental event. Any chapter, family or individual that would like to help or contribute, please contact Jodi Norman at the below address or phone number. Donations of Raffle items, Table Favors, items to sell in the Butterfly Boutique (items need to be butterfly, angel or bereavement related) are most welcome and greatly appreciated. Monetary donations can be sent to BP/USA Northern Virginia Chapter, P.O. Box 7675, Woodbridge, VA 22195, clearly marked that it is a donation for the Gathering.

For more information, contact, Jodi Norman, Gathering Chairman, at 703-910-6277 or e-mail: bpusa.nova@yahoo.com Information will also be available on the BP/USA website: www.bereavedparentsyusa.org

BOOK REVIEWS

Our Children, Our Hearts: Journeys of Child Loss and Remembrance
Emily Laitmon, LCSW with Terry Toll
The Bereavement Center Of Westchester, 2008

About two dozen personal stories are told in the parents’ own words. Most of these relate the anguish and pain that follows the death of a child. The overriding question voiced throughout these essays is Why? None of these folks have answers, but there is something to be learned from how each of them comes to the understanding that the question will never be answered. Many discuss how their relationships with God, family and friends have changed. Poignant poems interspace each story. This book will be useful to the newly bereaved, especially those who are unable to attend support group meetings.

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Too Soon Old, Too Late Smart: Thirty True Things You Need to Know Now
Gordon Livingston, M.D.
Marlowe and Company, 2004

As a Vietnam War surgeon, a practicing psychiatrist and twice bereaved parent, Dr. Gordon Livingston approaches life with candor and perspective. His earlier book, Only Spring, deals with his personal tragedies. In Too Soon Old, Too Late Smart, he delivers thirty essays on various aspects of life. He shares with the reader what life has taught him. Subjects such as: ‘We are what we do,’ ‘Happiness is the ultimate risk,’ ‘Only bad things happen quickly,’ and ‘Love is never lost, not even in death’ are dealt with. Each essay ends with a message of understanding, or with reasonable advice. His writing is short, affecting and touching. Although not a grief book, I found it very helpful and I think you will too, especially if you are over fifty and have been on this journey for more than two years.

Did you know they were bereaved parents?

Charles Darwin was conflicted. He was still working on his theories of evolution and found great difficulty meshing them with his understanding of God’s role in the absence of man. While wrestling with this dilemma his 10 year old daughter, Annie, died. Like many bereaved parents he was unable to accept that a loving God would allow such a tragedy. He began to believe that God does not maintain a ‘hands on’ control of our day to day lives. “It has always appeared to me,” he wrote, “more satisfactory to look at the immense amount of pain and suffering in this world as the inevitable result of the natural sequence of events, i.e., general laws, rather than from the direct intervention of God.”

A Century later Rabbi Harold Kushner, in When Bad Things Happen To Good People, expresses the same understanding: God does not decide who will win tomorrow’s lottery or who will survive next week’s hurricane. A healthy belief in God, both Darwin and Kushner understood, teaches us to be good to each other.

Life, of course, had to go on. Darwin and his wife Emma, raised 5 children in addition to Annie. He went on to write Origin of the Species and The Descent of Man and continued to work until his death. How much did his child’s death affect his work? We will never know for sure. It is clear, however, that as both a scientist and a man he was profoundly changed.
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.