



MID HUDSON NEW YORK CHAPTER

Bereaved Parents of the USA

Newsletter

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

Kathy Corrigan Chapter Leader

www.mhbpusa.com

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2020

Please join us for our next meetings

Until further notice, MHBPUA will be meeting on the 1st Thursday of every month via ZOOM @ 7:00 pm. The link for each meeting will be sent out by email to all those on our email list. Please email Kathy to be included on our email list: kjcorrigan5@gmail.com
Call Kathy (845) 462-2825 for information about our chapter.



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.

Amie Lands (www.amielandsauthor.com/) is a wife, mother, teacher, author and bereaved parent.

To listen to Amie's message to the newly bereaved [CLICK HERE](#)

AFTER LOSS: LOVE HAS THE GRACE TO SAVE US

Unconditional self-love after catastrophic loss and love for others who are experiencing similar challenges allows us to embrace service by becoming part of something greater than ourselves.

By Dave Roberts, LMSW, Teacher, Workshop Facilitator, Speaker, Writer.

Since my daughter Jeannine's death in 2003, the music of Tom Petty, The Counting Crows, The Wallflowers, Rush, Sting and Jackson Browne have allowed me to sit with the many emotions of grief and have provided clarity and created awareness, in the aftermath of her death.

There were many times that my daughter signaled her presence to me through the music that we shared. One memorable experience was during her eighth anniversary date on March 1, 2011. That morning I spent some quiet time inviting Jeannine into my sacred space and sharing my gratitude for the relationship that we shared (and continue to share today) and the teachings that she revealed to me about life and death. I burned some incense and shuffled a playlist of songs that I had created for my iPod, prior to the 1st of March. The first two songs that came on were by The Gin Blossoms and The Goo Goo Dolls. The first concert that Jeannine and I went to was at the New York State Fair when she was thirteen. The Goo Goo Dolls were the opening act for the Gin Blossoms.



SHATTERED AND SCARRED

A while ago, I added an album to my Spotify play list titled *Born to Fly*. The recording artist, Sara Evans, was another one of my daughter's favorite recording artists.

With any music that inevitably strengthens the eternal bond with my daughter, I pay close attention to song lyrics that either promote further reflection and/or has something more to reveal about loss :

***Cause when we're torn apart
Shattered and scarred
Love has the grace to save us***

This passage from a song on Sara Evans' *Born to Fly* album, called *Saints and Angels*, precipitated a return to early grief following Jeannine's death.

In early grief, reflecting on my past with Jeannine led to intense emotional pain because of her physical absence in the present, and because of a future that I could not envision without her.

I was definitely torn apart after my daughter's death. The rules that helped make my world safe, orderly and predictable were shattered into millions and millions of little pieces.

Today, a return to the early days of grief does not have the same effect. I have learned that, if we let it, our past can be a rich source of information for us in the present. Looking back allows us to retrace our steps and conceptualize the progress made after life-altering loss. Our past is undeniably a part of who we have become in the present, and its influence can't be denied. Revisiting our pain in early grief serves as a wise mentor, if only to remind us that we were resilient enough to survive it.

The scars that I have developed as a result of the challenges with my daughter's death are not visible to the naked eye, but are a reminder that, if we live long enough, tragedy will, at some point, become us. We can choose to let tragedy overwhelm us, or we can choose to rise above it .

LOVE AND TENDERNESS

As *Saints and Angels* suggests, love has the grace to save us. I believe that this is unequivocally true following the death of a loved one. What has saved me is rediscovering those loving parts of myself that became hidden or otherwise unexpressed in the immediate aftermath of Jeannine's death.

In order to begin to love ourselves again, we must be gentle with ourselves.

Being gentle with ourselves after loss is an ongoing challenge because of, among other things: 1) Guilt about what we believed we should have done to prevent our loved one's death. and 2) Regret over things that were left unsaid, or perhaps were said. Once we release what no longer serves us, we can begin the work of self-love. The unconditional love that we give ourselves, morphs into gentleness , kindness and unconditional love towards those who walk the same or similar paths after life-altering loss. We not only become invested in ourselves, but in humanity as well. We become a part of something greater than ourselves.

I believe that when we embrace love and tenderness for ourselves and others, our passion for service, and life returns, and our loved ones' legacies live on for eternity. ♡



I NOTICED.....MY WORLD HAD CHANGED

By: Sharon Krejci (Bereaved Mother St. Louis, MO)

From Resources – www.bereavedparentsusa.org



Prior to becoming a bereaved parent, I thought I had a glimpse of what parents who have lost a child go through. I was an emergency room nurse. The sad part of my job was to inform parents that their child had died. After delivering this most devastating news, I would sit and cry with the parents. When I'd go home at night, I would think about the parents, and pray for them and thank God my two little boys were safe and that my family was intact.

Four years ago, I became a bereaved parent when the police informed me that my son, Andrew had an auto accident and was dead. My life stopped. I wasn't sure if I was going to be able to breathe again without my son, let alone survive his death. In the days that followed, I found out one thing was for sure, I didn't have a glimpse about what happens to a person when their child dies.

As I walk this journey of a bereaved parent I notice my whole world changed. My beliefs aren't the same. My priorities weren't the same and my future was changed forever. My whole life was shattered and I didn't know where to begin to pick up the pieces or if I had the will to pick up the pieces. Everyone around me, even though very attentive to me, continued functioning in their own lives. I didn't know where I fit in anymore. I was alone ... trying to figure out what happened in that split second, when they told me Andrew was dead.

I noticed many things about my new world that I didn't like. I knew then, if I was to survive my son's death, things must be changed and it was up to me to change them.

I noticed The silence of people not mentioning Andrew's name or his life was deafening to me. There were no stories about him anymore. It was like out of sight out of mind. I wondered what this world was doing to me. My son lived. He was a part of my life. I had dreams for him. He was my future. I was so frightened that everyone would forget him. I needed to hear other people say my Andrew's name. I needed to say his name and to tell stories about him. I could not stand the thought of going through the rest of my life not ever hearing or saying his name again. I knew then that part of my survival was going to involve keeping the memory of my son alive.

I noticed People removed Andrew's picture and other remembrances of him from their homes, thinking it was going to upset me seeing them. I needed to know that he was important to other people. Just because he died, it didn't mean that memories of him couldn't still exist. As part of my healing I gave framed pictures of Andrew to family and friends to display in their home. This let them know I needed to have him around me.

I noticed People would shy away from me, run down the other aisle of the grocery store rather than chance running into me. I needed more than ever for people to come up to me and give me a big hug, rather than shy away. Depending on how I felt that day, I would hunt those people down in that other aisle and show them that talking with me was not going to be a painful experience for them and that being a bereaved parent was not contagious.

I noticed I struggled with something as simple as not being able to sign a birthday or anniversary card from our family because to do that, I would have to leave Andrew's name off the card. I had signed his name for 23 years and there was no way his name could be left off the card. I also knew I needed to continue to write his name or people would forget him. I now sign all cards "With Love and Memories of Andrew." It's funny, I rarely sent Christmas Cards before Andrew died. Now I make sure that I send cards to everyone I know so I can write his name to keep his memory alive. What's great is that people sent cards back to me with the same message.

I noticed People were uncomfortable about what to say to me, so they would avoid mentioning Andrew's life or death for fear they would remind me of him. They would also feel bad if they thought they would make me cry and then "what would they do with me?" It was easier for them not to say anything. What these people didn't know is that they don't remind me of Andrew. I think about Andrew every minute of every day. I will never forget his life or his death. Their mentioning Andrew's name only made me feel better. After experiencing a few of these encounters, I knew then, I had to make people feel that it was okay to talk about Andrew and that if there were tears, that was okay too. I always thanked people for bringing Andrew's name up and remembering him. If tears came first, I would explain that they did not make me cry and I really appreciate them talking to me about Andrew.

I noticed When I entered the room at my first bereaved parent meeting, I was surprised to find other people in that room smiling, some laughing, and some making small talk. I thought ...boy, I am really in the wrong place. It was inconceivable to me that I would ever smile or laugh again. I thought that they must love their child as much as I did. Once the meeting began, I learned that these parents did love their child as much as I loved Andrew and that maybe I too, would someday smile and laugh again. Just maybe...there was a glimmer of hope that I might survive and they would lead the way.

I noticed.... At my meeting I learned a lot about my new world from parents who have walked the path before me. They brought to my attention the situations I may encounter and offered suggestions in how they dealt with the issues. They didn't theorize grief; they lived it every day and shared their coping skills with the group. They gave me strength and confidence and validated that I was on the right path in keeping the memory of Andrew alive. They were patient with me. I knew I was in a safe place where people understood me. They wanted to help me get better. They knew something I didn't know at the time....that I was going to survive.

I noticed Some people thought that because my son was 23 years old, somehow he wasn't my child anymore. Even though I was his parent, they assumed the grief would not be as intense as if he were a baby or young child. I'll never forget a 70-year-old man coming into the ER, dead on arrival after a heart attack. I was told his mom was on her way to the ER. When his frail, 90-year-old mom entered the room, she screamed out "My baby, my baby." She sobbed. She hugged him. She held and rocked him. She kissed him all the while saying, "My baby, my baby." I learned that night, it doesn't matter how old your child is because the parent child relationship is for life. That night her baby died. The night Andrew died was the night my baby died. Our children are our children forever.

I noticed I didn't know what to say when people asked me "how many children do you have?" This caused me great anxiety when it came up in a conversation. I let them know, I had two boys. Most of the time that was sufficient. If the conversation required more information. I told them that my oldest son, Andrew, died in an auto accident and he was a mechanical engineer. My younger son, Elliott, is alive and well and is a graphic designer. I told them about Andrew, not so they could feel sorry for me, but, because I will always be his mom, he will always be my child and I could not deny he had lived.

I noticedThat people compared my loss to their father dying, grandmother dying and yes; I had one person compare my loss to their dog dying. I knew these people didn't have any intention of hurting me. They were just trying to relate to probably the very worst experience they had ever had with death. I needed to let them know my father had died, my grandmother and grandfather, my friend, my aunts and uncles and even my dogs died. My Andrew dying was like no other experience I have had with death or hopefully will ever encounter again. My life didn't stop with all the other deaths...like it did when Andrew died. Even though I grieved the other deaths, they didn't hit the core of my existence...like Andrew's death. My heart didn't ache every minute of every day of every year, like it did when Andrew died. The difference...I would have given my life to let Andrew live, but I wasn't given the choice.

I noticedThat the old family traditions at Christmas, Andrew's birthday and other holidays needed to be changed to include something that kept Andrew's memory alive. We started new traditions. At Christmas, I give everyone an ornament that reminds me of Andrew and his life. Friends and family give me Christmas ornaments that reminded them of Andrew to hang on our new "Andrew tree." We continue to gather on his birthday to celebrate his life. It's not about the ornament, the tree, or his birthday. It's about family and friends taking the time to remember Andrew.

To say his name. To let me hear his name. To tell me a funny story they remember. It means so much to me and has allowed me to continue to survive.

I noticed That even though it's been four years Andrew continues to live in the lives of others. What I love most is when my nieces say "Aunt Sharon, I felt Andrew today all around me" or "I heard his song and remember when..." Or when my nephew comes into the house with a new friend and asks, "Where are the pictures of Andrew? I want to introduce him to my friend." When the little guys say, "I needed to get to first base last week and I asked Andrew to help me and I made it." Or when friends and family send me cards or mementos on his angel date or birthday. I will forever need to know that Andrew has not been forgotten. These little mentions of his name let me know, I will survive.

I noticed After a year or two people were expecting the "old Sharon back." They wanted me to move on with my life, to be happy and to try to forget my son's death. I guess they read one of those psychology or medical books that give bereaved parents one year to recover. I know now that the writers of those books never consulted a bereaved parent. Society doesn't understand or seem to want to give us the time it takes to get better. I let people know that I was working very hard on my recovery. I didn't want pity. I wasn't attention seeking or being a martyr when I cried. I wanted more than they did to feel like my old self again. I wanted the intense pain to stop. I hated where I was in my life and feeling this bad.

I let them know....I heard...that as the years pass, the pain gets softer, and the tears less, but I will never fully recover. I will always miss Andrew. I will always grieve his death. He will always be a part of my life and I will never forget him.

My wish for you is that you will find peace and to know that your child is with you and will never be forgotten.



PEACE THROUGH WRITING

By Molly Hanna Glidden from Grief Digest

During the 1950s, a lovely lady named Floss, witnessed a little girl with weight on her shoulders and fingernails bitten to the quick. It was then that I was rescued. Aunt Floss spent quality time teaching alternative ways to express my feelings with infinite compassion.

Her most memorable advice was handwritten, "Thoughts are the shadows of our feelings. Whether feeling sad, hurt, happy or angry, our emotions need expression. What better way than putting pen to paper?" She handed me a beautiful box containing her note, fancy paper and a pen. Throughout years of weathering unimaginable tragedies, I've learned expressing emotions on paper proved to be a healthy escape. I believe Aunt Floss was my inspiration.

During life's traumatic experiences, intense feelings oozed from my fingers. With pen in hand, thoughts and sentiments emerged. Scribbling down thoughts was never a chore. As a child, it became a safety net storing them inside my lovely box. Eventually this evolved into journaling, allowing me to once again let go of secret conversations bottled up inside. It began after receiving a gift from Santa in third grade. A lovely pink diary with a tiny lock and gold-plated key. Most of my earliest writings were about being bullied. Looking back, those early childhood experiences included things I didn't understand and couldn't express openly.

Embedded in my heart was the story of my first tragedy written in third grade. My mother gave birth to twins in her mid-forties. Judith Ann was the smaller twin with a heart condition. Myself and four young siblings nicknamed them Jack and Jill. As kids do, we repeated the nursery rhyme time and again, driving mom crazy—until that fateful day. Our 8-month-old baby sister developed complications from pneumonia. There was nothing the doctors could do. Throughout the night Mom held her close, comforting Jill. My baby sister died in her arms before I awoke. Dark clouds settled over our home for quite some time.

One sorrowful memory takes me back to the day Jill's crib was removed, like a scary old movie playing in my head. A freckle faced third grader standing in the doorway, tears rolling down her cheeks. That little girl was me, experiencing the finality of her sister's death.

Again there was urgency to put feelings on paper. It became a way of purging anxieties while sorting through my emotions, even at a young age. It didn't matter what was scribbled on paper, writing was proving to be therapeutic. During my teen years, friends and activities came to the forefront. Working and playing first singles on the high school tennis team kept me busy. Writing being mandatory in school sent my creativity out the window. No longer feeling the need to write, pages of my diary were left blank while the shiny mahogany box under my bed collected dust balls.

It wasn't until midlife, after years of tragic heartbreak, writing found me once again. I wrote of special times, funny moments, as well as the difficult ones...My story needed to be told.

When writing, I often find myself drifting back in time reliving scenes from those dreadful days and nights in 1973, 1983 and 2018. No matter how much we wish for, not all stories have happy endings.

In spring of '73, my beautiful sister, twenty-four years young, didn't want to end her life, just the pain. Losing all hope living with depression, Martha sank into that bottomless black abyss. As her surviving sibling close in age, it was painfully difficult to witness. After the funeral no one talked about it, everything got swept under the carpet. Left were feelings of being disconnected from a world gone silent. I couldn't save my beautiful sister, no one could. The realization of being a sibling of suicide is a pain [that] survivors live with in silence.

February 26th, 1983 was my brother George's last time wearing his State Police uniform. His last goodbye as he waved to his wife and three children. While working a double shift late at night, he stopped a vehicle with a rear light out. Being in a dark and remote area, Trooper Hanna observed an orange Chevy Vega with five men inside. Standing alone in a dark parking lot with his cruiser lights flashing, he asked them to get out of the car. While frisking the first individual, they began speaking a foreign language. During a scuffle, my brother was shot in the leg, falling to the pavement. Having guns, the assailants began firing upon my brother, shooting him multiple times. Trooper Hanna began crawling to the cruiser when one of the gunmen slammed him to the ground shooting three more times in his back. After the perpetrators sped off, my 36-year-old brother stood in the middle of the street to wave a car down before collapsing. He died three hours later, alone in the hospital. As fast as the cruisers escorted us, our family was unable to arrive in time. There were no good-byes, but a tragedy that forever changed our lives. While enduring three separate trials, we learned these dangerous criminals were out to rob a liquor store. Trooper George Hanna's intervention, undoubtedly saved lives.

Decades later in 2018, I lost my best friend and only child. It's been two years since my beautiful Laura received her angel wings. I wasn't sure I'd survive the first year however faith and my red winged visitors carried me through. That year we were planning to celebrate her 50th birthday. The finality of her loss continues to engulf me with a daily reality of carrying on without her.

When a parent buries a child, it takes hard work and dedication to survive. For me, nature continues to provide great respite allowing deeper breaths. Losing Laura broke my heart in a million pieces yet somehow with time, I'm learning to live with joy and sorrow in unison. Triggers and landmines continue going off, shaking me to my core. This unending war inside, helps me to use my pain to support others. After all, the love we feel that can't be expressed can filter through in other directions. Much like dark clouds that leak rain while rays of sunshine peak through.

Writing continues to be a healing factor in expressing my emotions. Much has to do with my heart, soul and mind behind the words. When difficult emotions or ideas come through for me, the visceral side of my brain begins speaking through my fingers. At times I surprise myself when words begin to flow. The action of writing helps me to

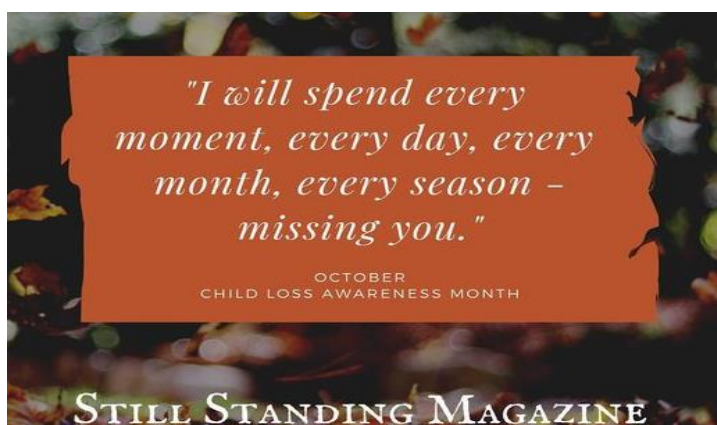
remember things I thought were lost. Recalling happy memories is a reminder not to let those precious moments disappear.

Floss's advice allowed freedom of expression to once again surface. My love for reading true stories made it easier to tell my own. I'm an avid believer in the importance of both. Writing will always have a curative and cathartic exercise. It's one of the outlets and distractions that helped me through my worst of tragedies. It's about finding peace when releasing pain instead of allowing it to root within. Over time and without choice, I've learned to change and adapt after losing loved ones. In spite of the dark clouds that linger, I continue looking for sunshine, flowers in spring, and the beauty of nature—keeping darkness at bay.

There are times I turn away from writing. Other times, I'm laden with rushing emotions, jotting words down, making little sense. My fingers move easily and sentences flow like a sun-spangled brook. That's when my best stories are written.

My daughter's passing happened while writing my memoir, *Reminiscing – La Vie en Rose*. Finishing my story felt impossible living with complicated grief. Laura's support of my book and my desire to honor her memory, kept my fingers on the keyboard. Writing our story gave me purpose, allowing Laura's name to live on.

Living is not forever, nevertheless memories written, withstands the test of time. My hope is to inspire all who walk a similar path even if our shoes are different.



9 THINGS TO HONOR YOUR GRIEF AND START LIVING AGAIN

FOREVERMISSED.COM ONLINE MEMORIALS

When you're grieving, it can be easy to be hard on yourself. Moreover, it is even easier to become stunned and lost while experiencing all the phases of sadness. That is why it is so important to take care of yourself during this time. We have collected 9 tips on how to cope with grief after losing a loved one and how to start living again:

- **Ask for help**
It is hard to take this journey alone; you need the support and care of others. Share your emotions with family or friends, a spiritual mentor, or a professional psychologist. Don't try to overcome the grief by yourself.
- **Look to others as an example**
You are not the first to travel down the road of grief. Talk to others who have coped with loss. This will give you a model in which to base your own healing and remind you that you are not alone. Read books about grief and find support groups for people who are looking to heal.
- **Learn about the nature of grief**
The more you learn about the nature of this emotion and dispel the myths surrounding it, the faster you will start to understand that your sadness is a natural psychological state after the tragedy.

- **Express your emotions**
Grief must not remain hidden deep down. The best way to overcome it is to release it. Cry and scream if you need to. Express your feelings through music, art, poetry, or prose. Whether you express your sadness with a close friend or alone does not matter, you just need to show it. This is the only true way to honor your grief and start living again.
- **Recognize your feelings**
Trying to escape or hide from your pain is not a good idea. You need to experience it and go through it in order to start healing. Grief can bring a lot of feelings to the surface. Some, like anger, rejection, and apathy, can be strong and overwhelming. Recognize these feelings and accept them as a natural part of the grieving process. Do not hold in your anger, sadness, or melancholy. These feelings are important, and if accepted and expressed, can help your healing.
- **Do not hurry**
Grief can be tedious. It takes a lot of energy to feel such emotion. Allow yourself to live more slowly. Set aside more time for daily activities and do not overload yourself. Rest when you need to and treat yourself a little better.
- **Start a new activity or hobby**
Participation in work or any other activity that you enjoy can make you more focused and help distract you from your grief. If the activity is particularly meaningful or beneficial to others, you may find that it also raises your spirit and helps you cope with negative emotions.
- **Allow yourself to be happy sometimes**
People in grief do not allow themselves to be happy at least sometimes. They feel that their joy somehow means that they have forgotten about a loved one. The truth is that laughter is the best medicine. An easy way to cheer yourself up is to spend more time with children or animals.
- **Remember that one day the pain will lessen**
Time will pass, and your pain will subside a bit. It is likely that this feeling will not pass entirely ever. But you will start living a full life with bright and joyful moments again.

