



MID HUDSON NEW YORK CHAPTER

Newsletter

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

Kathy Corrigan Chapter Leader

www.mhbpusa.com

JULY/AUGUST 2015



Please join us for our next meetings

Thursday, July 2nd -- Topic: Open Meeting

Thursday, August 6th – Topic: “No Vacation from Our Grief”

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 THE GRIEVING MOMMA

Oh, sweet momma...

I am so, so sorry you are here.

I know this is your worst nightmare realized. I know this wasn't plan A, B, C, or Z. I know the weight of it all is suffocating, soul-crushing, devastating, and earth-shattering in every way possible. I know you would trade it all just for one more moment.

I know your heart is broken. How I wish I could make you feel at home again. How I wish I could take away the pain. How I wish I could place that baby back in your arms. You could watch them grow. All the giggles, skinned knees and Eskimo kisses. I know you would savor every moment. I know you would breathe that baby in till you no longer had any breath in you. I know you would give every ounce of you to save every ounce of them, one thousand times over.

I know you miss them. I know you wish you could just smell them one more time, see their face one more time, kiss that squishy cheek and then freeze that moment so it would last forever. There are things that pictures and videos can never replace, and having that baby in your arms is at the top of the list.

I know.

If I could “fix” this, I would move mountains. My gosh, I would in a heartbeat.

You, sweet momma, are so brave. You are strong. You are such a good momma.

You need to know this.

On the days when it's all you can do just to function, that's okay.

On the weeks when you live off of sweatpants and dry shampoo and ice cream for lunch, you deserve a freaking break. You are doing a good job.

On the days when you try your hardest to pull yourself together, and somehow things just don't work out, give yourself grace. Give yourself room to breathe, you are so loved, sweet momma.

On the days when no one but you mentions their name, I am so, so sorry. Say their name bravely. Know that they are still real, they were still here, and you are still their momma.

On the days when you feel like you could burst from anger and pain, go somewhere alone, cry it out, curse at the sky—there's nothing worse than having to fake it. Just don't. Please, let yourself feel it. You've been through too much to put on a face, and healing doesn't come when we are living under a facade.

On the days when the world tells you to “heal” and “move on”, friend, healing from child loss doesn't look like healing from an injury. Our children were not a broken bone, they are a piece of our hearts, and now a piece of our hearts is gone. Friend, you will heal, just not in the way the world wants you. You will breathe easier. You will ache maybe a little less, but I've heard from mommas much, much further down the road than I, the longing will never, ever, ever leave. That's the beauty and the fierceness and the strength of a mother's love.

Momma, you are strong. You are so brave. You are doing such a good job.

You are irrevocably changed, in the sweetest, head-over-heels, all-in, never-stopping way. Your love is strong. That's the promise you made when you swore to love them every second of their life and every second of your own, no matter what the cost was on your heart. Nothing on this earth has shown me unconditional love better than the love of a grieving momma. I see your love. I see the power of it. It's stronger than any amount of pain, than a sea of tears, than even the grasp of death.

I know, because of that love, you would brave every ounce of pain one thousand times over just for them.

Even when you don't feel it... Look, momma. Here you are... You're still breathing. You're still standing. You are so brave.

Sweet momma friend, I am so sorry you are here. Know that you are so loved.

Know that where there is great pain, there is even greater love.

So much love to you,

A Momma Who Knows

Editor's Note: Although this article is written specifically about the death of a relationship, it gives very good advice on taking care of yourself when your heart is broken. K.C.

BROKEN HEARTS CAN LEAD TO AWAKENED SOULS

By Vishnu <http://tinybuddha.com>

"For a seed to achieve its greatest expression, it must come completely undone. The shell cracks, its insides come out and everything changes. To someone who doesn't understand growth, it would look like complete destruction." ~Cynthia Occelli

There are no two ways about it.

Heartbreak squeezes you as though you were an orange, crushes you as though it were a tractor, and cuts sharply as a razor blade.

Breaking up with my former wife was the most crushing event in my life. It made me see myself as a failure, hide in embarrassment, and cry myself to sleep for months.

There are so many things I'd rather do than experience a broken heart again—like, oh, I don't

know, take a safari through the Serengeti alone and have hungry lions eat me alive, or take a plunge into the shark tank at Sea World and discover just how friendly those creatures really are.

When you're in a long-term relationship, or married to that person for years, heartbreak can be life breaking. The world you know ends.

Through heartbreak, you come to see yourself as rejected, dejected, failed, and damaged.

You question the meaning of life and, if bruised badly enough, even wonder why you're alive.

Would it seem too nuts for me to say that the pain of heartbreak led me to believe that being buried alive would have been more peaceful? Settling into a coffin would have been more pleasurable than facing the world every day?

These were the thoughts that occupied my mind for a couple years of my life.

I'm glad to say I survived this experience and didn't do any of these drastic things.

I survived the end of a love gone wrong. I survived the shattered pieces of a broken heart that scattered around me. I survived the accompanying disillusionment, sadness, sorrow, and pain.

I lived to tell about it.

What life lessons can I give you other than the simple message that you can do it too?

Simply this: Your heart might be broken and closed, but this experience can lead to a soul awakening; through it, you can form a deeper connection with your highest self and find a greater sense of peace and clarity. Here's how.

1. Assess the damage.

At some point, you'll have to go from being the person who is broken and lost to being an observer surveying the wreckage.

What do you miss about that person? What did you lose? What shared dreams have vanished from your life?

When the pain has stopped or when you decide that you can't keep living with a heavy heart, you'll have to see where you are so that you can rebuild your life from the ground up.

Acknowledge the loss. See where you are emotionally, psychologically, mentally, financially, and spiritually.

It doesn't matter how bad of a place you're in. Stopping to look around you, to reflect and acknowledge where your heartbreak has brought you, is a start.

2. Let love flood in.

Your love for someone has shattered to pieces. Every edge of your heart cuts; every corner twinges with pain and nothing seems to fit back together.

While you may see that your heart is shattered, know that now there is space for light to enter. Where is the light?

The light is the love already within you.

The light is subdued and hidden. It seems distant. You had completely forgotten about it.

The good news is that you can access the light again by cultivating your love of yourself.

Wherever you see emptiness, let the light come in. Imagine sunlight filling the void.

When you notice craters of loneliness, let the light in. Imagine love filling the void.

When you see ice blocks of pain, let the light's heat melt them. Imagine love melting the void.

What we're talking about here is love that's already within you—unleashing, releasing, and recapturing it. We're not talking about love for anyone or anything else.

I'm asking you to tap into the love already there.

Cultivating this love requires that you mend your heart.

It requires that you slow down and take care of yourself. It requires long walks, meditation, and room to breathe.

It requires healthier eating, rekindled friendships, and self-care.

Learn that you are enough as you are. No one can fulfill you or complete you as much as you can fulfill and complete yourself.

3. Let your ego wash away.

Your bruised ego desires plenty of attention and wants to be deeply embraced. It wants to grab a hold of your life and turn you into a victim. Our egos don't like to feel ashamed, vulnerable, or lonely.

Becoming aware of the ego helps release its strong grip on your life.

Gently notice the ego's hunger and its desire to encompass your life. Watch it become enraged, hurt, bitter, and vengeful.

Examine if your love for your ex was based on true love, or a need to feel complete, a need for companionship, or a desire to feel good about yourself.

Were you in your past relationship to fulfill your ego's needs, or your heart's desires?

One is selfish and centered on you; the other is generous and centered on giving.

The point is not to be hard on yourself; it's to be honest with yourself so you can show yourself compassion.

The ego comes from a place of lack and not having had enough love.

You can water the ego with the love it desires. Treating yourself better, being mindful of your thoughts, and being kinder with the words you use toward yourself will help release the role of the ego in your life.

4. Sit with your soul.

I never connected with my soul during the course of my relationship.

I was too busy nit-picking, disagreeing, and getting even with my ex. I was caught up in games, ego, and anger.

I never tapped into my soul to guide the way.

If I had, I would have come from a place of love for her and for myself. I would have showed up every day with compassion and understanding.

The soul is an internal all-knowing sacred space that holds your highest truth, your most divine self, and an abundance of love.

This space is your true nature, your essence, your clarity.

Walks in nature, a meditative silence, a silent cathedral, a closed-eye prayer—all allow the senses to quiet themselves so that you can tap into your soul.

Connect with this quiet, wise, all-knowing, expansive, light-filled space daily.

Go forward in the world from this space of love and clarity. Learn to listen, love, and live from this sacred space.

5. Let your soul guide you.

Live your life from the source of internal power that comes from the soul.

Listen to the strong command of your soul's voice—your intuitive feelings and the wise internal whispers that come from a place of love and quiet strength.

Hear the ego's voice arise and acknowledge it. Thank the ego for looking out for you, then release it from its duties.

Nearly 50 workshops will be offered on a variety of grief topics. We will also offer a sibling program of activities and special workshops. We have special workshops scheduled for both the younger and older siblings. The workshop schedule should be complete in the next week or so - stay tuned for updates!

Registration is only \$ 60 and room rates at the Sheraton Hartford Hotel at Bradley Airport are \$89 per night, with up to 4 people per room. (**Deadline for reduced rate July 1st**)

Opportunities are available to sponsor a page in the program book, sponsor a centerpiece or a workshop all in memory of your child. You can also order t-shirts or picture buttons!

We are also in need of donations for the raffle and silent auction, if anyone is interested in donating any items! We would also like to have table favors for each of the meals, so if your chapter or any individual would like to donate approx. 300 items that would be greatly appreciated. Let me know of any donations!

We look forward to welcoming you to Hartford as we share a healing weekend together celebrating the lives of our beautiful children, grandchildren and siblings who have gone too soon.

Please go to www.BereavedParentsUSA.org to register and for any information related to the 2015 National Gathering!

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me through email at bleachermom2000@aol.com or phone me on my cell phone at 703-656-6999.

Hope to see you in July,
Jodi Norman

From Jodi Norman, National Gathering Committee Chair:

Hi Chapter Leaders,

Please pass on this information, regarding the 2015 National Gathering of the Bereaved Parents of the USA in Hartford, CT, to members of your chapter. Join us July 24th - 26th for "Seasons of Healing" which promises to be a helpful and healing weekend for families grieving the death of a child, grandchild, or sibling.

Keynote speakers include Sara Ruble, Kelly Buckley, Scarlett Lewis, Dave Roberts, Deb Carlin Polhill, and Bart Sumner. They are all outstanding speakers that you do not want to miss hearing as they provide the hope we need to tackle this journey through the Seasons of Healing.

*Birth was not our choice
Death will not be our choice
But the way we live our life is our
The past cannot be altered
Tomorrow isn't promised
And today is a gift.*

*Josh Lawhorn
Children of the Dome*



SIBLINGS: THE FORGOTTEN GRIEVERS

The sibling bond is often overlooked when a sibling dies...and siblings do have a very

special relationship. When considering grief, it's the familial relationship least studied. It's most unfortunate because our children who live often become the "forgotten grievers." And yet, just like us, their lives are not the same because relationships change when a child dies.

Losing a sibling has a special grief all its own. It's as if they've lost part of their past and their future. When one child dies, the surviving sibling must grow up faster than anyone should, losing the innocence of childhood. Most often they find themselves in a new role—taking care of others, and their identity is gone. Sometimes they feel they've lost their parents to the overwhelming grief because we, as parents, do not function as before our child died. And watching us grieve can be harder than their own grief.

Unbeknownst to us, fear sets in and consumes their thoughts. Will someone else they love die? Loneliness can overwhelm with the realization that there is no shared future, only memories to recall. And often times, friends do not know how to respond. When an important event occurs, the grief gets reprocessed. It comes back in waves. Anxiety, panic attacks, sleeping issues, and depression are common. Medication and sleeping aids can help. Sleep is very important in the healing process. Suicidal thoughts are not far away. Isolation from the lack of attention and support can also lead surviving siblings down this path. They may want to be with their sibling again. Some will attempt suicide at least once. But thankfully, lingering in the back of minds is the hurt it would inflict on parents and others they love. Professional therapy can help, if the sibling is open and willing. Sometimes the surviving sibling just needs someone to talk to. Sometimes the therapist can offer insight that their feelings are normal. Sometimes therapy isn't productive. And that's okay. Or maybe the child who lives believes that Heaven awaits them, where their sibling now is. In either case, hopefully the attachment to immediate family

awakens and strengthens with more appreciation, openness and love.

In the early days, if possible, focus on your children who live. Children are often more resilient than us. As I found my daughter, Sarah, alive within, I discovered more grace to confront my own grief. And as I watched my surviving children navigate their days with more depth and return to the joys and pleasures of life before their sibling's death, then my daily routine became more manageable.

Just as we find ourselves struck with denial, anger, guilt, and regrets, so do our children who live. I learned from my children who live that these three actions were most important to them when grief set in.

• ***LISTEN...because I will hear.***

• ***BE PHYSICALLY PRESENT and PATIENT. I cannot eliminate their pain. But my presence and my caring response let them know that they are not alone. I schedule one-on-one time with each of my children just as I schedule a date with a friend. I am learning to truly embrace their unique qualities.***

• ***SAY THE NAME OF THE DECEASED SIBLING frequently. I weave Sarah's name into everyday conversation. It lets my family know that Sarah is not forgotten. We share stories and memories. I am learning to keep communication open. I ask my children to be open to signs from their sister. Those signs offer great comfort.***

Each of us grieves, and each griever must find his own way. Grief doesn't necessarily coincide with any stages. We must honor the uniqueness of grief. It's a life-long process of jumping back and forth and every place in between. And when in our darkest moments, look to the love and spirit of our children who live. I have found that the love and resilience of my four children who live heals and strengthens me in ways I'd never known before my daughter, Sarah, died. Today we all walk together.



Editor's Note: This was written on Michael's 8th Angelversary. I have "resurrected" it for his 20th and it rings as true today as it did back then... KC)



ANNIVERSARY

By Kathy Corrigan
In loving memory of
Michael Patrick
Corrigan

We recently marked the 8th anniversary of our son Michael's death on June 26th. I'm always caught off guard by how easily I am thrown back into the memory of

those horrific days when time stood still and the idea of surviving the death of my child seemed inconceivable. During this still-difficult time each year, I am reminded of a passage written by Dean Koontz in his book Sole Survivor. He writes:

"...he had heard other grieving parents speak of the Zero Point. The Zero Point was the instant of the child's death, from which every future event would be dated, the eye blink during which crushing loss reset your internal gauges to zero. It was the moment at which your shabby box of hopes and wants -- which had once seemed to be such a fabulous chest of bright dreams -- was turned on end and emptied into an abyss, leaving you with zero expectations. In a clock tick, the future was no longer a kingdom of possibility and wonder, but a yoke of obligation -- and only the unattainable past offered a hospitable place to live."

I'm not sure if Dean Koontz actually came up with the term Zero Point but the concept is certainly one that I can relate to. The Zero Point has simply become a fact of life for me. I used to speak of things that happened "before I was married..." or "after the kids were born..." but since June 26th, 1995, my reality is measured solely by the time "before Michael died" and the time "after Michael died". There is no other calendar for me. The life I lived before Michael died has been blurred by grief and the person I was before Michael died has ceased to exist. In the weeks immediately after his death, I was unable to recognize the stranger who had rushed in to inhabit my heart and my mind; worse yet, I really didn't like the person I was becoming. I was exhausted and angry and terrified of what might happen next. I became two-faced, smiling while going through the motions at work and cold and withdrawn from my family when I got home.

All that had mattered in my life, all that I had struggled to accomplish seemed worthless and tawdry and insignificant in comparison to what I had lost. Life seemed pointless and senseless. I remember writing in my journal, "I feel set adrift with no hope of reaching the shoreline". With the writing of those desperate words, came the realization that I had been free falling into a deep, dark hole yet also, in that rare, lucid moment, I caught a tiny glimpse of the "me" I used to be and I recognized the familiar "survivor instinct" that had carried me through other losses in my life. I began to understand that while I could not change the heart-wrenching, life-altering fact that my son had died, I did have a choice about how I would live my life from that day forward. Would I choose bitterness and desolation or would I try to make some sense out of this tragedy? Would I forever yearn for a future with Michael in it – an impossible dream or could I learn to celebrate Michael's 21 years with us – as short-lived as that time had been?

Please understand that this awakening did not happen overnight. The climb out of that deep, dark hole took years; I lost my footing and slipped back often. There were times when I barely held on by my fingertips and made no progress at all. There were times when friends carried me and there were even times when I thought that lying at the bottom of that pit was a better option. I used to think that grief was a passive process – that as time passed, the pain would simply recede. Of course, now, I have eight years of hindsight to clarify my understanding of mourning the death of a child. It is the hardest work I have ever done; it is the most worthwhile endeavor I have ever been a part of. It has given meaning to the most senseless of tragedies, the death of my precious middle son, Michael.

During the anniversary week, I revisit those days. They are familiar and strangely comforting. The depth of my anguish is a testament to the depth of my love for Michael. But I choose not to remain there, in part because I'm a very different person now, but mostly because my survival – no, more than that -- my thriving validates the significance of Michael's all-too-brief lifetime.

We cherish the time we had with you, Michael. We take comfort in the memory of your warm and loving spirit, your charming humor and your beautiful smile. You are with us always and forever!

