



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 2020



Please join us for our next meetings

Thursday, May 14th – Zoom Meeting

Thursday, June 4th -- TBA

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.

TO HEAL AGAIN by *Rusty Berkus*

You sit in the shadow of sorrow seeking, searching for the magic that will make the pain go away. Weep what you must weep, not only for this loss, but for all other losses you have sustained in this life. Surrender into the memory of what once was, and can no longer be. This winter of your life will pass, as all seasons do. Stay in your season of winteriness as long as need be, for everything you feel is appropriate.

- *There is no right way to grieve - there is just Your way*
- *It will take as long as it takes*
- *It is important to be ever so gentle, kind, loving and giving to yourself right now and to let others be ever so gentle, kind, loving and giving to you.*
- *Remember how deserving you are of gentleness, kindness, lovingness and givingness*
- *No one ever said it was easy to let go, let be, let life do what it is supposed to do*
- *Perhaps you feel you are the only one in the universe*
- *But out of your loss is an interconnectedness with all humanity - for you are One with everyone who has ever mourned*
- *When you live fully, your vulnerability takes you through the shadows of Winter where you feel you may never see the sun again*
- *To cease living fully because you fear the Winter shadow is never to see the sun at all*
- *Judge not the appearance of this loss*
- *Behind the darkest cloud of the dreary Winter chill is a Springtime begging to burst forth*
- *Bless this pain for it will bear its perfect gift to you in perfect time*
- *Out of your yearning for comfort, calm, growth and belief, out of an aching void, comes a divine mystical force*
- *It longs to thaw the frozen Winter of your grief*
- *For the invisible world of Spirit will be your greatest power with which to heal*
- *Know beyond all knowing that through the power of the spirit within you will befriend your highest Self*
- *The exquisiteness of this Friendship leads you to realms of compassion, humility and service - to a fulfillment you never knew existed*
- *Into a holy instant of Springtime - of harmony, creativity and the opportunity to once again master your life.*
- *Behold you will sit in the radiant sun without sorrow no longer seeking, searching for the magic that will make the pain go away - ready to love, to smile, to sing, to give, to heal again*
- *And you will have stopped asking why.*



FOR SIBLINGS

MEMORIES THAT MATTER

By Mark Mayfield

I REMEMBER him when we were kids, dreaming we were riding on Santa's sleigh instead of sitting on a piece of cardboard in the hallway of our house.

I REMEMBER climbing the hedges with him, & more than once tumbling to the ground when he gave me a push.

I REMEMBER the trip out West when he renamed our Ford Custom 500 the Stanley Steamer, because it kept overheating and blowing its top on our way up the Rocky Mountains.

I REMEMBER the security and comfort it gave me knowing he was standing beside me at the front of the sanctuary when we joined a new church.

I REMEMBER him playing a tape of rock music at Papa's house, and Papa saying he liked it. Papa was just being agreeable. I'm sure.

I REMEMBER how sad I was when he went off to college—and how happy I was when I joined him there a couple of years later.

I REMEMBER going with him to a restaurant to examine the fine craftsmanship of the remodeling job he had done on the place.

I REMEMBER how excited I was when he visited me in Washington. We were like kids again; he wanted to see the dinosaur bones in the Smithsonian. We were both amazed at the sight.

There are more than memories. There were times in our lives when the world seemed right. Larry died November 11. Suddenly, the world didn't seem so right anymore.

I've searched for him since then—in the cemetery, in his old room at our parents' house, in photographs, in letters he left behind, in quiet hours at my house.

I've cried, I've prayed, I've laughed. I've gotten angry at the unfairness of it all.

It's true that life does go on. And it's just as true that part of you dies with a loved one; certainly part of my life stopped in time with Larry on November 11. Yet even in death, Larry has taught me a few things about life.

It's incredible how insignificant things like ambition, career, and possessions can be at times like these. It's just as stunning how important other things become—faith, love and family. They go hand in hand.

As life goes marching on, I can see Larry in the two-year old daughter he left behind and loved so much. If I listen closely enough, I can still hear him talking to her, babying her.

Larry Mayfield was my brother. I loved him here on earth. And I'll keep looking for him, until I see him again someday.

HOW TO COPE WITH BEREAVEMENT DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Grieving the loss of a loved one may be especially challenging right now.

Bereavement is a painful, stressful, and difficult journey at the best of times. But grieving the loss of a loved one may be especially challenging during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Why Does the Pandemic Create Additional Strain for the Bereaved?

We live in highly uncertain times, and we are surrounded by fear, anxiety, and illness. But this pandemic will be especially stressful if already grieving the loss of a loved one. Some of the reasons for increased stress may include:

- Being less able to receive in-person support from friends and family, potentially leading to a greater sense of isolation and loneliness.
- A decrease in activity levels which may lead to more "thinking" time and a reduced ability to use hobbies and interests as helpful distractions.
- High levels of social, health, and occupational uncertainty, reducing stability in life as you grieve, which can create difficulty planning for the future.
- More frequent reminders about illness and death, including the fear that you will experience further loss.

There will be other stressful factors but, as we can see, the coping resources of a bereaved person are under severe strain in the context of the pandemic. You must have a clear game plan to help manage the additional challenges caused by COVID-19.

Coping Strategies

Here are some suggestions to help support your well-being while grieving during the pandemic:

- Acknowledge that grieving at this time is more challenging than coping with loss outside a health crisis. You have additional sources of stress to contend with, so you must practice self-compassion. Signs of self-criticism might come in the form of beliefs like "I should be doing better than this" or "I am failing to keep it together." Failing to acknowledge the additional stress associated with the pandemic runs the risk of blaming yourself for something that is out of your control.
- Staying connected to others is very important if you are grieving AND socially isolated. Often, we don't feel like talking to others after losing a loved one. If you lack this motivation, try to book times for phone calls and video chats. Arrange these conversations as appointments you must keep. Agree on times with people in advance so you are more likely to follow through.
- Alternate between "loss" and "restorative" activities. This idea comes from the dual-process approach to grief which says that people move between loss-related activities (e.g., looking at photos of the deceased, crying, talking about the person) and restorative exercises (e.g., making plans for the future, spending time on hobbies).
- Consider minimizing the time you spend watching the news. It is sensible to be aware of major announcements by government and health officials. Outside of that, don't watch the news if it increases your stress levels.

You might find it useful to think about how your lost loved one would like you to respond in these circumstances. You can use this exercise to help generate coping strategies.

Alternatively, if you could talk to this person in 10 years, what would you like to say about how you coped during the pandemic? These final two strategies may not suit everyone, so only use them if they are right for you.

Summing Up

Everyone is living under difficult and stressful circumstances. The pandemic will be especially challenging for the bereaved. Having a clear coping plan is essential, and some of the strategies suggested above may form a part of that plan.



From <https://www.facebook.com/RiversInTheOcean/>

Many people sharing with me that they are under a huge stress of uncertainty and fear. While I don't have a perfect recipe for the current situation, I have several advices [sic] for myself to stay strong, centered and develop greater relationships with my inner guidance. It is a rather simple list of practices that I follow to stay balanced physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

1. Start and finish every day with gratitude. You have many blessings in your life that are taken for granted. Go over everything that is dear to your heart and give thanks for its presence in your life.
2. Listen to and take care of your body. Very often the rush of everyday life and its endless chores shift your attention away from the body needs and signals that it sends.
3. Stay active, do yoga, tai chi, Qigong. Start to move energies and keep the body flexible. Go to the nature to spend some time with its healing beauty. Learn symbolic language of its living beings. Pay attention to signs and learn to understand their message.
4. Nurture your body with non-processed foods, take vitamins. Nature is a powerful source of medicine. Educate yourself how plants and elements can help you with your issues. Find what resonates with your body. Don't fall for advertisements, do your own research. Plant your own medicinal garden, even it is just a window garden.
5. Act. Find a way to help others. Don't hide, you know your gifts, make them available for others. Any act of kindness reverberates through the lives of many. Amaze somebody by your generosity, don't expect any rewards. The world is drastically changing, embrace changes, evolve your understanding, expand your consciousness and always care for the well-being of all life.
6. Create rituals to keep your spirit in alignment, purified and empowered. Any ritual with good intentions will do. Meditate. Be mindful and present. Purge out all negative patterns of fear, guilt and unforgiveness. Open your heart to compassion and connect with your soul essence. Embrace the power of love, witness its depth and become it!
7. Start some creative projects - draw, paint, write, play music. Find the joys in your life. Create something new! You have a power of Creation!

A MOTHER'S CHORUS: GRIEVING A CHILD ON MOTHER'S DAY

This letter is not written by one bereaved mother, but an entire chorus of mothers. Their words are not at all the same, but their message blends together to create a mournful, harmonious, and beautiful song.



Dear Friend,

I miss my child every day. This grief of mine will never leave me, and honestly, why should it? I love my child more than I ever could have imagined, and yes, I do mean present tense *“love”*. It is excruciating knowing that my child will never return to my arms. However, a mother’s love for her child doesn’t require physical presence; this can be proven by the fact that most mothers love their children well before they are even born. I will love my child forever, and therefore, I will grieve my child forever. This is just how it goes.

I know it’s difficult for some people to understand my ongoing grief, I guess because they want me to *“get better”* or return to *“normal.”* However, I actually *am* normal. I’m just different now. I believe those who say they want to support me on difficult days like Mother’s Day, but part of this is accepting me as a grieving mother who will always love her deceased child. Again, this is just how it goes.

My grief is like the weather. Somedays it’s calm, quiet, maybe even a little sunny. Other days it’s a devastating storm that makes me feel angry, exhausted, raw, and empty. I wake up in the morning and wonder – *“Am I even alive at all? And if so, how am I supposed to make it through this day?”* This is why when you ask me how I feel about Mother’s Day, all I can say that it depends. Of course, I’m going to try my best to cope with the day, but while you’re hoping that your Mother’s Day picnic doesn’t get spoiled by actual rain, I’ll be praying that the grief storms stay at bay.

Like many things in a grieving mother’s life, Mother’s Day is bittersweet to the nth degree. On the one hand, I feel immense joy because I was blessed with my child and I feel gratitude for every moment I was given with them. On the other hand, the pain of missing my child – my greatest happiness, my life’s purpose, and my best friend – is intense.

Bereaved mothers live with so many of these confusing contrasts. They are like undercurrents that tug at and toss about our hearts and minds. I am the mother of a child who is not alive. Perhaps a child who you’ve never met. You can’t ask me about their school year, or how they’re liking piano lessons, or whether they’ve chosen a major in college. In my mind, I’ve imagined my child doing all these things. People don’t realize that I grieve each of my child’s milestones, knowing they didn’t get the opportunity to experience these special days. Most people don’t know how to validate my child’s place in the world or my ongoing role as my child’s mother. This is a difficult concept for others to grasp. Heck, sometimes even I grapple with the answers to questions like *“Do you have children?”* and *“How many?”* I know many bereaved mothers, like me, long for these questions to have straightforward answers.

Sadly, mothers who have experienced the death of their *only* child may even wonder whether they get to call themselves a mother at all in broader society. So, in addition to the pain of grief, these mothers have to cope with a sense of being left out, forgotten, and ignored. Can you imagine how that might feel? I think it must be like being stabbed through the heart and when you turn to others for help, they say *“What blood?”* *“What knife?”*



Then, for mothers who have surviving children, there is this gem of a comment – “*Don’t forget, you’re lucky to have other children.*” Please let me assure you, a mother does not forget *any* of her children. This mother loves each and every one of her unique and special children in unique and special ways, but one of her children has died and so her love for this child looks a little untraditional. Mothers do not have a finite amount of love to be shifted, divided, and spread around depending on the number of children they have on this Earth. So please be careful with your comments, because it’s difficult enough for grieving mothers who often feel torn between feeling joy and happiness for their living children and grief for the child who has died.

All that said, you asked me what it’s like to grieve a child on Mother’s Day, so here’s what I have to say:

This day will forever be hard for me. I live with an emptiness that no one can fill; so, I may be sad, I may be unsociable, and I may need to take a break to be by myself in a quiet place. Whatever shape my grief takes on this day, please allow me to feel the way I feel and please follow my lead.

Beyond that, acknowledge me as a mother. It makes me feel forgotten and as though my child has been forgotten when people act as though my child never existed. Also, I can sense that people feel uncomfortable talking about my child and I constantly feel like the elephant in the room, but it doesn’t have to be this way. Honestly, I find it really comforting when someone talks about my child. I love hearing their name spoken out loud! I love hearing stories about them. Maybe you know a story I’ve never heard, or maybe I’ve heard it a hundred times before, but it really doesn’t matter to me. Your acknowledgment alone is one of the greatest Mother’s Day gifts you could give me.

I guess while I’m offering my two cents, I also have something to say to my fellow bereaved mothers. No one has it all figured out, but I’ve learned a few lessons along the way. If you’re worried about Mother’s Day, you’re not alone. Try not to get overwhelmed or wrapped up in anxiety. You may actually find that the anticipation of the day is worse than the day itself. You may want to plan a whole day of activities just to stay busy, or you may feel like doing nothing at all. There is no “right” way to handle Mother’s Day – but do try to plan ahead a little. You may want to reach out to others who are struggling with the day and, if you can, it always helps to face the day with people who love and support you.

Whatever you do, believe you will make it through the day. With time, the grief storms will grow smaller and less frequent and you will find a little more balance and room to breathe. Believe you will be okay and have hope that in the future you will find yourself in a place where you can grieve and celebrate on Mother’s Day all at the same time.

Let’s take care of each other... <https://whatsyourgrief.com/>



MOTHER’S DAY & FATHER’S DAY

Mother’s Day and Father’s Day will soon be upon us and we will be remembering our children who are absent but yet so much a part of us, filling our hearts and stirring our memories.

Wishing each of you a peaceful day. Yes, as always, it will be bittersweet and for the recently bereaved, filled with sadness, but may it also be filled with hope of better days ahead.

We remember our children with gratitude for having given us that most precious of all gifts – their love.

FATHER'S DAY VOID



I spent two years interviewing men that have experienced the death of a child. As you can imagine, I heard a lot of heartbreaking stories. All were different, and all were bad. I also learned a lot about my own pain and suffering caused by the aftermath of burying two children. Those interviews, and my own hard lessons, are captured in my book *Grieving Dads: To the Brink and Back*.

I've tried to become an advocate of sorts for grieving dads. My goal is to make sure these men feel like they have the permission to grieve, to feel the impact and express their pain without society trying to hush them because the topic of a child's death is uncomfortable for those who haven't experienced it.

Because of my book and my advocacy, I receive a lot of requests to write Father's Day articles about the dark side of the day from the perspective of the guys who have had to bury a child. Is the day harder than most? Yes, but to us grieving dads, it's not much different than the holidays, birthdays, and death anniversaries. They are all difficult to navigate, and each one stirs similar, but different, emotions.

There isn't a day that goes by that we do not think about our absent child. Regardless of the circumstance of their deaths, we miss them deeply. However, there are days where we feel this pain more acutely than other days. Days like Father's Day remind us that they are not here. We are keenly aware of their absence every single day, and on days like Father's Day, the hole they left grows a little bigger.

We feel a sense of emptiness on Father's Day because there is an obvious void that tends to suck the air out of the day, creating a difficult space that we do not know how to navigate. We try our best, but it is hard to explain our feelings to those that haven't lost a child. It is not fair for us to expect you to understand; you're one of the lucky ones that have never had to walk in these shoes.

Most of us will try to keep our minds occupied with other living children, or by filling the day with busy, mindless tasks. It's a defense mechanism that helps us to hide from the harsh reality that lurks in the darkness, seeking our whereabouts. It's a constant battle that we often lose in the early years. Yes, I said years.

This isn't something that goes away after a year. It's a burden that weighs heavy on our souls for the rest of our lives. However, the weight lightens dramatically as time moves forward and we continue to process our loss. The death of a child becomes who we are. It doesn't define us, but it certainly changes the course of our lives and destroys the naivety we once had.

Regardless of the day, most people will not bring up the fact that your child died because it is too awkward for them. They are not sure if they should acknowledge this day. Let me resolve this confusion: you should acknowledge Father's Day.

It certainly isn't a "Happy" Father's Day. So, what should people say or do?

Try saying something like, "I know this must be a difficult day, but know I am thinking about you." This statement, or a variation of it, goes a long way with the men that are on the receiving end of it. It might trigger a visible emotion, but know the emotion constantly lurks just below the surface regardless. Though you just don't see it, it's just waiting for an opportunity to escape.

I wish all fellow grieving dads a peaceful Father's Day. If you know a grieving dad, pay them a visit or make that phone call to tell them that you are thinking about them and their child.

Written by: Kelly D Farley Author of *Grieving Dads: To the Brink and Back* - Website: www.GrievingDads.com

Blessing for Falling into a New Layer of Grief

You thought
you had hit
every layer possible,
that you had found
the far limit
of your sorrow,
of your grief.

Now the world falls
from beneath your feet
all over again,
as if the wound
were opening
for the first time,
only now with
an ache you recognize
as ancient.

Here is the time
for kindness—
your own, to yourself—
as you fall
and fall,
as you land hard
in this layer
that lies deeper than
you ever imagined
you could go.

Think of it as
a secret room—
this space
that has opened
before you,
that has opened
inside you,
though it may look
sharp in every corner
and sinister
no matter where
you turn.

Think of it as
a hidden chamber
in your heart
where you can stay
as long as you need,
where you will
find provision
you never wanted
but on which
your life will now
depend.

I want to tell you
there is treasure
even here—
that the sharp lines
that so match your scars
will lead
to solace;
that this space
that feels so foreign
will become for you
a shelter.

So let yourself fall.
It will not be
the last time,
but do not let this be
cause for fear.

These are the rooms
around which your
new home will grow—
the home of your heart,
the home of your life
that welcomes you
with such completeness,
opening and
opening and
opening itself to you,
no part of you
turned away.

~ Jan Richardson

