



MID HUDSON NEW YORK CHAPTER

Bereaved Parents of the USA

Newsletter

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

Kathy Corrigan Chapter Leader

www.mhbpusa.com

MAY/JUNE 2017



Please join us for our next meetings

Thursday, May 4th -- Topic: **Mother's Day & Father's Day**

Thursday, June 1st – Topic: **Grief and the Healing Power of Humor**

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.

A LETTER TO MY LIVING CHILDREN FOR MOTHER'S DAY

Written by Maria Kubitz

Dearest ones,

Mother's Day is quickly approaching. Each year, I've received beautiful hand drawn cards or beautiful crafts from you that I cherish and save. Your words of love and appreciation are an echo of the profound love and appreciation I feel for each of you. Not just on Mother's Day, but every day. And yet, you know Mother's Day will forever more be bittersweet for me, since your sister will never again be alongside you to wish me a happy Mother's Day.

It has been a very challenging road for all of us since the death of your only sister. You didn't just lose your only sister and a piece of your innocence that day, but you also lost the mother you once knew. After that horrible day, you had to witness a mother who was crushed by the weight of grief; a mother who still loved and took care of you, but was so often sad or tired or visibly overwhelmed.

I know that for a long time you tried to hide your own pain from me in an effort to not make mine worse. You tried to take care of me, as I often struggled to find the energy needed to take care of you. You helped out more. You followed the rules as best you could. You checked in on me as a parent checks in on their child. I appreciate all of it more than you know, but I'll always be sorry you found yourself in that difficult position.

Seeing all my outward sadness since her death, it might appear to you that I think more about your sister than I do of you. It may even appear that I love your sister more than you. Nothing could be further from the truth...but I'm pretty sure you already know that. I think you understand that when all we have left of someone is our memories, we may choose to spend more time with our thoughts than before.

I also think you know just how much I am grateful for each and every day that I have to spend with you. I have tried very hard over these past few years to show that to you, and despite the pain – or perhaps because of the pain – we have grown a stronger, deeper bond of love and trust between us. We have all witnessed firsthand the fragility of life, and we are reminded that our relationships with each other – and those we love – are what matter most. That is a wonderful gift your sister bestowed upon us that I know will last our lifetimes.

So if I have tears in my eyes this Mother's Day, I hope you know it is just the overflowing love I feel for all of you – including your sister – leaking out of me. And while I wish with all my broken heart that she were here with you, it is all of you that help mend that heart each and every day with all the love you continue to give to me. I can only hope you will also feel my love for you each and every day of your lives.

Love, Mom

Source: www.opentohope.com

A Trip in June


By Tim Purk in memory of his daughter Emma

*I went to the station
They said they had Your Things
I didn't understand why
They would have Your Things
Or what those things would or could be
So I went to the station
And they handed me a Large Plastic Bag
It wasn't too heavy
Not as heavy as my Feet seemed
Or my heart
I said "Thank You" and signed
The too many forms For Your Things
I took the Large Plastic Bag
To the car
I should have waited to open it
Just until I got home
But I didn't
I opened it there in the car
Alone with my thoughts of
What the Bag Held
I was surprised at what
Was there
Your Leather Handbag
The Too Expensive One
You had wished for
Longed for
But never dared hope for
Your Leather Handbag
The strap Torn Twisted Hard
No longer soft upon your shoulder
Dark, dried memories
I opened Your Bag
I NEVER opened Your Bag before
It was yours
Even when you said it was OK
I would bring it to you to
Get Whatever
Now I couldn't ask
But I did anyway
It seemed OK for some reason
Papers for the New Office Furniture*



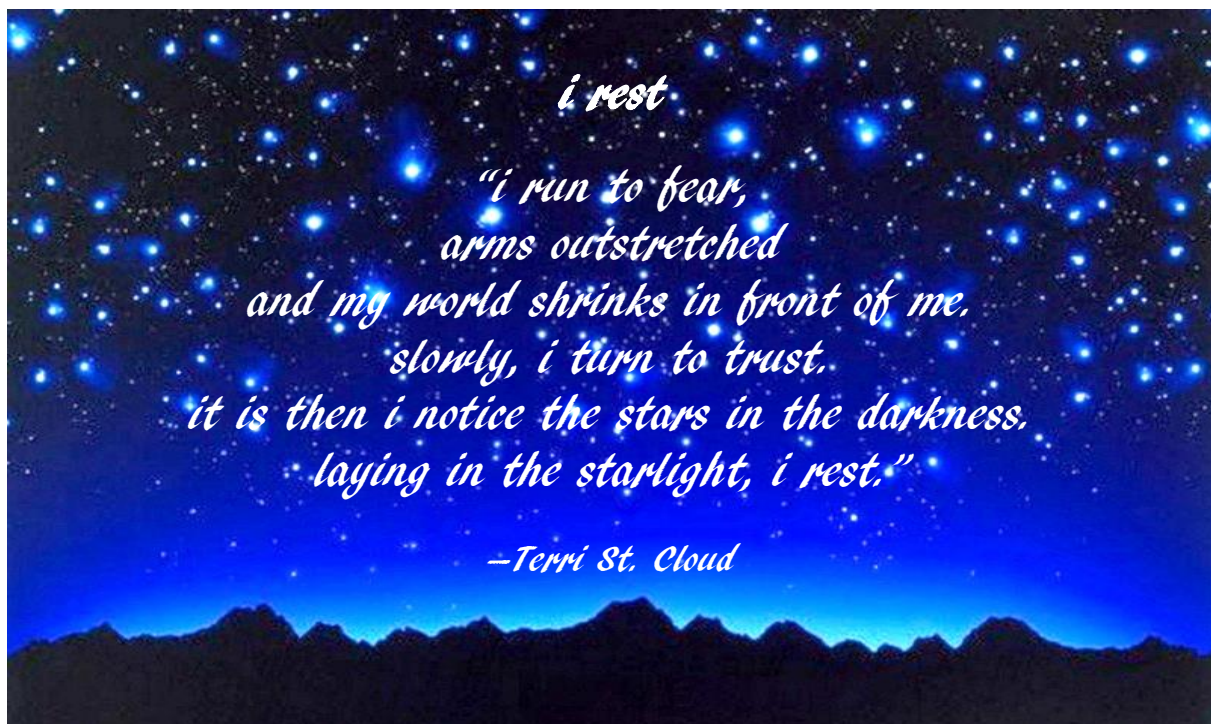
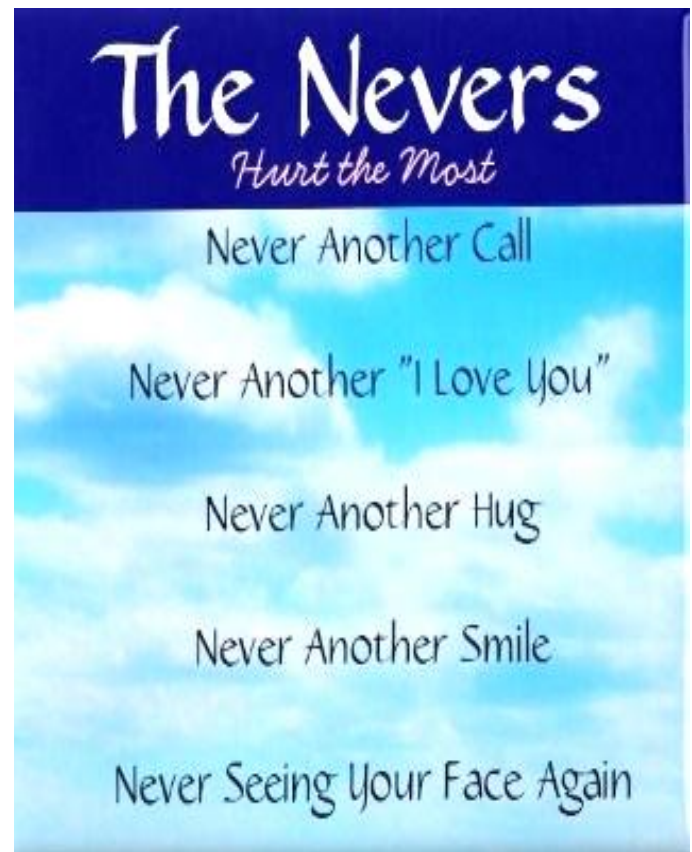
*I'm not sure that I'm ok,
Don't even think I'm fine,
I'm empty on the inside,
But not inside my mind.
My mind can't stop thinking,
What more could I have done,
I really can't stop wondering,
Where did everything go wrong.
I'm not really here at all,
Just the shell is left to see,
I have become someone,
I never thought I'd be.
A Grieving Father*

By Liza McCann



*In a father's heart
a child's memory
lives on...*

*Receipts from That Day
Your wallet
Driver's License
Social Security Card
College ID
Your Emergency Credit Card - Never used
And a piece from a dance program
Folded Carefully There –
The Creative Pause
But it wasn't a pause
My world had stopped
Just like your heart Stopped
Your Things
Now mine to care for
Clean Repair Restore Soft again
And give to your sister
She needed something to
Carry her memories
I never felt good
About going into Your Bag
But I held onto that pause
That Creative Pause
And shared the words
To help us all find our way
Back to ourselves
And onward
To other pauses
Along the Way.*



I'M STILL A MOTHER EVEN IF MY SON IS NO LONGER LIVING

By Angela Miller

Mother's Day can be a wonderful day for many women. A day of celebration, honor and love. But for those of us who are mothers of children gone too soon, Mother's Day is often filled with dread, sorrow and insatiable longing. It's marked by a visceral ache that spills from our heart to the depths of our bones. It's punctuated by an ever-present hole in our hearts, in our lives, so deep and wide, that no one and nothing can fill it.

Our arms are empty, yet we long for them to be full. We are mothers, but the world often forgets- especially if we no longer have living children to carry and hold outside our hearts.

"It's hard being a bereaved mother on Mother's Day, being a mother to a child who is no longer living."



As bereaved mothers, our deepest cry and longing is for our motherhood to be honored and recognized. For *all* our children, in heaven or on earth, to be remembered. Honored. Celebrated. For someone to yell from the rooftops, or to quietly whisper in the silence: Yes, *you are still a mother!!!*

You'd think this would be a simple request, something that would surely happen. You'd think anyone and everyone would give us this gift. But year after year, on this seemingly special day, bereaved mothers feel left out. We're left out of the pastors' sermons at church. Left out of the montage of flowers and chocolate and Mother's Day well-wishes. Left out of the conversations and celebrations of motherhood. Left out of the "Happy Mothers' Day" messages that flood social media.

And we bleed.

It's hard being a bereaved mother on Mother's Day, being a mother to a child who is no longer living. By hard, I mean torturous, and even that word falls short.

You want your child recognized by name, validated as a real person who lived. You want someone to step in and offer to carry a piece of your pain for just a minute, an hour, a day- especially on *this* day. This day that is supposed to honor and celebrate *all* mothers. You want a shining soul to see you, to truly get it, (for even just one second.) You want a brave and daring heart to compassionately climb in the ditch with you, lie down beside you, and just *be with* you, smack in the middle of your whirlpool of Mother's Day tears.

The sad truth? There are few who can do this. And even fewer who will.



"We know on Mother's Day people will forget how to count. All our children. (In my case that only means counting up to three.)"

I remember my first Mother's Day after the death of my only son like it was yesterday. Every cell in my body was dreading the day. The mere thought of Mother's Day filled me with palpable anxiety from the tips of my hair all the way down to my toes.

You see, as loss moms we know and anticipate that the world will forget us. We know. We know because it happens all day, every day in our post-loss life. Our motherhood denied. Ignored. Stomped on. Crushed. Not recognized, honored or even simply stated. We know on Mother's Day people will forget how to count. All our children. (In my case that only means counting up to three.) We know our children gone too soon will no longer be included in the routine '*how-many-kids-do you-have*' count. We know the gaping hole in our family tree will go unnoticed. We know the most important names will be missing from our Mother's Day cards. We know it's going to happen. Our children, forgotten- their existence, denied.

And yet? No amount of preparing prepares the broken heart for the excruciating pain of more salt poured in its wounds. Even if it is with the best of intentions. It burns.

Knowing our motherhood and our children won't be recognized does not make it one ounce more bearable. At all. In fact, it makes the anticipation of, and the day itself, filled with dread.

The thought of "celebrating" Mother's Day feels impossible. Surviving it is generally the goal. And even that feels like a lofty one. The Mother's Day landmines are too many to count.

For some, staying in bed with the covers overhead until the day passes is the most reasonable solution.

Having your motherhood ignored on a daily basis is torture; but on Mother's Day, the one day of the year all mothers should be celebrated, honored and recognized? There aren't words for the ache, for the pain of being forgotten, for the dread of knowing you will be.

...

All I wanted my first Mother's Day after the death of my son, was simple: for someone to remember him, for someone to remember I was a Mother, with a capital-M. To have both my motherhood and my son acknowledged was the only gift I wanted and needed that year. For anyone to kindly say, "Yes, you are still a mother." For someone to say, "I see you. I love you. You are an amazing mother to your precious son."

Unfortunately, most people didn't remember that year. Most people didn't remember I ever had a son. Even though it had only been a few short months since he had walked the earth beside me. Most people forgot I was ever a mother, and still a mother, on a day that ironically was in fact founded by bereaved mothers themselves.

The world's message to me was loud and clear: "No, you are not still a mother."

"You will always be your precious child's mother. Always. Even though heaven and earth separate you, even if no one remembers, even if the world tells you you're not."



That year I received one Mother's Day card. One.

It came from someone I didn't even know well, but let me tell you, that card made my year. It made my life. It made breathing a little easier, a little lighter, every hour of that wretched day, and every day for the rest of that year. Inside the fibers of that paper held hope.

I still have that card. And I will always keep it. That one acquaintance decided to step out in bravery and in love to acknowledge what no one else could or would: not only was I still a mother, but I always would be. Always.

It was a message my heart longed for and desperately needed to hear. One I clung to and cling to still. That \$3.99 Mother's Day card became my lifeline.

It gilded the cracks of my heart with love. With honor. With pride. To be acknowledged as the mother of my precious son still- and always- was the gift of all gifts.

Someone finally saw me, all of me, and my broken open heart will never, ever forget it.

To every courageous loss mama, with an aching heart and empty arms, I leave you with this: Yes, you are a still a mother, and you always, always will be. The love you two share is forever, just as your motherhood is forever. No one can take that away from you. Not today, not on Mother's Day, not ever. You will always be your precious child's mother. Always. Even though heaven and earth separate you, even if no one remembers, even if the world tells you you're not.

You are.

You are.

You are.



<https://bereavedparentsusa.org/gathering-home/>

2017 Workshops

The Gathering Committee is excited to announce some of the workshops for the 2017 Gathering.

Why Doesn't He Grieve Like Me? – Ron Kelly

Awareness Brings Understanding – Ron Kelly

Is Healing Really Possible? If so, how? – Tom Zuba

Brave Enough to be Vulnerable: How sharing your messy story can lead to healing - Anna Whitson-Donaldson

The Roots of Resilience - Finding the Strength, Seeing the Beauty – Kelly Buckley

Music and Other Proven Grief Relievers – Dr. Doug & BJ Jensen

A Survivors Guide To A Child's Suicide – Dr. Doug & BJ Jensen

7 Essentials My Son's Death Has Taught Me – Nisha R. Zenoff

How to Help a Grieving Teen – Carolyn Zahnow

Grief Transformed: A Family's Experience with Sibling Grief - Mary Jane Gandour

Complicated Grief: Am I Going Insane? – Deana Martin

A New Tradition to Honor Your Child – Joy Hagens

The Grief Journey - Grief for Bereaved Parents under 2 years and over 10 years – Pat Dodd

Who Am I Now? & Who Am I Now? The Soul Journey – Sara Ruble

The Sole/Soul Journey – Sara Ruble

Fear: My Life With It and Without It – Sara Ruble

Seasoned Grievors and Now Childless - Panel

Now Childless and Bereaved Five Years or Less – Panel

Soothing Grief With Eternal Love – Dr. Lynn Migdal

Signs from Our Loved Ones – Claire Ann Stevenson & Panel

Focus on Five – Becky Russell

Transforming Tragedy into Triumph – Michelle Cottom

Has Your faith Been Shattered?; & The Many Facets of Forgiveness; & Until Death Do Us Part – Laura Diehl

Journaling, Sharing and Healing – Shannon Spruill

Discovering a New Spirituality for Grieving & Ten Healing Practices of Your Spirituality – Chris Mulligan

Murder and the Legal System - Beverly Ruane & Panel

Healing Choices: The Gratitude Pill; & Painted Rock Memorials; & Lasting Memories - Janice Meisenhelder

From Pain to Purpose: When Lightning Hits Twice - Michelle A. Wilson Green

Creating a Movement: It Takes a Village (and a whole lot of effort and heart) - Joyal Mulheron

Transforming Your Life After the Death of Your Child - Donna Mancuso

Focus on Five – Becky Russell

"As We Begin to Thaw" – Lora Krum

Soothing Grief With Eternal Love – Dr. Lynn Migdal

Forgiveness and Freedom - Omar Freyre-Montero

Don't Be a "Waster of Sorrows" – Peter Wilcox

Why We Should Share Our Stories - Kelly Kittel

The Healing Power of Spiritual Connection With Our Children - Rachel Pearson

What Do I Do with My Love: Creating a Lasting Legacy after Your Child's Death - Rose Carlson

Plus Workshops for Siblings!

An Excerpt from:

REMEMBERING ABI: HOW LUCY HONE LIVES WITH THE LOSS OF HER DAUGHTER

By Lucy Hone (Author of *Resilient Grieving*)



... it used to be accepted wisdom that successfully adapting to the loss of a loved one required us to sever our bonds with the dead; there was no moving on until we'd done so. But contemporary bereavement research suggests the opposite to be true: the bereaved who somehow manage to cultivate an ongoing connection with the dead seem to grieve more easily. Tom Attig, past president for the Association of Death Education and Counseling, who has written and taught extensively about death, bereavement, and grieving, believes that the key to effective grieving lies in making the transition from loving someone in the present to loving them in their absence. "We can continue to 'have' what we have 'lost', that is, a continuing, albeit transformed, love for the deceased.

We have not truly lost our years of living with the deceased or our memories. Nor have we lost their influences, the inspirations, the values, and the meanings embodied in their lives. We can actively incorporate these into new patterns of living." In other words, we can work out what their legacy is.

I won't say that working out our Abi's own particular legacy – the ways she shaped us, the impact her short life has had on us – has been easy, but it has helped me process her loss. Considering it now, I realize I have developed several different methods of keeping Abi a part of my life.

Firstly, I have certain rituals that remind me of her. I wrap my wet hair up in her old Barbie towel after swimming, just as she used to, I wear her necklace when I need extra strength, we continue to celebrate her birthday at the same spot on the beach each year, surrounded by her friends and eating B.B.Q. Kettle chips in her honor. When I spy something that reminds me of her, that I know she would love, I post a photo on Instagram, accompanied by the hashtag *#abiwouldhavelovedthis* – an idea picked up from the fantastic online grief forum, *What's Your Grief*.

Similarly, I have developed rituals to remind me of Sally. At Christmas time I made a wreath out of wild foliage, gathered in her memory. Each weekend I wander down the lane, clippers in hand, plucking odd bits of greenery, grapenuts and wild berries to place in a jam jar back in my kitchen – the process and the outcome both keeping her present in our everyday lives. I frequently walk out to the local headland she loved to run on – giving me time and space to think of her. I bake her recipes, treasuring her handwritten notes.

Keeping some of Abi's things around the house has also helped. I simply don't feel the need to eradicate all evidence of her from our lives – so her little girl sunglasses still hang from the rear view mirror of Trevor's truck, ladybug hairgrips sit alongside mine in the bathroom cupboard, I snuggle up to watch TV in the fluffy pajama jacket I bought for her last birthday. We had her most-loved sweatshirt and two winter jerseys turned into cushions, and are in the process of framing precious scribbled notes she wrote to her brothers and us. I have a notebook she gave me, a cup she painted, the pillowcases from her bed. It's not much I know, but her presence shines through these often-used items, and the regular practice of gathering in Sally's memory keeps us connected.

Please, don't think me in denial. I am not. I just don't see the need to rid our family home – her home – of every last possession when they bring me comfort and remind me that yes, I did have a daughter, her presence was real, not imaginary, and she brought so much joy to my life. American researchers Michael Norton and Francesca Gino have demonstrated, through a series of studies, that creating personalized, frequently practiced, rituals significantly helps the bereaved

cope with loss. Their research shows that, far from being public or religious performances, bereavement rituals are more commonly everyday acts, conducted in private, designed to connect us to the dead. Their work suggests that engaging in rituals helps restore a sense of control and order at a time when we feel so utterly powerless; these deliberately controlled gestures help counteract the turbulence and chaos that comes with loss. What's more, they say that practicing such rituals has been shown to reduce negative emotions while increasing positive ones. Hooray for that.

In short, rituals provide something of a long-term solution, enabling us to grieve and maintain normal functioning simultaneously. They are the answer to moving forward while retaining the dead in our lives.

In terms of her personal legacy, I have pondered what Abi taught us long and hard. What did we learn from having her in our lives for such an agonizingly short time? Addressing such weighty philosophical questions is regarded as a very normal part of grieving in today's bereavement literature. The fact that death (particularly sudden death) frequently induces a crisis of meaning is well understood. How do we go on living in a world where such things can happen? How do we incorporate such tragic events into our personal life stories?

My own way, like any other grieving mother, is unique. If I can channel my professional skills and personal experience to help others cope with grief, then that goes some way to comforting me; to dragging something useful from the terrible loss we have all felt since the deaths of Abi, Ella and Sally. Staying miserable forever was just not an option for me. I have two beautiful teenage boys to live and care for, and a voice in my head urging me not to "lose what you have to what you have lost". These things propelled me to assume an active role on this terrible journey of grief.

Ultimately, I chose life, not death and hope to help others do the same.

*I think I miss you most
in spring...*

