BE GOOD TO YOURSELF THIS SUMMER

Adapted from
THE HOPE LINE
July/August 1996 Newsletter for the Bereaved, Inc., Syracuse, NY

Whether you are grieving or not, it is wise to get away and “recreate” yourself. When you are grieving, it is even more important to relax and take time to be good to yourself. Grief work takes an amazing amount of physical, emotional and spiritual energy. The following are some random thoughts which we hope you will find helpful.

• Get outside as often as possible, even if only into the backyard. The warmth of the sun, soft breezes against your skin, the scent of grass and flowers and the chirping of birds all fill your senses and help to make you feel better and more alive.

• Read a good book. Light reading helps to take your mind off grief.

• Exercise. Exercise helps to work off anger, frustration and depression. Search out local parks and nature trails – even walk around your own block. Brisk walking, bike riding and swimming are all great ways to reduce tension. Be sure to observe safety rules and, if you can, invite a friend, family members or another grieving person to join you.

• Try to visit places where there is water. Watching water and hearing it lap against the shore is soothing. As the waves recede, try to envision your grief receding; as the waves return, think of them as bringing peace and comfort.

• Spend some time alone. Possibly go for a drive and observe pleasant surroundings – or roll up the windows and yell and scream and vent your anger. Or go somewhere comfortable where you can just sit and reflect.

• Plan a vacation that will be a peaceful, restful time. Don’t try to do too much. Try to take a respite from your grief work, knowing that, undoubtedly, there will be more grief work waiting for you when you return home. Sometimes it’s easier if we can put the grief work aside for a bit and, when we come back to it, we see it in a different light.

• Attend a support group meeting. Groups keep regular schedules all summer. The newly bereaved will gain helpful ideas on coping. For those who have been bereaved a longer time and who have not attended in awhile, go back to visit your support group and lend a hand to the newly bereaved.

Above all, hold on to HOPE!

REAL LIFE, REAL PAIN, REAL HOPE
THE GATHERING

It’s not too late to decide to come to the Gathering in Dallas on July 26-29. There are workshops planned that will be helpful to bereaved parents no matter when your child died or from what causes. There are speeches planned by other bereaved parents, a bookstore where you will find helpful books, a boutique with special gifts, and special sharing sessions. If you are interested, check your last newsletter or look at our web site (www.bereavedparentsusa.org), or contact Shirley Ottman at 940-387-1074 or by e-mail at ro0002@unt.edu for information. The deadline for room reservations at our special rate will have passed by the time you receive this newsletter but contact Shirley to see what arrangements can be made.
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Our web site is: http://www.bereavedparentsusa.org

NEW BOOKS

We were sent three more books this past quarter for review.

“A MOUNTAIN TOO FAR, A Father’s Search for Meaning in the Climbing Death of His Son” is by Karl H. Purnell and is his story of his attempt to understand why his son, who died in a fall, loved climbing so much. One of his comments is, “There are so many people lost when a son dies.” He finally decides that, “If you really loved the person who is now gone, don’t confuse yourself by trying to find out why it happened or who should be blamed.” He came to feel that his son is not lost and that death is only another state in the endless cycle of life and says, “When you learn that, you will understand the meaning of what happened.” The book is published by New Horizon Press in Far Hills, New Jersey.

“THE SACRED WOUND, Healing From the Death of a Child” is by Lois Gold. Her daughter died in an airplane crash at 16 years of age. Lois is a therapist and searched through many cultures for meaning to the death. None of her therapy study or work had prepared her for her reactions or the grief she felt. She tells us that the book was a means of healing for her. This book is published by Fire Word Publishing, Inc., Portland, Oregon.

“THIS BOOK IS FOR ALL KIDS, BUT ESPECIALLY MY SISTER LIBBY. LIBBY DIED” is a book by Jack Simon, age 5 as told to his mom. It is about his attempt to understand why his sister, Lib, died. It is a short book with great illustrations and would be helpful to any age person. The book and greeting cards with some of the illustrations are available from GSD&M Idea University Press in Austin Texas.
LOOKING FOR MATTHEW

(For Matthew David, 3/24/00 to 4/7/00)

Donna Miles
BP/USA Chapter, Anne Arundel County, MD

Where were you, little one, when the earth was bursting with new life? When the colors and fragrances were fresh and new? When I longed to take you outside and let the warm breeze kiss your cheek?

Where were you little one, when the days grew long and hot? When we should have lain under the tree and looked up in wonder at the swaying leaves? When I hoped to dip your toes in this chilly water and hear you squeal?

Where were you, little one, when the leaves turned to gold and the wind could bring color to your cheeks? When I would have tickled your nose with a leaf and watched your chubby fingers grab it?

Where were you, little one, when the days grew short and the air turned cold? When the first white flakes began to fall and I could let you touch them and laugh with delight?

Where were you, little one, when my arms were empty and aching for you?

You were where you have always been, and will always be, in my heart.

Love,

Mommy

THE TIME WE LIVE IN

By a Columbine High School Student, Littleton, CO

“The paradox of our time in history is that we have taller buildings, but shorter tempers; wider freeways but narrower viewpoints; we spend more time, but have less; we buy more but enjoy it less. We have bigger houses and smaller families; more conveniences, but less time; we have more degrees, but less sense; more knowledge, but less judgment; more experts, but more problems; more medicine, but less wellness. We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values. We talk too much, love too seldom, and hate too often.

We’ve learned how to make a living, but not a life; we’ve added years to life, not life to years. We’ve been all the way to the moon and back, but have trouble crossing the street to meet the neighbor. We’ve conquered outer space, but not inner space; we’ve cleaned up the air, but polluted the soul; we’ve split the atom, but not our prejudice. We have higher incomes, but lower morals; we’ve become long on quantity, but short on quality. These are the times of world peace, but domestic warfare; more leisure, but less fun; more kinds of food, but less nutrition. These are the days of two incomes, but more divorce; of fancier houses, but broken homes. It is a time when there is much in the show window and nothing in the stockroom; a time when technology can bring this letter to you, and a time when you can choose either to make a difference... or just hit delete.”
UPCOMING EVENTS

July 6-8, 2001: National Conference of TCF in Arlington, VA; Contact 630-990-0010.

July 26-29 2001: BP/USA Gathering in Dallas, Texas. Information and registration blanks are available on the web: www.bereavedparentsusa.org or by contacting Shirley Ottman, Denton, TX at 940-387-1074 or e-mail at ro0002@unt.edu. Please note a clarification of the room rate: the $52 is for the room (not per person) with up to four people allowed.

Please specify whether you want 2 double beds or a king size bed and we will do our best to accommodate you.

August 30-Sept. 2, 2001: The In Loving Memory Conference: “Illuminating Grief’s Darkness” will be held at the Holiday Inn Hotel & Suites, Alexandria, VA. There are many excellent speakers and workshop leaders. Although the conference is advertised for “bereaved parents with no surviving children,” anyone could find help there. For information contact In Loving Memory, PO Box 3527, Reston, Virginia 20195. You will also find information and a registration form at www.InLovingMemoryOnLine.org

WHEN IS IT OVER?

Have you noticed how often the length of time one will grieve is becoming a topic of discussion in the media lately? People are beginning to get the picture as so many deaths get more media coverage then they used to.

First of all, we read about the death of Adam Petty. After a year his father, Kyle, says that things like the smell of broccoli or a pile of clothes in the middle of a room can knock him to his knees, “bringing on a fresh wave of grief.” He also says, “You want to hurt because you feel like, if it hurts, he is still close by.”

Then on Memorial Day, in Cincinnati, Ohio, the newspaper carried a front page story of a father who takes his children most Sat. mornings to a florist to buy flowers and then to their mother’s grave. Their mother died after childbirth in 1994. He says that they know this is the place to honor their mother and he never wants them to forget her. The outreach coordinator at Fernside Center in Norwood, Ohio says, of this father, “This is the ritual that he’s adapted for his family and it works for them. I don’t think you can pull out the grief rule book and say grieving should only last a certain amount of time.”

At the Oklahoma City Memorial, we still see loved ones remembering their dear ones and saying they will never forget.

TV on D-Day this year showed memorials in France and a dedication in Virginia of a National Memorial. We saw veterans and families from the Second World War who were, over 50 years later, remembering and shedding a tear for lost friends and loved ones.

So, it seems that whether it is one year, 5 years, 7 years or 50 years, it is never “over” and we never forget. The next time someone asks you if you aren’t over it yet or if you are still grieving, use examples such as these to let them know that you are just like everyone else, it would seem. Many of them will not even ask any more since they have been made aware of all this by the papers, TV, etc.

THE BROWN STAR STORY

Kim Steffgan from “When Hello Means Goodbye: A Guide For Parents Whose Child Dies Before Birth, At Birth, or Shortly After Birth”

Not long ago, astronauts found in the heavens gaseous celestial bodies - clouds of cosmic dust - which they think have finally answered the mystery of what exists between the small things in the universe, like planets, and the bigger things, like the sun. They call this cosmic dust “brown dwarfs” or “prestars,” because, although the brown dwarfs have all the same elements to become a star, for some reason they never did.

All stars go on to live full lives, from their hot, bright white dwarf stage to their aged, cooler and dimmer red giant stage. But “brown stars” only go so far. Instead of being born to live a normal star’s life, they remain cool and dim, hiding in the heavens, sprinkled in clusters among the other stars, 150 light years from Earth.

But, like our babies, their role in the universe is very important. In fact, scientists believe they serve as a link between the small things and the big things, holding the universe together; a midpoint between the beginning and the ending of our universal story.

As we grieve our babies who died before reaching the stardom of their earthly lives, perhaps we can find comfort in the possibility that they were designated for this very special, universal role. Energized by our love, they are guardians of our memories of what was and dreams of what some day may be.

As we look to the heavens, seeking answers, we send messages of love to our “brown star” babies.
On Monday, September 3, many of us will enjoy a day off work, usually in the company of friends and family, cooking burgers on the grill. It is Labor Day—a day to honor all working people. As parents, our “labor” begins at the birth of our child, an experience you are not likely to forget. But the pain has a wonderful purpose and so we don’t mind too much. Some of us labor in vain to conceive but are blessed with a child through adoption. As our children grow, we labor constantly—giving them the guidance, nourishment and emotional support they need to develop into caring and concerned adults.

But, along the way, our labor increases one hundred-fold. Now we labor in our grief and oh how we labor! Such exertion we have never known before in our lives. The things that came so easily before the death of our children are now so difficult—like reading the newspaper, making dinner, conversing in social groups—it is all just too much effort with too few rewards. And it can stay that way for a long time. Most of your energy is going into absorbing the impact of your child’s death on your life.

Fortunately, most of us reach the point of a new kind of labor. We find new fulfillment in our family, a special cause, work that is important to us, and, many times, in helping other people. We are growing and making something good come of the rest of our lives. It is the choice that we finally feel free to make. So, as you labor, let me assure you that it will become easier and, when you are ready, it will become something that you do for yourself and for your child—a true labor of love!
The price of the brochures is $10.00 for 50. This includes postage and handling. You may order an assortment of titles at the same price. For information, contact president@bereavedparentsusa.org.

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AT FIRST
By Sascha
From WINTERSUN

At first
my very name was grief.
My eyes saw only grief,
my thoughts were grief.
And everything I touched
was turned to grief.

But now
I own the light of memories.
My eyes can see you,
and my thoughts can know you
for what you really are;
more than a young life lost,
more than a radiance
gone into night.

Today you have become
a gift beyond my grief,
a treasure to my world –
though you have left
my world and me behind.

FORGIVE ME, MOMMY
By Thomas Herbert, Jr.

Forgive me, Mommy,
for breaking your heart
when all you were trying to do
was help me to a new start.

Forgive me, Mommy,
for all the pain I caused you
and the family, I have to claim;
Mommy, forgive me
for hurting you so.
I love you, Mommy.
Don't ever let me go.

Forgive me, Mommy,
I'll do right,
I promise this the rest of my life.
Please Mommy, I love you so.
FORGIVE ME MOMMY,
DON'T LET ME GO.

Love, your son, Tommy
July 31, 1998

Tommy’s mother, Barbara, sent this poem to us. Her son was killed “by a train that didn’t stop as he was lying on the tracks.” He was 24 years old and died on Nov. 30, 1998. He had written this to her from a half-way house and sent it to her with a red rose. She says she knows, as we all do, that we never forget our children. She is proud of this poem and wants to share it with other families.

I've changed forever,
And so have you.
We're not the same.

Darcie Simms
FOOTSTEPS THROUGH
THE VALLEY