



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 2018



Please join us for our next meetings

Thursday, March 1st -- Topic: **Heart to Art**

Thursday, April 5th -- Topic: **The Masks We Wear**

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.

HOW TO HANDLE THE EXHAUSTION OF GRIEF

Loss can be swift and devastating, like a chasm opening beneath our feet. No warning. No way to prepare. Lives can change forever in an instant.

This leaves us stunned and like we're partially paralyzed. Grief affects our whole being:

- **Grief is intense.** Emotion surges forth, and our feelings are all over the place. It's *exhausting*.
- **Grief isn't smooth.** It's more like a roller-coaster, and that's *exhausting*.
- **Grief isn't a sprint.** It's a marathon, and that's *exhausting*.
- **Grief smacks us cognitively.** Our mental capacity takes a hit. We forget and misplace things. That's frustrating, and *exhausting*.
- **Grief drastically impacts our decision-making.** We don't see things clearly right now. This can lead to further regrets, and that's *exhausting*.
- **Grief puts us on edge.** We get easily irritated, and sometimes angry. Anger is draining and *exhausting*.
- **Grief makes every little thing huge.** Each task takes a terrific amount of energy. It's *exhausting*.
- **Grief causes us to question things.** This further upsets our world. That's scary, and *exhausting*.
- **Grief forces us to remake the future.** What we planned is no more. This requires a massive amount of energy. It's *exhausting*.

Sorry for the repetition, but I've found that most of us don't take grief seriously enough. It takes a huge toll of us. **Grief is body-slamming, mind-numbing, heart-breaking, and soul-rattling. It's exhausting.**

It feels like we're helpless and just along for the ride on this relentless, *exhausting* roller-coaster. There are a few things, however, we can do:

- **Breathe.** Breathe deeply. Seriously. Stop. Take a moment and breathe. Do this often, many times a day.
- **Be patient with yourself.** This is *exhausting*. It should be.
- **Release the usual expectations of yourself.** Everything has changed. To expect yourself to do the "usual" right now is grossly unrealistic. Pare back. Get more margin. Put more space into your routine.
- **Be very nice to yourself.** You've taken a huge hit. Take care of you. Eat well, rest, and exercise.

- **Get around people who know grief.** They can give you the perspective you need for this unwelcome journey. Contrary to what you may feel, you're not alone. We're in this together. You're not crazy, but grief can be. You're going to make it, but it's a bumpy road.
- Worn out? How could you not be? ***This is exhausting.***

Remind yourself often: grief requires us to be patient with ourselves and others.

Gary Roe is an author, speaker, and chaplain with Hospice Brazos Valley. He is the author of the award-winning bestsellers *Shattered: Surviving the Loss of a Child*, *Please Be Patient, I'm Grieving*, *HEARTBROKEN: Healing from the Loss of a Spouse*, and *Surviving the Holidays without You* and the co-author (with New York Times Bestseller Cecil Murphey) of *Saying Goodbye: Facing the Loss of a Loved One*. Visit him at www.garyroe.com.

SAVE THE DATE!

Bereaved Parents of the USA **NATIONAL GATHERING CONFERENCE**

Whispers of Hope

August 3-5 ✂ Memphis, TN

Whispering Woods Hotel & Conference Center

Join us for an incredible weekend where bereaved families like us (who often feel isolated in our grief) can connect and create lasting bonds with each other and experience a safe space to remember and speak openly about our children, siblings or grandchildren and express our true grief emotions.

Meet our speakers and workshop presenters -- all amazing grief survivors who will share wisdom and insight about the grieving process and courage, perseverance and grace under the most devastating of circumstances.



Mitch Carmody



Pam Vredevelt



Stephane Gerson



Ann Irr Dagle

www.bereavedparentsusa.org

Go to our website and **REGISTER ONLINE** today for early-bird discount. Be sure to read the entire **REGISTRATION PACKET** to answer all your questions about what happens during the Gathering Weekend.

THE SEASONS OF GRIEF: WINTER TO SPRING by Kristen Lamb

There are daffodils in the yard.

How did spring sneak in so stealthily? I'm not ready. Winter fit my mood, my grief. Now there are flowers in the yard and a garden to tend. Things are growing. Life marches forward, even when we aren't ready. Spring reminds me of this.

When grief hits it's like a winter of the soul. Parts of us freeze in time. Not dead, but dormant. Pain blankets our emotional landscape like a fresh snow. It smothers greenery and muffles sound. Parts of us peak out, foraging to survive. It's a state of emotional survival. Oddly, at some point there is comfort in not having to grow, expand, or reach for the sun.

The expectations of myself were few in that season. But now there are flowers in the yard...



I don't feel ready, but it's time to step into the sun. I'm not fully healed. Actually, I'm not certain that's possible. But it's been long enough and life is moving forward. My kids are growing older, friends need me...I need me. It's time to plan for the future again, not just survive the day. Within me are gifts and talents to share and give back to the world. By stepping back out into the sun I'll be able fulfill my mission, purpose, and dreams.

Love means wanting the best for each other. Whether it's your child, parent, grandparents, sibling, husband, or wife, we seek to lift up our beloved and give them happiness. That's simply the nature of true, healthy, love. If something were to happen to you, wouldn't you want your loved ones to live a life of fulfillment and joy? Our lost loved ones want that for us too. They want us to be happy and even find new love. **We honor them by rejoining life and growing again.**

Life is a cycle. It doesn't reach a set point and stop, even when something horrible happens. New days dawn and seasons pass, both on the calendar and in our soul. As they do, healing continues, but in a new way, one that includes personal growth and respecting the wishes our loved ones had for us.

Looking out at the bright day and daffodils I know it's time to accept spring. **My winter of grief served its purpose.**

Stepping outside I lift my face to the sun and feel both warmth and tears...



I SEE YOU... By Cindy Brewer

Editor's Note: Sometimes there is that rare friend who "gets it", even though they've not lost a child or a sibling and we are forever grateful! KC

To You, My Friend, Who Still Grieves When No One Sees

I see you, Friend. I see you go about your daily life. I see you laugh and work. I see your still vibrant smile. I see you putting your best foot forward. I see you creating your newly remodeled life. I see you stepping up and helping others along the way. I see you standing there, a bit wobbly-kneed sometimes, but feet firmly planted. I see you. And I want you to know how proud I am to know you.

I do not claim to know how you feel. Who can claim such a thing? Grief is so personally wrenching, so tailor-made for our own circumstances. The devastation of your personal loss cannot be compared to any other loss. There is no mathematics of grief; no such thing as: this loss is precisely 12.63 times more devastating than that one. Because loss is loss, like zero is zero, and no amount of multiplication or division makes it any other number. It's just zero, ground zero for trying to rebuild your life around a cannonball-sized wound in your heart.

I do know a few things about grief. I know that years later, long after you have scraped yourself on the concrete and moved on, long after you have told yourself that you are okay now, the old grief can ambush you from behind. There you are, going about your day, shopping, cleaning, driving, or doing any old mundane task and then suddenly you are utterly flattened again by grief. And you can't figure out how it managed to sneak up on you like that. Why didn't you see it coming? It's like, there you were, standing on a quiet street, minding your own business and WAM, a truck plows over you from behind. And that's it. You're down for the count. And the really weird thing about it is that everything around you goes on, business as usual, as if nothing significant had happened. You are down and the rest of the world still sees you standing. And you get used to them not knowing you are down. And you don't tell them, because... well... isn't there enough drama in the world already?

But I am telling you, I see you! You are not the same as those still untouched by loss. You have something different about you, something that draws me to you and marks you as one who knows the full price of love and chooses to love again anyway. I know you are not always steady on your feet, and I know that reconstructing your inner world is pretty much a solo project. But I see you standing there, with that cannonball wound in your heart, and I am moved by you. I know you have made that difficult choice to let the wound stand. You have not filled the hole with bitterness; you have not encased your heart in concrete; you have not surrounded yourself with emotional barbed-wire. You stand there with your broken heart and you give me hope for the future. I know some wounds never heal. But I think, when I look at you, that it might somehow be okay if a heart stays that way, a heart broken open by loss, vulnerable but welcoming like yours.

There is this strange thing that happens to me sometimes. I am in some public place and I see something out of the corner of my eye. Or I hear a voice and turn around, fully expecting to see a familiar face. And it's just strangers, and they are not even looking at me. It's weird. After all this time, I still have moments when I feel like I have entered into that alternate universe, where your life turned out the way it was supposed to and the loss never happened. And then I feel that pang in my heart, small though it is in comparison, and I think of you. And I send you my love, letting it pass along unseen channels, hoping somehow you'll feel it. In those moments I remember your loss, and I think of you standing there with your open heart, standing beside all the other lovely open-hearted people who have gone there before you. God, you are a beautiful sight!

So, thank you. Thank you for being there for me in spite of everything. Thank you for showing me how to stand up again and again, no matter how many times grief ambushes you. Thank you for showing me how to love when your heart is broken. Thank you for showing me what I need to do when my losses come. Because no matter how we try, none of us escapes loss; sooner or later we all get ambushed by it. But I feel more confident about the future knowing this one thing: on that terrible day, when my heart breaks, you will be there standing by me with that broken-open heart of yours. All of us with our broken hearts will stand together. And we will know that our wounds are not signs of weakness, but badges of honor, because we have dared greatly and loved deeply and fully intend to love again. And if not now, well... at least... someday... hopefully soon.

I am so proud of you. And I want you to know, I see you



When someone dies,
you don't get over your grief by *forgetting*,
you get through your grief by REMEMBERING

- author unknown



You now live in what could be called your new reality...You didn't choose this, but because you are in it, you need to adjust to it in order to move forward and begin healing.

- Grieving with Hope -

"Think not so much on 'moving on' but of 'moving forward'. And as you move forward, you ALWAYS do so with your love one by your side, in your heart, within your very breath. They are part of you now and always. You move forward with them and continue to engage in life because of their inspiration". - Ashley David Bush



GARDENING THROUGH GRIEF

Still Standing.com

My childhood is blessed with memories of apple orchards, picking blackberries, raking autumn leaves and snowmen. And yes, of gardening, of being a reluctant helper in my parents' soggy vegetable plot. When I started a family, I knew I wanted my children to feel compassion and connected to living things. I'd been working in a city for a great many years, yet in gently showing them the flora and fauna of our planet something quickly became apparent — **to touch nature's extraordinary power was to be drawn back into its grace.**

Twenty years went by and, much to everyone's surprise, I changed careers and began to farm. One day, as my son Alex planted seedlings he looked at me and said, "You haven't bought a fruit farm, mum, you've bought a life, it's going to be your new life." Peaceful, happy moments spent with my children gardening and growing food with our bare hands.



And then the unimaginable happened: Alex was murdered.

With his death, my life was forever changed. That new life he had imaged for me, had helped plan with me; it now seemed to me impossible. **Future dreams were an absurdity in the face of such devastation.** So deep was my

pain that the world fell into a greyscale and nature lost its colors. No scents, no hues, no birdsong. I was impervious to its energy; nothing could penetrate my grief.

The months passed and I remained in the dark, desolate pit of grief. Breathing exhausted me; living was hell.

But nature waits for no man, least of all a woman who has to farm. The seasons continued to pass and forced me to accompany them as best I could. It did not matter that I had to drag myself outside, the fact is I did.

And this is what I learned — that nature heals.

By being in nature, by immersing myself in it, by touching it, smelling it, working with it, I let myself become a part of it. It wasn't the physical activity of gardening that made the difference, though I don't doubt that endorphins released by exertion do lift the mood. Scientific research shows that gardening lowers stress levels. It also reduces inflammation — a precursor to heart disease, depression and diabetes. And soil bacteria really do boost our immune system.

It was far more than that, though. As I helped my young trees and vegetables grow, so I was growing me. If I cried and screamed, there was no one to take offence or pass judgement. Instead, the earth and rustling of the young branches soothed me, the rain washed my face, the cricket and cicada song touched my soul. What helped me cope with the horror and destruction of Alex's death was nature itself.

I learned that I could not hasten nature's pace any more than I could bring back my dead son. In being forced to accept patience, I also re-learned the acceptance of the cycle of life and death.

I learned to face my own son's death.

As the months turned into a year, then two and three, I became a part of the very nature I was nurturing. I gained a deep appreciation for simplicity and began to yearn for the peacefulness of the garden and olive grove. Gardening was my therapy. When the sadness overwhelmed me, it was here, among the trees and vegetables that I felt grounded. **In tending to the plants, I was tending to my grief.** Colors began to filter back into my life. The incalculable sorrow stayed but I could now look up at the sky and smile when the bee-eaters flew by. Spring's flowering with its bold statement of life and renewal ceased to hurt me as it had done in the first two years and instead I sensed a deep gratefulness that nature had held me close and helped nurture my healing.

For me, though I once lost the capacity to see the point to life, gardening became a life-saver. In seeing plants grow I discerned hope within my heart. The miracle of watching seedlings push through the soil helped me to understand that I too could change from a closed, deeply hurting mother into something unforeseen and different. It didn't matter if my tears mixed with the soil as I dug, I kept digging. My response to being outdoors was initially indiscernible and yet, as time passed, whether it was physical work or lying with eyes half-closed under the trees, I began to sense a connection to the Earth I'd never felt before.

The therapeutic benefits were not felt by me alone. My surviving children gained much from being in nature and gardening following their brother's homicide. Nature's restorative power seeped into our hearts and gave us permission to smile again. As a family we were able to grieve together whilst doing something as beautiful and therapeutic as planting and growing food.

I believe Alex would be proud of what we have achieved. He was right about the farm being a new life for me.

It is.

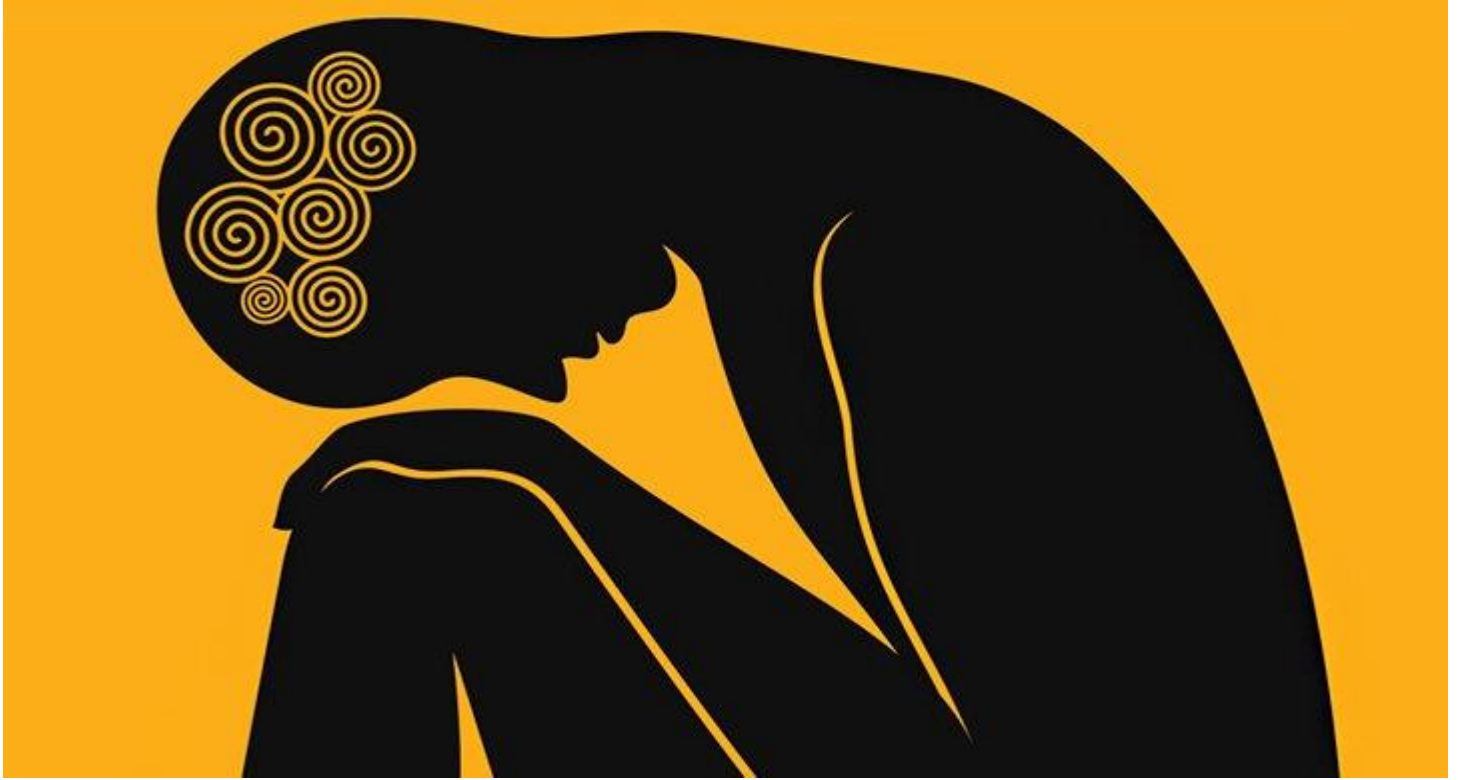


"The ongoing relationship that I have with my daughter's spirit has allowed me to adopt a peaceful perspective about her death. I still occasionally yearn for her physical presence, but I don't dwell on a wish that will never be granted. Instead I embrace the different, non-traditional father-daughter relationship that we now share. It is a reminder of what I have gained since my daughter's rebirth into a new existence, as opposed to what I have lost."

Dave Roberts

WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT PTSD RELATED TO CHILD LOSS

By Amanda Smith



Dear World,

I want to share with you my experience with PTSD, which is directly related to the loss of my infant/child.

Yes, you read that right, post-traumatic stress disorder.

It is not uncommon for someone who has lost a child to develop PTSD, and although it is not uncommon, it is rarely talked about.

As a whole, most people are becoming more aware of PTSD, but most of that awareness has to do with combat-related PTSD. I have a dear friend who battles combat-related PTSD, and although we have the same symptoms, as well as the same diagnosis, our PTSD illnesses are very much different. I personally cannot speak about combat-related PTSD, but I can help shed light on PTSD related to child loss.

I wish more people knew PTSD can happen after the loss of a child. I have been openly judged because of some of the “triggers” I have. Although I am working on dealing with them, it is not easy, and it is not a fast process. Anxiety, flashbacks, avoidance, fear, and nightmares are all part of PTSD.

Anxiety and Fear: I do have terrible anxiety about pregnancy and infant loss. I have had people tell me I need to stop worrying because it will not change anything. The problem is my worrying is not about what might happen, but it is about what did happen.

Flashbacks: When watching television, I am unable to watch any type of labor/delivery scene because it takes me right back to my delivery with Robby. I was in labor for days, knowing my baby boy was not going to survive. Even if it is a comedy show, it gives me flashbacks.

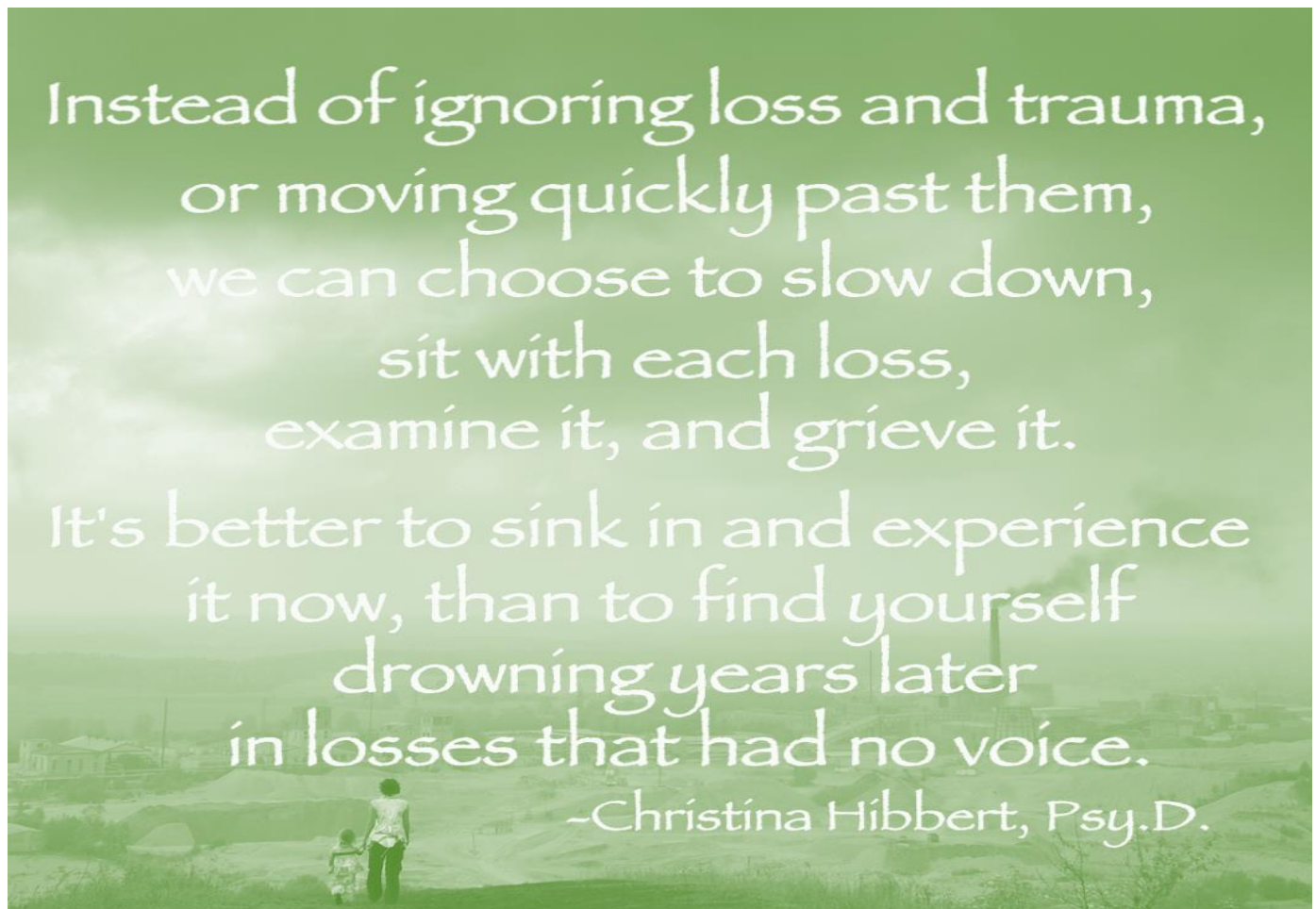
Nightmares: I have intense nightmares about Robby’s birth and death. I relive those moments over and over in my dreams.

Triggers: I can be walking around the mall and when I see a small boy who would be about Robby's age, I have trouble breathing. I can be eating at a restaurant with my family and hearing the sound of a newborn cry can make me feel like the walls are closing in on me. Sometimes just even seeing pictures and announcements on Facebook can be enough to be a trigger for me.

Avoidance: This one might be the hardest for people to understand. There have been situations I have avoided because of my PTSD. A baby shower is a perfect example. Yes, I will be able to handle that someday, and when the next opportunity arises for it, I will try to face this certain trigger of mine.

If you know someone who has lost a child and is dealing with PTSD, I urge you to please be gentle with them. Please be gentle with all who have lost a child because they might be dealing with things you aren't aware of or things you might not understand.

Please do not assume they are OK because it has been long enough in your mind that they should be "over it" by now.



CELEBRATE
SPRING