



MID HUDSON NEW YORK CHAPTER

Bereaved Parents of the USA

Newsletter

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

Kathy Corrigan Chapter Leader

www.mhbpusa.com

MARCH/APRIL 2021



Please join us for our next monthly meeting

All in-person meetings have been canceled until further notice. In the meantime, we will meet via zoom on the first Thursday of every month at 7:00 pm Eastern.

For more information, please email Kathy kjcorrigan5@gmail.com or call her at (845) 462-2825



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.

WHO ARE YOU, GRIEF?

By Natalie's Momma, Melissa Witmer

I am love. I am the part of love that is difficult and ugly. I am the scream that love cries out when your person has left or been taken away from you. I am the chaos in your mind when you can't make sense of what has happened. I am heavy, my hands are large and wrap lightly around your head, neck and chest. I push down on your shoulders. I whisper "what ifs" and "I should haves" in your ear. I clang about in your mind so that you cannot sleep and if you do, I sometimes offer nightmares to your rest. I set you apart, misunderstood, judged, broken, lonely.

Sometimes I am willing to sit in the corner while you participate in life, other times I will be the loudest voice in your mind and you will be crippled with despair. I only exist because there is love. The deeper, the more reckless the love the stronger I will be.

I will never go away, but we will learn to live together, side by side.

It will be a long life.



DEAR NEWLY (OR NOT SO NEWLY) BEREAVED PARENT

by Angela Miller

This will likely be the hardest thing you'll ever do. Survive this. And eventually, maybe even thrive again.

At times it will feel virtually impossible. You'll wonder how a human being can survive such pain. You'll learn you know how to defy the impossible. You did it from the moment your child's heart stopped, and yours kept beating. You do it with every breath and step you take. You're doing it now. And now. And now.

Your fingernails will become bloodied from clawing your way from the depths of despair. Your spirit will grow weary from fighting to survive. Your eyes will cry more tears than you ever thought possible. Your arms will ache an ache for which there aren't words. For a lifetime.

Your heart will break into a million tiny pieces. You'll wonder how it will ever mend again.

But with every morsel of unspeakable pain, there is love. An abundance of love. A love so strong, so powerful, it will buoy you. You will not drown.

Others will say things that are intended to be helpful, but aren't. Take what is, leave what isn't.

Still, you'll meet others along the journey who will get it without ever saying a word. Kind souls who will breathe you back to life again. Let them.

Years down the road you'll tire of hearing the same advice and clichés, over and over again. Advice you don't want or need. Everyone will try to tell you how to best "fix" your broken heart. The trouble is you don't need fixing. There is no fix for this.

Eventually you'll learn how to carry the weight of this pain. At times it will crush you. At other times you'll learn how to shoulder the burden with newfound grit and grace. Either way, you'll learn how to bend with the weight of it. It will not break you. Not entirely.

And even if you don't believe in hope— not even a little— hope will light the way for you. At times you won't realize your path is lit. The darkness feels all-consuming when you're in it. But know the light is there. Surrounding you now. And now. And now.

Know you're being guided, by all of us who have survived this impossible hell. You may not hear us, or see us, but we are with you. Beside you. Hand in hand, heart to heart. Always. Just like your child still is.

Above all else, know that no one can save you but yourself. You are the heroine/hero of this sad story. You are the one who gets to decide how, and if, you'll survive this. You are the one who will figure out a way to survive the sleepless nights, and the endless days. You are the one who will decide if and when you'll find a purpose again that means something to you. You are the one who will choose how you'll live with the pain. You are the one who will decide what you'll cling to, what will make your life worth living again. You, and only you, get to decide how you'll survive.

No one else can do this for you.

People will speak of "closure," of "moving on," of "getting over it," of grief coming to an end. Smile kindly, and know, anyone who says these things hasn't lived this thing called grief.

To lose a child is to lose the very heart and soul of you. It is overwhelmingly disorienting. It takes a long, long time to find yourself again. It takes a long time to grow new life around the chasm of such grave loss. It takes a long time to grow beauty from ashes.

There will always be a hole in your heart, the size and shape of your child. Your child is absolutely irreplaceable. Nothing will fill the void your child left. But your heart will grow bigger— beautifully bigger— around the empty space your child left behind.

The love and pain you carry for your precious child will be woven into every thread of your being. It will fuel you to do things you never dreamed you could do.

Eventually, you'll figure out how to live for both of you. It will be beautiful, and it will be hard.

But the love you two share will carry you through. You will spread this love everywhere you go.

Eventually, you'll be able to see again.

Eventually, you'll find your way again.

Eventually, you'll realize you survived.



GRIEVING HARRY POTTER

I miss Harry Potter.

Can you miss someone who isn't real? Oh, I think so. We miss a good book when it finishes, a favorite TV series when it's over, and a good movie when the credits roll. Many adults felt concern when the seventh and last Harry Potter book, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, came out last summer. They worried about their children's reactions when some of the characters died. The author, J.K. Rowling, had promised that some significant characters would not survive to the end of the story, and the possibility of Harry's death hung close and heavy. Lines were long around the country and around the world to buy the book as soon as it went on sale. Did it matter if a fictional character died? All one had to do was see the faces and listen to the conversations of those in line to see that it mattered a great deal.

The Harry Potter books were appealing for many reasons. Harry was an unloved, neglected and abused boy who had been told all his life that he was both a disappointment and an embarrassment, just by being who he was. At age eleven, he discovered otherwise. Not only was he a special boy, in some ways he was the most special person in a magical world of wonders where he did belong and where he was desperately wanted and valued. What an appealing message—that we can be more important and valuable than we have ever known or experienced. Add to this great imagination, clever humor, overflowing adventure, layers of mystery, the “joys” of puberty, and good triumphing over evil and you've got a heck of a story.

But the Harry Potter story was something even more. It was and is the grief story for this current generation of young people. Harry was an orphan who never knew his parents, and his story was filled with wisdom about loss, grief and living. Insights into grief begin in the first book as Harry discovers a magical mirror that shows the viewer's greatest desire. When Harry looks in the mirror, he doesn't see himself as rich or powerful or winning accolades from adoring crowds. He sees himself with the parents he never knew. Eventually, the wise, father-figure wizard, Professor Dumbledore, finds Harry sitting again in front of the mirror gazing at what he can never have. With gentleness, Dumbledore tells Harry that “It does not do to dwell on dreams and forget to live...” Throughout the books Harry is threatened by foes who call themselves “Death Eaters” as if by their power and skill they could conquer and move beyond death itself. Harry's task, however, is never to conquer or vanquish death, but to find ways to live fully with the reality of death in his life. His parents are dead and some friends die, too, but

Harry lives on and must discover meaning both in his life and in the deaths he experiences. There is even the concept of growth in the midst of loss: In Harry's world, there are magical creatures called *thestrals* that only those who have seen death can see. Midway through the books, Harry finally sees these creatures that have been present all along, and he is then able to use this new vision and insight in a heroic effort to help someone else—all because he can see something in his life that he couldn't see before.

As the stories continue, Harry experiences more danger and more threats on his life. Repeatedly, in the midst of the most threatening times, he has some experience of his parents, which brings him strength and comfort. In one particular scene where Harry seems trapped and all seems lost, his mother's spirit comes to him from his enemy's wand and encourages him to hold on, for his father is coming, and both parents protect and guide Harry to his survival. In another brush with death, Harry thinks he sees his father but then realizes he has only seen himself instead. Embarrassingly, he reports his mistake to Dumbledore who replies...“You think the dead we loved ever truly leave us? You think that we don't recall them more clearly than ever in times of great trouble? You know, Harry, in a way, you did see your father last night. You found him inside yourself.” In some ways this is the strongest grief lesson of the book. Those we love can still be present with us even when they are physically gone from our lives. Their presence with us after their deaths is not the same as before, but it is significant, and in the end, it is enough—enough for us to live again.

There are two more Harry Potter movies to come, and I look forward to them, but it's not the same. I've read through the last book and know how the story ends. I miss Harry Potter, boy wizard and grief tutor for the masses. Can we miss a character that is not real? Perhaps the old wizard Dumbledore deserves the last word. In the final book, when he is asked by Harry if his presence with Harry is real or happening inside Harry's head, Dumbledore responds, “Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?”

About the Author: *Greg Adams, LCSW, ACSW, CT is a clinical social worker and director of the Center for Good Mourning and PalCare at Arkansas Children's Hospital. Greg is the author of Lessons from Lions: Using Children's Media to Teach about Grief and Mourning, which is a user's guide and CD using a popular children's movie to help children learn and talk about death and grief. Greg is certified in Thanatology: Death, Dying and Bereavement by the Association of Death Education and Counseling (ADEC). Greg's email adamsjg@archildrens.org.*

GRIEF AND THE BURDEN OF GUILT

By Marty Tousley www.griefhealingblog.com

Guilt is perhaps the most painful companion of death.

~ Coco Chanel

Guilt is a normal response to the perception that we've somehow failed in our duties and obligations or that we've done something wrong. It generates a jumbled mixture of feelings including doubt, shame, inadequacy, insecurity, failure, unworthiness, self-judgment and blame, anxiety and fear of punishment.

When your loved one's terminal illness was finally diagnosed, as a caregiver you may feel guilty that you hadn't noticed symptoms sooner, waited too long to seek treatment or didn't do enough to comfort your beloved. If death came suddenly or unexpectedly, you may feel guilty for not being present when it happened. If it came after a long, lingering illness, you may feel guilty for feeling relieved that your loved one's suffering is over and you're now free from the burden of worry and care. You may feel guilty that you are the one who survived, or uncomfortable that you received an insurance settlement or inheritance following the death of your loved one. If you're a religious person, you may feel guilty that you feel so angry at God.

Unfortunately, guilt is a natural and common component of grief. When someone you love dies, it's only human to search for an explanation, to look at what you did or did not do, to dwell on the what if's and if only's. You agonize and tell yourself, “If only I'd done something differently, this never would've happened.” Sometimes, though, there simply isn't anything you could have done differently. When your loved one's illness or death occurred, chances are



that whatever happened beforehand was not intentional on your part. In the wise words of internationally known author and publisher Louise Hay, we do the best we can with our understanding at the time, and when we know better, we do better. Given the stress you were under at the time and how exhausted you may have been, you were doing the best you could. You were basing whatever you did on what you knew, given the information available to you then.

Harsh as it may seem, consider that even if you had done things differently, your loved one still could have died in some other way at some other time! Sometimes we act as if we can control the random hazards of existence, even when we know that death is a fact of life.

Guilt is driven by our own personal beliefs and expectations, and dealing with it requires that we examine what we think we did wrong, face it and evaluate it as objectively as possible. For example, what did you expect of yourself that you did not live up to? Were your expectations unrealistic? If they were, then you need to let go of them. Since you did all that you were capable of doing at the time, there simply is no basis for your guilt, and you need to let go of that as well.

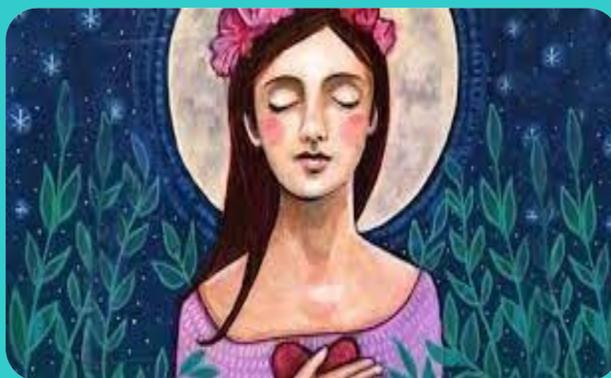
Nevertheless, if after careful examination of the facts, you find that your expectations of yourself are legitimate and you still did not live up to them, it's important to face and take responsibility for what you believe you could have done differently. Healthy guilt allows us to own up to and learn from our mistakes. It gives us a chance to make amends, to do things differently next time, to come to a better understanding of ourselves, to forgive ourselves and move on.

Tips for Coping with Guilt

Identify what it is that you feel guilty about. Resist the urge to keep such thoughts and feelings to yourself like so many deep, dark secrets. Bring them out into the open where they can be examined. Share them with a trusted friend or counselor, who can view your thoughts and feelings more objectively, and challenge what may be irrational or illogical.

- Listen to the messages you give yourself (the should haves, could haves and if only's), and realize the past is something you can do absolutely nothing about.
- When guilty thoughts come to mind, disrupt them by telling yourself to stop thinking such thoughts. Say "STOP!" firmly, and out loud if you need to.
- Live the next day or next week of your life as if you were guilt-free, knowing you can return to your guilt feelings any time you wish. Pick a start time and stop yourself whenever you make any guilt-related statements.
- Write down your guilt-related statements, set a date, and pledge that from that day forward, you won't say them to yourself anymore. Post them and read them every day.
- If you are troubled by feeling relieved that your loved one's suffering has ended, know that a heavy burden has been lifted from your shoulders; you have been released from an emotionally exhausting and physically draining experience, and to feel relieved is certainly understandable.
- If you believe in God or a higher power, consider what He or She has to say about forgiveness.
- Participate in a support group — it's a powerful way to obtain forgiveness and absolution from others.
- Be your own best friend. What would you have said to your best friend if this had happened to that person? Can you say the same to yourself?
- Remember the good things you did in your relationship with your loved one and all the loving care you gave. Focus on the positive aspects: what you learned from each other, what you did together that brought you joy, laughter and excitement. Write those things down, hold onto them and read them whenever you need to.

- Ask what you expected of yourself that you didn't live up to. How is it that you didn't? What were the circumstances at the time? What have you learned from this that you'll do differently next time?
- What can you do to make amends? Find a way to genuinely apologize to your loved one's spirit and ask for forgiveness.
- Have a visit with your loved one. Say aloud or in your mind whatever you didn't get to say while your loved one was still living. Be as honest as you can be.
- Have your loved one write a letter to you. What would this person say to you about the guilt and sadness you've been carrying around?
- Ask what it would take for you to forgive yourself. Can you begin doing it? Say out loud to yourself, "I forgive you." Say it several times a day.
- Remember that no one else can absolve your feelings of guilt -- only you can do so, through the process of intentionally forgiving yourself.
- When you've consciously learned all, you can learn from this situation, and when you've made any amends you consider necessary, then it's time to let go of your guilt, to forgive yourself, and to move on.
- Channel the energy of your guilt into a worthwhile project. Do good deeds in your loved one's honor.



To honor you, I get up every day and take a breath, and start another day without you in it.

To honor you, I laugh and love with those who knew your smile,
and the way your eyes twinkled with mischief and secret knowledge.

To honor you, I take the time to appreciate everyone I love,
I know now there is no guarantee of days or hours spent in their presence.

To honor you, I listen to music you would have liked, and sing at the top of my lungs,
with the windows rolled down.

To honor you, I take chances, say what I feel, hold nothing back, risk making a fool of
myself, dance every dance.

You were my light, my heart, my gift of love, from the very highest source.
So, every day, I vow to make a difference, share a smile, live, laugh and love.

Now I live for us both, so all I do, I do to honor you.

~ *Connie F. Kiefer Byrd*

You change and you become different, open and willing. The fear that held you back becomes the strength that flows in your veins, and the story you now tell. You bloom and you give hope to those who were once in the dark.

HanlieR©

"What
is grief, if not
love persevering?"
-WandaVision

Death leaves a heartache no one can heal,
Love leaves a memory no one can steal...

~Irish Headstone



BEREAVED
PARENTS
of the USA

BPUSA VIRTUAL BEREAVED SIBLING SUPPORT GROUP

Meeting online on the last Thursday of every month at 8 pm EST.
Please email bpvirtuaisiblingchapter@gmail.com for the zoom link.



Bereaved Parents USA

August 6-8 ♥ St. Louis, Missouri

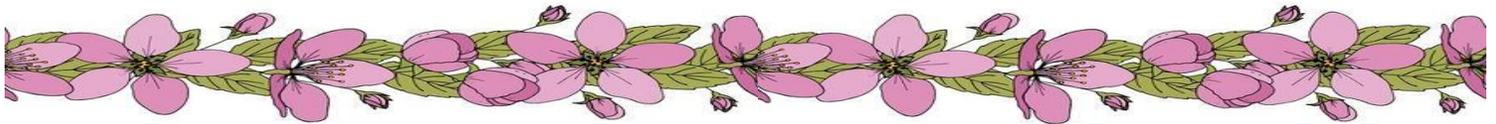
A MESSAGE FROM THE BPUSA BOARD:

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Like so many others, we are anxiously waiting for the vaccines to be more readily available so that we will begin to see a slowdown in the spread of Covid-19 and a return to safe get-togethers and being able to shake hands and hug again.

Depending on the outcome, we will be making the decision to either go ahead as planned with an in-person Gathering in St. Louis, MO or host a virtual event as we did last year. As soon as we make that decision, we will let you know. Regardless, the Gathering is planned for August 6-8, 2021. So, mark your calendar!



Lean Into Spring by [Jennifer Stern, LISW](http://www.transformativiegrief.com) for www.transformativiegrief.com

Spring has sprung. The flowers are blooming. The birds are singing. The sun is shining. So why do you feel so dark? So stuck? So empty? So sad, overwhelmed and angry? Why do you long for cold, rainy, dark days? Because you are grieving. Because Spring can feel like pressure. Pressure to be present and live life in spite of how you are feeling on the inside. Pressure to feel a semblance of normal. Pressure to believe in the possibility of new. Spring feels like a betrayal of your grief.

Grief is not predictable. It does not follow an order as the seasons do. It is personal. It is painful. It is messy. Grief can feel surprising, shocking, never-ending.

Spring feels contrary to the realities of grief. To the experience of mourning. Sadness, anger, anxiety, loneliness, feeling overwhelmed....those feelings do not match the sights and sounds of Spring. And yet there is much to be learned from the audacity of Spring. Those feelings of deep grief are the winter frost forcing us to lie dormant, to turn in, to be in (and of) our grief. Trust in time that your Spring will come. That you too will begin to thaw. That in time you can and you will push through the bitter heaviness of grief.

You will bloom once again, new and different. You will begin to grow towards the sun and find respite and healing in its warmth.

Your Spring will come. In your time. In your way. Perhaps in the most trivial and unexpected ways...hearing the song of a bird and allowing that song to fill you. Noticing the crocus poking through the snow and experiencing a sense of awe at its resilience, strength and courage. Feeling the warmth of sunshine from the inside out. Moments previously not accessible now experienced with heightened awareness and even gratitude.

Lean into Spring. Go outside each day and write one sound in nature you hear. One new flower or growth you see. Add to this list daily. At the end of one week reflect on this experience. Were you able to find some comfort (and maybe even hope) noticing leaves on branches once barren, lying dormant under the weight of ice and snow? Nature provides a model for grieving, healing, and resilience. Nature teaches us that there is a season for everything.

“Earth teach me to forget myself as melted snow forgets its life. Earth teach me resignation as the leaves which die in the fall. Earth teach me courage as the tree which stands all alone. Earth teach me regeneration as the seed which rises in the spring.” ~ William Alexander