



MID HUDSON NEW YORK CHAPTER

Bereaved Parents of the USA



Newsletter

together we remember... together we heal...

Kathy Corrigan Chapter Leader

www.mhbpusa.com



JULY/AUGUST 2017



Please join us for our next meetings

Thursday, July 5th -- Topic: **Introduction to Meditation**

Thursday, August 2nd -- Topic: **Open Sharing**

7:00 at The Children's Home of Poughkeepsie, 10 Children's Way, Poughkeepsie, NY

Call Kathy (845) 462-2825 for information

A WARM WELCOME TO NEWCOMERS

We understand how difficult it is to attend your first meeting. Feelings can be overwhelming; we have all experienced them and know how important it is to take that first step. Our stories may be different but we are alike in that we all hurt deeply. We cannot take your pain away but we can offer friendship and support. Bring a friend or relative to lean on if you wish.

THE NEW STAGES OF GRIEF: 5 TASKS, NO TIMELINE

What bereaved survivors wish they'd known about the grieving process.

By Paula Spencer Scott (Editor's Note: General bereavement, long but worth the read)

Bereaved people often brace for the so-called *stages of grief*, only to discover their own grieving process unfolds differently. The stages of grief -- popularized from earlier theories put forth by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross in her 1969 book *On Death and Dying*, and later modified by others -- initially described responses to terminal illness: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance. While some find those responses relevant to coping with death, psychologists increasingly believe that the idea of "stages" oversimplifies a complex experience. And grieving survivors seem to agree.

"When we're confronted with emotional chaos, we yearn for clarity, and the Kubler-Ross stages of grief serve as a kind of road map," says Robert Neimeyer, a professor of psychology at the University of Memphis who studies grief. "But it's more accurate to think about *phases of adaptation* rather than stages of grief. And they overlap rather than fall in sequence."

No two people mourn the same way. The grieving process is shaped by one's relationship to the deceased and the nature of the death, Neimeyer says. For example, "non-normative losses" -- sudden or untimely deaths (accidents, homicides, deaths in youth or life's prime) -- tend to trigger more intense anger and disbelief, and longer depression.

What all survivors share: Death presents challenges, from processing the loss and coping with grief symptoms through reformulating a relationship to the late loved one -- tasks that can take months and years to work through.

Grief Task #1: Acknowledging the Reality of Loss

The finality of death is always a shock, even after a known terminal illness. After helping her 62-year-old husband battle a brain tumor for four years, Maureen McFadden thought she'd girded herself for his eventual passing. "A nun warned me that for all the pain I'd already gone through, I would not be prepared for what grief is. She was



right," says the Brooklyn, New York, widow. "Even though I understood the outcome when he was first diagnosed, I had no idea that I was still hoping. When someone dies, you're just not prepared for that, because humans don't know how to live without hope."

It wasn't until after the busy period of nursing, funeral planning, and the memorial services that the truth struck -- "as if I'd been shot," McFadden says. Later, one of her husband's physicians told her that people who are constantly at a dying loved one's side often have the hardest initial response. "He said they seem to hold an unarticulated belief that just by virtue of their presence and determination, they will keep the person alive," she says. "The eventual death seems like a terrible failure."

Accepting that death is real (and not your fault) isn't the same as being OK with it. It merely means absorbing the truth of what has happened. This can be as difficult and painful as smacking through the first high breakers at the ocean's shore. For some people, acknowledgment happens quickly; others remain in disbelief for months or years (or experience disbelief in periodic bursts).

What helps:

Experiencing the rituals of death. Lise Funderberg and her sisters allowed someone else to organize a quick memorial service because "we were so out of it, floating in Jell-O." Looking back, she wishes they had done it themselves. "We didn't even put anything in the papers. I wish we had known how a ritual of closure is really important for everyone in the community of the deceased, everyone who loved him," says the author of *Pig Candy: Taking My Father South, Taking My Father Home*. "It's not like we would be doing another one."

Knowing there are no shortcuts through grief. "Grief can begin even before death, during caregiving. But grief doesn't end until we do," says Sherry E. Showalter, a social worker in Tarpon Springs, Florida, who's the author of *Healing Heartaches: Stories of Loss and Life*.

Practicing your faith traditions. Some research shows that survivors with a spiritual life tend to absorb grief more quickly, possibly because -- psychologists believe -- people who eventually find meaning in loss are generally better able to cope with it.

Grief task #2: Weathering the stress of separation

Mourning brings many physical and emotional hallmarks: crying, being unable to cry, sleeplessness, not eating, numbness, feeling forlorn, withdrawing socially, and so on. The exact mix is different for everyone.

Anger is a common response, especially to a violent or untimely death. "My anger was so primal and intense, that this good person, my dad, had to die. It was illogical. I was mad at the world. I even thought, 'Why couldn't it have been my mom?' who was already sick and not a contributing member of society," says Harriet, a San Francisco producer whose father died at 69 after a cancer diagnosis.

Intense emotions can be a way to "hang on" to the deceased person, bereavement counselors say. It's a tangible connection to the person who died. "It feels like power, like life," one widow says of her white-hot anger. Letting go of the emotion, or learning to live with it, can feel like letting go of the person who died. Naturally, there can be a built-in reluctance to do that.

Another confusing emotion: Relief. "I felt horribly guilty that I was so relieved when my mom died," says the daughter of an alcoholic. Caregivers, for example, often feel surprise (and, in turn, guilt) that they feel a lifting of a physical and/or emotional burden when caregiving ends. This is a natural response that's separate from the sadness of losing the person. It's entirely possible, and normal, to feel two such different emotions at the same time.

What helps:

Letting yourself experience turbulent emotions rather than shutting them down. "Wallowing is good," says Cherie Spino, a mom of four in Toledo, Ohio, whose mother was killed at age 69 by a drunk driver. "You have to go through it, dwell on the person and your sadness, cry."

Redirecting anger. Within a few years of her dad's death, Harriet, the producer, "used my rage to fuel my passion" for a new project about cancer.

Asking what the deceased person would suggest. Maureen McFadden, whose husband died of a brain tumor, says she partly transitioned out of anger when the thought struck her, "What would Jim want from me?"

Reading about others' experiences. Literature about grief can point out common threads. Survivors often point to Joan Didion's *The Year of Magical Thinking* and *A Grief Observed*, by C.S. Lewis.

Seeking bereavement support. Professionally led support groups or individual counseling provide skilled guidance as you navigate confusing or painful emotions. The goal isn't to make the feelings go away but to help you embrace their purpose. Some people are ready immediately for this kind of help while some come to it long after the loss, and others do fine on their own.

Grief Task #3: Adjusting to Everyday Life After a Loss

After the funeral and burial, mundane life patterns such as shopping and working must eventually resume, now in altered form. "Everyday life" often leaves survivors experiencing long-term reactions on top of the more familiar emotional and physical manifestations of grief.

Most common: yearning (intense longing for the person who has died), stress, and depression. These can prevail whether the relationship was happy or turbulent.

"Whatever unresolved issues you have, they get magnified and are elusive at the same time; you feel alone in the world," says Ellie, whose parents and sister all died within five years. "I felt so isolated in my grief."

What helps:

Not rushing yourself. "Being without my parents knocked me down and kept me down for a long time; it was as if something had been severed in me," says Ellie. "Time and new experiences helped, but it was mostly a matter of putting one foot in front of the other."

Ignoring the "grief police." Don't let others rush your adjustment. Turn a deaf ear to the well-meaning comments people make that miss the mark -- including "It's time to move on."

Getting help as needed with practical tasks. Handling finances, cooking, yard work, and so on can swamp a bereaved person, especially if they're unfamiliar duties. This just adds to stress and prolongs pain.

Inching toward new ways of doing things. One woman who had a standing Saturday morning long phone call with her late mother felt bereft at that hour each week. "I switched my walking time to then and called my sister while I walked, which shook up my routine and dulled the pain."

Not expecting you can medicate the pain away. Antidepressants have a place in helping someone who has a chemical imbalance causing depression. But antidepressants can also impede the grieving process, and they can't remove the yearning that's associated with depression. The goal should be to think about the deceased with less pain, over time, and to derive a measure of comfort from such thoughts.

Grief task #4: Revising your relationship to the deceased

Your relationship to the person who died doesn't end with his or her death; it changes. "The goal of grieving is not to let go but to find a way to hold on with less pain," Neimeyer says.

Simon Ruben of Israel's University of Haifa describes the grieving process as being "two-tracked," with two processes happening simultaneously. On one track, we cope with the visible symptoms and emotions (anger, depression, sleeplessness, and so on). On the other track, less obvious but equally important, we're working to reframe our relationship to the loved one who has died.

Nobody forgets a loved one. The question is, how do we hold him or her in our memory, our rituals, and our conversation in a way that's manageable, possibly even comforting, rather than painful?

What helps:

Reminiscing aloud. "Loss is so taboo in American culture. You're supposed to have a funeral and move on," says Jennifer Amandari of Los Angeles, who lost her mother when she was 16 and then lost an infant daughter six years ago. "But not talking about the person stunts your ability to heal and work the loss into your life."

Having your grief witnessed. When psychologist Robert Neimeyer's teenage son got choked up at Thanksgiving on realizing he was seated in his late grandmother's chair, the table conversation came to a halt. Rather than rushing

the awkward moment, someone shared his own memory of her. "We all began to recall 'Gloria stories,' and it was a beautiful moment that allowed us to continue a connection to her," Neimeyer says.

Reflecting on the legacy of the person who died (alone or with others). How did he or she inspire you? What was his or her life's meaning and purpose? Questions like these help shape a perspective on the seeming meaninglessness of death.

Following rituals that celebrate or honor the deceased. Victorians made an art of the rituals of remembrance, from wearing black and jewelry made from the hair of the deceased to producing funeral cards and postmortem photography. Such traditions help survivors maintain a connection and continuity. Family members join Lisa Byers of Toledo, Ohio, on an annual visit to the grave of her late husband, who died of a heart attack at age 46. Patti Anderson, who lives in Cincinnati, joins her out-of-state sisters in annual trips for their mother's birthday. They've turned it into a memorial to her, complete with a special dinner devoted to reminiscing. Another family sends balloons aloft on the anniversary of their father's death -- followed by a dinner at his favorite restaurant.

Creating a memorial. Cherie Spino and her sisters plan to make a wall hanging from scraps of their mother's clothing that they'd saved. Others have found solace in creating scrapbooks or PowerPoint presentations with old photos, symbolically lighting a candle on a memorial website and posting a dedication or planting a tree or garden.

Grief task #5: Rewriting the storyline of your life

"Grief is more than an emotion; it's a process of reconstructing a world of meaning that's been challenged by loss," psychologist Neimeyer says. When our life is closely entwined with another's, and that person dies, it's as if a main character in a book dropped out. How can future chapters be rewritten so the book makes sense?

And yet there must be a rewrite, because life is a narrative. An important part of grieving is to gain a perspective on the meaning of the loss and to reconstruct a world in which you can live effectively afterward. Who will now do the things that your loved one once did with you or for you? Who will you confide in about your promotion or share pride in an accomplishment? Will you ever be able to walk into a hospital or nursing home again? Be able to love again? How has the meaning of your life changed?

One challenge: This involves integrating the reality of death into a cultural system that likes to pretend death doesn't exist.

What helps:

Finding compassion in the workplace, one's place of worship, and social organizations. It can be incredibly useful to reintegrating into life after a loss to have it acknowledged, rather than ignored without comment. Example: a manager stepping forward to say, "I'm sorry for your loss; let's talk about what you feel like tackling now."

Putting your life story on paper. Neimeyer has his patients write the chapter titles of their life stories. Then he asks them to reflect, in writing, on specific questions: How did you organize the flow of your self-narrative? What are the major themes that tie it together? If you were to give a title to your self-narrative, what would it be?

Recognizing that you're not the same person as before. Losing any loved one is a transformative experience. Expect and embrace change, rather than avoiding it and expecting to return to your "old self."

Expecting the intensity of your grief to vary. "Whenever I go to a funeral, I cry and cry now -- for my own loss," says one woman. Mother's Day, birthdays, and anniversaries can ignite surges of depression years later -- or there may not even be an obvious trigger.

Being open to help. It's worth noting that there **may** be a syndrome called *complicated grief*, in which grief reaches a point where therapy can be useful. Is prolonged grief a new psychological disorder? Many psychologists now think so and want to see it become a recognized disorder. But more relevant than labels is being open to help if you feel stuck.

A "Happy" Ending?

Important point: Completing these five tasks doesn't "end" the grieving process. They may never be fully completed. Grief isn't a disease, after all; it's a transition.

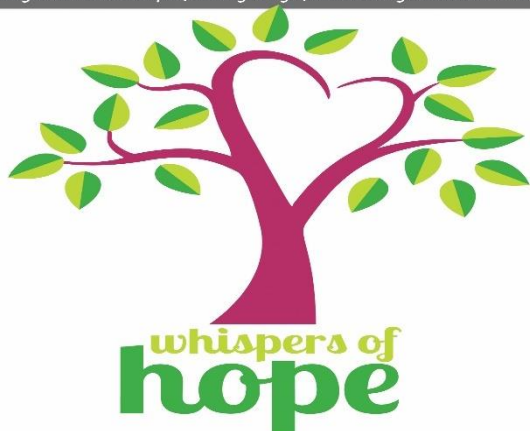
"Grief is like a room we may enter or leave again and again, for years," psychologist Robert Neimeyer says. "The character and quality of grief may change across time, but it remains available to us as a resource that we can revisit."

That positive word, *resource*, is a deliberate choice: "Being able to revisit earlier losses and their implications for us can enrich our lives and make our narrative more coherent about who we are and how we got to be who we are," Neimeyer adds.

"I still feel such a sense of loss," says writer Lise Funderberg of her father's death in 2006. "But qualities of that experience were incredibly moving -- the compassion and charity shown to me and witnessed by me. It's strange to hold two opposing ideas in your head: that an experience can be horrible and yet have good effects. Things were stirred up by my dad's dying that are pretty incredible and life-affirming. I now know that if you've loved a person, you will always grieve them. It just changes over time."



Featuring Alan Pedersen performing songs from his Angels Across the USA Tour



Bereaved Parents of the USA
NATIONAL GATHERING CONFERENCE
AUGUST 3-5, 2018 • MEMPHIS, TN



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Pam Vredevelt

Stephane Gerson

Ann Irr Dagle

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2018 BPUSA NATIONAL GATHERING CONFERENCE "WHISPERS OF HOPE" HIGHLIGHTS

Our gatherings provide an opportunity to hear some of the best speakers in the nation who are experts on many topics related to grief. They will inspire you with their messages of HOPE. They will offer you the tools you need to continue to HEAL as you transition from mourning to living again after the death of your child.

You will also get to know many parents, siblings and grandparents from different parts of the United States who have experienced losses such as yours. You will come to understand that you are not alone on this journey.

Please join us for 3 days of remembering, honoring and celebrating our children, brothers, sisters and grandchildren. Let this be the year that Hope & Healing will fill your heart...

CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHTS:

Speakers and Workshop Presenters – offering hope, inspiration and tools for healthy grieving.

Pre-conference Thursday Night Activities -- Meet and greet while enjoying food and beverages followed by music and inspirational words of Alan Pedersen & Denise Ganulin!

Sibling Program -- Sibling specific workshops, hospitality area and evening sharing sessions.

Alive Alone -- specially designed workshops for parents who have lost their only child or all of their children
Creative memorial craft stations offered throughout the days and evenings. Let creativity help you express what your words cannot.

Memorial Candle Lighting Ceremony and Slide Presentation of our children offered on Saturday evening.
Bookstore – The Centering Corporation offers a wide variety of books and CDs on grief-related topics.

Silent Auction and Raffle – something for everyone! Trips, handmade quilts, original artwork, autographed sports items and other collectibles will be part of the Silent Auction. All proceeds directly benefit BPUSA.

Hospitality Room -- A social gathering spot to enjoy snacks and beverages and/or a place to take a break from the busy schedule and catch your breath while you visit with fellow bereaved families from across the USA.

Reflection Room -- A peaceful and serene room to relax, reflect, and take a break.

T-Shirts – Order t-shirts with our colorful 2018 logo on the front and picture of your loved one on the back.

Picture-Buttons Order buttons with a photo of your child, sibling or grandchild -- free with your registration.

Memory Wall – Decorate a template and add a picture of your loved one to hang on our Memory Wall.

Closing Ceremony – Join us for a Memorial Walk Towards Hope and Healing culminating with a Butterfly Release to mark the official end of the Gathering.

And much more...

[CLICK HERE FOR MORE DETAILS & TO REGISTER FOR THE CONFERENCE](#)



Dealing with the Death and Loss of a Sibling

HealGrief.org

One of the great losses in life is the death of a brother or sister, and many of us will face the loss of a sibling more than once. Yet this is one of the most neglected types of grief, especially in adulthood. Following a death, the focus of support is usually on the surviving spouse and children, or on the parents who have lost their child, rather than on the siblings. A sibling often has less input into the funeral, memorial service or other arrangements. Sentiments and condolences offered to them often lead with questions about how the deceased's "immediate" family or parents are faring. It should be remembered that this is a significant loss for a sibling, and they are dealing with their own deep grief or mourning.

Why sibling loss is unique

The loss of a sibling in adulthood can have many meanings. It is the loss of a brother or sister who shared a unique co-history with you. This person was an integral part of your formative past, for better or worse. Your brother or sister shared common memories, along with critical childhood experiences and family history. When death takes your brother or sister, it also takes away one of your connections to the past. That brother or sister knew you in a very special way, unlike those who know you now as an adult. Consequently, a constant is gone. This can make you feel insecure, for although you may or may not have had frequent contact with your sibling, at least you knew another member of your family was there.

Your sibling holds a symbolic place in your life even if your brother or sister did not have an impact on your current day-to-day activities. This brother or sister's death can make you feel older and indicate that your family is dwindling. Because you likely have the same genetic background, the death of a sibling may increase concerns about your own mortality. And in some cases, the death of a sibling may suddenly make you an only or the eldest child — creating a profound shift in the role you may have held for all or most of your life. This new role, when combined with your natural grief, can make it difficult to wade through the many complicated emotions that arise when a sibling dies.

Some adults who have lost an adult sibling experience a change in their relationship with their parents. Since siblings often feel their grief isn't fully acknowledged and their parents are focused on overcoming their loss, they can feel abandoned by their parents. At a time when they need them the most, their parents are disabled by their own grief. It's critical that surviving siblings get the support they need from others in their family or community. This will help meet not only the surviving sibling's needs, but also temper any feelings of resentment or abandonment.

Why sibling grief can be complicated

Mourning after the loss of a sibling can be complicated for several reasons. The ambivalence that is normally present in a sibling relationship may give rise to guilt, and guilt is known to complicate mourning. You may have had a close relationship with your sibling or a distant one — either extreme and everything in between can affect your guilt or feelings of abandonment after your brother or sister's death. You may experience guilt, sadness and regret if the relationship was never what you ideally would have wanted it to be. Perhaps you had not spent as much time together since you became adults with your own careers and families. Your survival itself can be another source of guilt, especially if you recall the times when you wished your sibling would disappear. These are all normal reactions to sibling loss, and you shouldn't judge yourself if these feelings arise in you.

Another factor that complicates sibling grief is the need to support your parents in their grief. This can draw on your energy and emotional reserves, making it harder to care for yourself. You may question if you have the "right" to mourn as deeply as they do, or as a surviving spouse or children do. Know that you do have the right and the need to mourn and deserve the same support and care as others affected by your sibling's death.

There are some valuable ideas for coping with grief found within this site, as well as recommended readings in the column on the right. There are also online and local groups for those who have lost a sibling — being part of a community of people who have suffered a similar loss may be helpful.


How children are affected by sibling loss

The death of a brother or sister at any age profoundly changes the lives of surviving siblings. But children who lose a sibling often face long-term challenges that differ from those for adults who lose a sibling. Research shows that the death of a sibling adversely affects surviving children's health, behavior, schoolwork, self-esteem and development.

Surviving siblings may be troubled throughout life by a vulnerability to loss and painful upsurges of grief around the date that the sibling died. They may develop distorted beliefs about hospitals, doctors and illness. Many bereaved siblings describe feeling sad, lonely and different from their peers.

The impact of loss may be felt most by the brother or sister who shared the greatest amount of "life space" with the one who died. Siblings who shared a room or who played or spent their spare time together are likely to be those most profoundly affected.

Just like adults, many children who lose a sibling can experience strong feelings of guilt. When a brother or sister dies, they remember all the fights and name-calling, seeing themselves in their memory as the bad child and the dead sibling as the good one. This can result in feeling that they are not good enough.



*A mother's love for her child never ends;
it grows and grows
and never stops,
even after her death.*

- MARY E. MARTINEZ

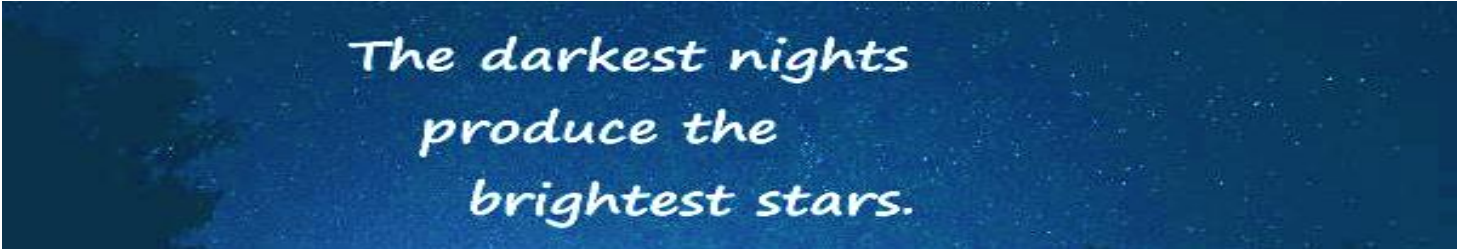
THE MOURNERS CODE: TEN SELF COMPASSIONATE PRINCIPLES

By Alan D. Wolfelt, PH.D.

Though you should reach out to others as you journey through grief, you should not feel obligated to accept the unhelpful responses you may receive from some people. You are the one who is grieving, as such, you have certain “rights” no one should try to take away from you.

The following list is intended both to empower you to heal and to decide how others can and cannot help. This is not to discourage you from reaching out to others for help, but rather to assist you in distinguishing useful responses from hurtful ones.

1. **You have the right to experience your own unique grief.** No one else will grieve in exactly the same way you do. So, when you turn to others for help, don't allow them to tell you what you should or should not be feeling.
2. **You have the right to talk about your grief.** Talking about your grief will help you heal. Seek out others who will allow you to talk as much as want, as often as you want, about your grief. If at times you don't feel like talking, you also have the right to be silent.
3. **You have the right to feel a multitude of emotions.** Confusion, disorientation, fear, guilt and relief are just a few of the emotions you might feel as part of your grief journey. Others may try to tell you that feeling angry, for example, is wrong. Don't take these judgmental responses to heart. Instead, find listeners who will accept your feelings without condition.
4. **You have the right to be tolerant of your physical and emotional limits.** Your feelings of loss and sadness will probably leave you feeling fatigued. Respect what your body and mind are telling you. Get daily rest. Eat balanced meals. And don't allow others to push you into doing things you don't feel ready to do.
5. **You have the right to experience “griefbursts”.** Sometimes, out of nowhere, a powerful surge of grief may overcome you. This can be frightening but is normal and natural. Find someone who understands and will let you talk it out.
6. **You have the right to make use of ritual.** The funeral ritual does more than acknowledge the death of someone loved. It helps provide you with the support of caring people. More importantly, the funeral is a way for you to mourn. If others tell you the funeral or other healing rituals such as these are silly or unnecessary, don't listen.
7. **You have the right to embrace your spirituality.** If faith is a part of your life, express it in ways that seem appropriate to you. Allow yourself to be around people who understand and support your religious beliefs. If you feel angry at God, find someone who won't be critical of your feelings of hurt and abandonment.
8. **You have the right to search for meaning.** You may find yourself asking, “Why did he or she die? Why this way? Why now? Some of your questions may have answers, but some may not. And watch out for the clichéd responses some people may give you. Comments like, “It was God's will” or “Think of what you still have to be thankful for” are not helpful and you do not have to accept them.
9. **You have the right to treasure your memories.** Memories are one of the best legacies that exist after the death of someone loved. You will always remember. Instead of ignoring your memories, find others with whom you can share them.
10. **You have the right to move toward your grief and heal.** Reconciling your grief will not happen quickly. Remember, grief is a process, not an event. Be patient and tolerant with yourself and avoid people who are impatient and intolerant with you. Neither you nor those around you must forget that the death of someone loved changes your life forever.



The darkest nights
produce the
brightest stars.