



MID HUDSON NEW YORK CHAPTER

Newsletter

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

Kathy Corrigan Chapter Leader

www.bereavedparentsusa.org

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2015

Peace to You



In the New Year

PLEASE JOIN US FOR OUR NEXT MEETINGS

Thursday, January 15th -- Topic: **Potluck Supper in the Dining Room – Families Welcome!**

Thursday, February 5th – Topic: **Scrapbooking Session – bring pictures**

NEW!! Sibling Group led by Janine Wheeler

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

Call Kathy (845) 462-2825 for information



FACING THE NEW YEAR WHEN YOU ARE BEREAVED

When we are grieving, it is hard enough to live each day as it comes. It can be daunting to face a whole new year stretching out in front of us. We may be afraid of what the new year might bring. We may worry whether or not we can handle any more challenges. Our current experience of emptiness and loneliness may make us reluctant to face a new year.

We might say to ourselves, "I used to be so busy. I used to feel so needed, so useful. Now it seems there's nothing but empty space and empty time." It's bad enough to wake in the morning not sure what we'll do with the day; what will we do with a whole year?

Longing to recover the past can sometimes make us resistance to accepting the new year. The past was where we were comfortable, where we felt safe, felt good. Grief burdens us today and we fear the new year won't hold anything different for us. We pine for the person we miss and the precious past we shared. We think about how it was, and wish we were back there.

Approach of a new year may mean different things for different mourners. Whether we welcome, dread or ignore a new year probably depends on where we are in our grief process. The question is not whether, but how grief will show up, how we'll work with it.

If our loss was recent, sudden or unexpected, we will most likely still feel in shock. We may feel like we're living a bad dream or living another person's life and be trying desperately to get back to our "old" life. The new year matters little. We get up in the morning, put one foot in front of the other, breathe and tell our story of what happened. Writing and talking about different aspects of what happened over and over may help, until we find we don't need to tell the story in such detail anymore. Feeling a little numb or detached keeps us safe while we wake gradually to the reality that life and our world is not how we knew it or thought it would be.

Therese Rando, a noted grief therapist and author, describes grieving as a learning process. Each minute lived with our loved one taught our brain how to operate and what to expect. Each new challenge, like doing the taxes, fixing things, and going into a new year, becomes a fresh occasion to learn that our loved one isn't here and discover what that means for us. New challenges continue, bringing fresh pain even well into the grieving process.

If we have courageously worked with our grief over time, we may look to this new year with interest and wonder what it will hold for us. We might even feel eager to throw open our door and welcome this new year. The swelling around the wound of our loss has gone down some. We find comfort and joy in knowing we did all we could and that we loved well. We were enriched by our love and now know deeper compassion for all who suffer. We recognize life is a gift to enjoy with whoever crosses our path. We want to go and do and see for both of us what we'd hoped to do together. We don't know details, have no assurance about what's coming, but we hope for good.

Even if we're scared and lonely and long for the past, we can still open the door a crack to this new year.

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Tips to help face the upcoming new year:

- *We begin by getting needed rest. If we're still exhausted from caregiving or from acute grieving, we need to focus on physical recovery. We may need to talk with our doctor about how to rebuild ourselves physically.*
- *We also need to give ourselves mental rest. We can replace negative thoughts with positive affirmations about ourselves. We can soothe ourselves with music, prayer, uplifting literature, tears and laughter.*
- *We can notice any desires stirring within ourselves and find small practical ways to give ourselves new pleasure.*
- *We can get the support we need by attending a support group, by talking with friends and family who can listen to us and share our memories.*
- *We can seek spiritual support from a local minister, rabbi, priest, imam.*
- *Most important, we'll find courage to live into the future, into the new year, by living in the present, one day at a time, doing the best we can to care for ourselves and others today.*

www.vitas.com

Worth Repeating...

WHY DO I COME TO BEREAVED PARENTS MEETINGS?

A family member recently asked me why I continue to come to Bereaved Parents meetings. She said, "After all, it's been 5 years since your son died. Don't you find it depressing to go to those meetings?"

I stopped and thought for just a minute... It is incredibly sad to hear the stories of loss and pain, but it does not depress me. I ache for those families whose loss is more recent, where the pain is a heart savagely torn into raw pieces and where the pain seems relentless and like it will last forever. But had I not had the support of this group, I wonder if I would have made it, and kept my sanity, through the past 5 years. I know for certain that my grief journey, as hard as it has been, was made easier, and my burden lighter, because it was shared by those who truly understood my loss and who constantly reassured me that I was not losing my mind...I was just grieving.

I have personally been blessed by a supportive family and by loyal friends at church and at work who, even after 5 years, send me cards or flowers or call or e-mail to see how I am doing. And I am grateful for their support. But somehow there is nothing quite like the hug of another bereaved parent and the tears that mingle with mine as we grieve together the death of

our own child and our friend's child. I can't explain it. I can only be grateful to have experienced this amazing support that has made this unending grief journey bearable. I can share laughter and tears at the same time with parents who understand the guilt that accompanies those first moments of laughter. It seems like a betrayal of our children... even though we know that they would want us to go on and they would not want us to be miserable.

A friend who was recently widowed told me just today that she was so sorry that I had the grief experience to be able to comfort her and yet she was inexplicably comforted by the fact that she was not alone in her grief... that there were others who understood even a portion of what she was feeling. I know what she means. I felt that way the first time I came to a Bereaved Parents meeting and every time I have come since then.

I would not have chosen the pain of this loss and yet I would not want those whose children have recently died to not have the loving support that others gave to me when I thought I could not stand another day, another minute of the pain of our loss. And so we continue to come monthly... to meet, to hug, to cry, to laugh, to listen and to try to understand another's story.

And we come to love each other's children that we never got to meet. Their faces become almost as familiar as our own children's countenance and so incredibly dear because they were so special to our friends. In sharing our children's lives and their deaths, they continue to live on through our stories and our pictures and we are comforted as we grieve together.

~ Charlotte Miller



A NEW YEAR...

A time for looking ahead and not behind; a time for faith and not despair; a time for long great gulps of hopeful expectations.

Drink deeply, my friend, so that fortified with the promises it brings this year will keep you near fresh springs of healing love where you may come to weave old and loving memories with new understandings and acceptance... and find peace.

~Shirley Ottman



Healing doesn't mean
the damage never
existed. It means the
damage no longer
controls our lives.

Good friends help you to find important things when you have lost them...

Your smile...

your hope...

your courage....



"To remember brings a painful joy.
'Tis a human thing, love, a holy thing,
to love what death has touched."

AN AFRICAN ELEGY

WE ARE THE MIRACLES THAT GOD MADE
TO TASTE THE BITTER FRUIT OF TIME.
WE ARE PRECIOUS.

AND ONE DAY OUR SUFFERING
WILL TURN INTO THE WONDERS OF THE EARTH.

THERE ARE THINGS THAT BURN ME NOW
WHICH TURN GOLDEN WHEN I AM HAPPY.
DO YOU SEE THE MYSTERY OF OUR PAIN?

THAT WE BEAR POVERTY
AND ARE ABLE TO SING AND DREAM SWEET THINGS

AND THAT WE NEVER CURSE THE AIR WHEN IT IS WARM
OR THE FRUIT WHEN IT TASTES SO GOOD
OR THE LIGHTS THAT BOUNCE GENTLY ON THE WATERS?
WE BLESS THINGS EVEN IN OUR PAIN.
WE BLESS THEM IN SILENCE.

THAT IS WHY OUR MUSIC IS SO SWEET.
IT MAKES THE AIR REMEMBER.

THERE ARE SECRET MIRACLES AT WORK
THAT ONLY TIME WILL BRING FORTH.
I TOO HAVE HEARD THE DEAD SINGING.

AND THEY TELL ME THAT
THIS LIFE IS GOOD
THEY TELL ME TO LIVE IT GENTLY
WITH FIRE, AND ALWAYS WITH HOPE.
THERE IS WONDER HERE

AND THERE IS SURPRISE
IN EVERYTHING THE UNSEEN MOVES.
THE OCEAN IS FULL OF SONGS.
THE SKY IS NOT AN ENEMY.
DESTINY IS OUR FRIEND.

BEN OKRI

"Grief can heighten
our gratitude
as we cease taking
the gifts
life bestows
on us for granted"

- Roger Bertheausen



BY LINDSEY HENKE

It's been a year. 365 days, 8760 hours, 525600 minutes or 31,536,000 seconds have passed since my daughter has died. The daily task of making it through each grief filled moment has been trying. Even after a year, I still wonder, "Why did this happen?" "What was the point?" or "Could it have been different?" Then I realize, if I keep asking myself these questions, I might never find an answer. After reflecting on a year of grief, I could tell you lessons I have learned, but I believe each person's path is different as they walk through their own journey of grief. So instead, I think I will reflect on this past year of grief by just continuing to ask myself questions, but ones I might be able to answer.

1. Did I give myself permission to grieve freely, at my own pace, and in the ways I needed to? Yes! I took as much time as I needed and grieved in ways that were unique to me! I walked the road of grief at my own pace and with whom I chose to share the experience. I embraced my grief and did not allow others to drive the direction of my grieving or get in my way.

2. Did I give myself permission to fully experience love for my child? Yes! I learned that even though I could not hold my child in my arms any longer that my love for her still grows each day in my heart. I gave myself permission to share the love I have for her with others and learned that I can still have a loving relationship with my daughter even after her death. Love does not die.

3. Did I allow for moments of happiness without guilt? This was harder, as there were times when I felt being happy was being disloyal to my daughter. But I then realized that my daughter would not have wanted an unhappy mommy in life, why would she

want an unhappy mommy in death? She could no longer live so I learned to live life, with all its joyful moments, for both of us.

4. Was I honest with others about my feelings? Yes and No. There were days in my grief where I could not tell another person how I truly felt because if I did I would have crumbled to the ground in pieces. On those days I was not strong enough to let others see the pain, to touch it with their unknowing finger tips. These were the days I lied and wore the fake smile I got so good at putting on and simply said, "I'm fine." Then there were the other days, the days when I felt sturdy enough to handle whatever response I might receive from others when I shared with them my grief. There were also the days, when I just could not hide my sadness, pain, confusion, anger, and frustration any longer that my emotions were so true and raw that they just seeped out of me for all to see.

5. Did I honor my child in ways I chose to? Yes! I honored my dear daughter in every way I could think of from performing random acts of kindness in her name, walking 5k's, donating to baby loss organizations, writing about my grief, writing her letters, creating memory boxes, volunteering for child loss causes, and more writing. I did it all, and I will continue to do it, in the ways that I CHOOSE too! But after a year has passed I find that how I honor her does not have to be so active. I can honor her by just holding a thought for her every day or visiting a special spot that reminds me of her. It doesn't matter how I do it, it doesn't matter if I do it at all. All that matters is that if I decide to honor my child, I do it in a way that helps me heal, and in a way that I choose.

6. Did I embrace my pain in order to release it? Yes, but it was hard. At first I did not want to face my pain, the grief, the suffering that comes from losing a child. At first I wanted to crawl into a hole and die too. But slowly, and with each passing day I began to see that leaning into the hurt helped me heal. The pain was great because the love IS great. Eventually, I was able to accept the pain as an indication of love.

7. Did I open my heart up to healing moments, once I was ready? Yes, but healing now takes on a new meaning. Healing now means, learning to live with the grief, to wear the scar on my heart that love and loss has left behind but still feel the ache and see the ugliness of where the grief entered me. Healing also means allowing myself to enjoy parts of life again, without the guilt, without pain, but learning to let laughter, love and all things good creep back into my life. To even allow hope for the future to enter my thoughts again.

8. Did I go on living life in the aftermath of the death of my child? Yes! And I think I am a gosh-dang-hero for doing it and so are you! The quote my sister sent me says it all, "Anyone can slay a dragon,

she told me, but try waking up every morning and loving the world all over again. That's what takes a real hero." Not sure who it's by, but it is beautiful and has been my mantra for getting through each day in the aftermath of loss.

So it's been a year. 365 days, 8760 hours, 525600 minutes or 31,536,000 seconds have passed since my daughter has died. There are still questions, but more importantly there is still me! I am still breathing, I am still standing, I am still living, I am still loving, and I am the REAL HERO of my story. That is the real and only answer to all of the questions.

(P.S. if you are still breathing, still standing, still living, and still loving then you are the REAL HERO of your story too.) Editor's note: This applies no matter how much time has passed. KC

2014 ANNUAL CANDLE LIGHTING CEREMONY

"We are the parents whose children have died..."



At the Rombout Fire House in Fishkill, MHBPUA gathered to honor and remember our children, siblings and grandchildren who died too soon. Our **Annual Candle Lighting** held on December 14th coincided with the TCF World Wide Candle Lighting where at 7:00 in every time zone, families gathered in remembrance of children who have died, but will never be forgotten.

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

ALWAYS AND FOREVER

Written and read by Lori Canter

I never would have thought
that I could survive....

But I did.

I am surviving.

I don't know how

I've managed to go
on living without you.

But I have.

There are good days,
when I feel strong
and can think of you
with happy memories
that make me smile.

There are difficult days
when I feel sad
and cry... feeling
your loss just
like it was
yesterday.

Some days especially
approaching holidays
are days filled with
uncertainty and disbelief.

A balancing act
of the good memories
and my internal sadness.

A very fine line with
just about anything being
able to tip that emotional scale.

There is only one thing
that I am sure of anymore,
one thing that is true
to my heart.... my

longing for you will
never end and my love
for you will continue to grow.

I am so thankful for
having you in my life.

I am grateful that I
had you as long as I did.

I will always cherish every
memory. You will forever
be my son and I will always
love being your MOM.

So tonight we have gathered
together and with all of the other
bereaved parents
from around the world.

Tonight we are not alone.

Together we light our candles.

Together we remember.

Together we honor our children
with so much undying love.....

ALWAYS AND FOREVER

Grief can awaken us to new values and new and deeper appreciations. Grief can cause us to reprioritize things in our lives, to recognize what's really important and put it first. Grief can heighten our gratitude as we cease taking the gifts life bestows on us for granted. Grief can give us the wisdom of being with death. Grief can make death the companion on our left who guides us and gives us advice. None of this growth makes the loss good and worthwhile, but it is the good that comes out of the bad.

~ Roger Bertschausen

