



Bereaved Parents of the USA Anne Arundel County Chapter

December 2007

www.aacounty-md-bereavedparents.org

Many of us who have lost children find it impossible to hear, say or even read the words used to describe the winter holiday season. Merry, happy and joyful are often banished from our vocabulary. But I'd like to suggest that for our surviving children (if we are fortunate enough to have had more than one child) we say these words to them and mean it. So, this month I've dedicated my column to the siblings of our deceased children. The girls, boys, men and women who have lost a sibling due to miscarriage and stillbirth, and those whose siblings died when they were babies, children, teenagers and adults. I hope we all will remember that they are the quiet mourners who have experienced a devastating loss that will affect them for the rest of their lives too.

To these siblings, I want to tell you that I am so sorry your family has gone through such pain since your sibling died. It must be hard for you to see your parent so heartbroken when they think about the brother or sister you lost. They may think about them a lot at this time of year and find it hard to look like they're joyful, especially about the holidays. They may not want to do things like they used to and that may make you feel sad or even angry. So if it's too hard for your family to do holiday things like you used to before your brother or sister died, maybe you can help think of a new tradition you and your family can start for the holidays. Most of all, though, you should know that your parents love you too even as they grieve for your sibling. Your family is going through a difficult time right now but if you remember to stick together you will all come through this time stronger and more united than ever before.

To my fellow bereaved parents, perhaps more than any other time during the year, your surviving children need you to summon up all your strength and celebrate the holidays for and with them. Doing so will not diminish the love you feel for the child you lost, but it means something separately for the child that you have right there in front of you, to hug and to hold. It means they are valued. It means the death wasn't their fault. It means you celebrate *their* life. It means you will always love them. The siblings of children who have died especially deserve to have happiness during this special time of the year.

Carole Gilmour
Anne Arundel County Chapter/BPUSA



*Please join fellow bereaved families and friends
as we remember our children
at the 23rd Annual Memorial Service
Sunday, December 2, 2007 at three o'clock in the afternoon
St. Martin's-in-the-Field Church
375 Benfield Road, Severna Park, Maryland 21146*

If you missed the November 8th RSVP date you can still attend. Please call (410) 544-3634 for information.



The printing and mailing of this newsletter has been donated
by Denise, Russ and Nicholas Calo in memory of their son and brother
Russell Joseph Calo Jr.
and

by Diane and Bob Royer in memory of their son
Aaron Sebastian Royer



**Anne Arundel County Chapter
of Bereaved Parents of the USA
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**JANUARY NEWSLETTER
SUBMISSIONS
DUE DECEMBER 9**

It is our sincere hope that you will find comfort somewhere in this newsletter. It is our intention to offer you hope in knowing that you are not alone. We encourage you to write about your feelings and share your feelings with others who understand.

Other Resources:

Hospice of the Chesapeake in Annapolis, MD presents:
"HOPE FULL HOLIDAYS"
Date: Saturday, Dec 1, 2007
Time: 9:00 a.m. - 12:30 p.m.
A seminar to learn coping strategies and honor grief during the holiday season. For more information or to register, please call (410) 987-2129.

G.R.A.S.P. (Grief Recovery After A Substance Passing)
Provides help, compassion and understanding for families or individuals who have had a loved one die as a result of drugs. Website: www.grasphelp.com; or contact founders Pat or Russ Wittberger at (843) 705-2217 (Email is mom@jennysjourney.org)

Maryland Crisis Hotline
24 hour help ; toll free call
(800) 422-0009

T.A.P.S. (Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors)

Non-profit Veteran Service Organization offering hope, healing, comfort and care to American armed forces families facing the death of a loved one. Magazine; grief camps for kids; online forums and chats. Website: www.taps.org or call (800) 858-TAPS.

M.A.D.D. (Mothers Against Drunk Driving) Provides emotional support, professional referrals, publications, information about criminal justice system, drunk driving and victims' rights laws, etc. Contact Jan Withers at (301) 627-1743.

S.O.S. (Survivors of Suicide)
Meets first Tuesday of each month at Severna Park Methodist Church, 731 Benfield Road. Call (410) 987-2129.

MEETING & CONTACT INFORMATION

NEXT MEETING: DECEMBER 6, 2007

Doors open at 7:15 p.m.; meeting begins at 7:30 p.m.
(Meetings usually held on 1st Thursday of each month)

Calvary United Methodist Church
301 Rowe Blvd., Annapolis, Maryland
Please park in lot behind the church

Refreshments at our monthly meetings are donated by Chapter members. To make a contribution, please see the sign-up sheet on the refreshment table (drinks, ice, and paper products are provided). For information contact Carol Tomaszewski at (410) 519-8448.



At every monthly meeting we display materials from our **lending library** that are offered to help you understand and deal with your grief. Most of our materials have been donated in memory of a child. You are welcome to borrow them and when you are finished, please return them at our next monthly meeting or mail them to the post office box listed on page 2.

If there is **inclement weather** on a meeting night, our meeting is cancelled if Phase 1 of the Snow Emergency Plan is in effect that same day at 5:00pm.

**Telephone Friends:**

Sometimes we feel the need to talk to someone who understands the pain we feel. When you feel the need to talk, have questions to ask, or have just had a difficult day, these people welcome your call and are willing to listen to you.

Marie Dyke 410-360-1255. Single parent, only-child, 17 year old daughter; car accident.
Janet Tyler 410-969-7597. Daughter, 5, and brother, 33; car accident.

Tia Stinnett 410-360-1341. Miscarriages and infant death.

Sandy Platts 410-721-6457. Infant death.

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CHAPTER NEWS AND NOTES

ANNUAL MEMORY WALK 2007 - *More sincere thanks!*

Our Chapter would like to acknowledge the following individuals and businesses whose donations of time, energy and supplies helped make our fifth Annual Memory walk a tremendous success this past October 6th.



Chapter Member volunteers: Paul Balasic, Terre Belt, Eryn Belt, Barbara Bessling, Sandi Burasch, Bob Burasch, Aimée Kilian, Bill Kilian, Marlen Maier, Gene Maier, Fran Palmer, Pat Schultz, Jim Schultz and Debi Wilson-Smith.

Breakfast items generously provided by: Sam's Club of Annapolis; Starbucks of Annapolis, Harbor Center; Krispy Kreme of Glen Burnie; Graul's Markets; and Mars Supermarket

We gratefully acknowledge the following donations

Diane and Bob Royer in memory of their son Aaron Sebastian Royer
 Ken Smith in memory of his niece Tracy Ann Fotino
 Catherine Wallace in memory of her son John Kirkpatrick Wallace
 Margaret Williford in memory of granddaughter Victoria Shimonkevitz
 Susan Alexander in memory of her son Jamie Alexander on the anniversary of his birth and the anniversary of his death
 Jeanne Angier in memory of her nephew James William Henry Alexander on the anniversary of his death
 Rhonda and Norman French in memory of their son Brandon Robert French on the anniversary of his birth
 Linda and John Grimm in memory of their son Jeffrey Andrew Grimm on the anniversary of his birth
 David and Lily Openshaw in memory of their son John David "JD" Openshaw
 Juliet and Leonard Rothman in memory of their son Daniel Maurice Rothman



Memory Walk Donations (continued from November's newsletter)



Gloria and Stan Parker in memory of Edwin Molina Jr.
 Joanna and Serafin Salgado in memory of Kelly Ann Schultz
 Jody Smith in memory of Deneen Leigh Lins and Nicolas Allen Bowling
 Pat and Kathy Speiden in memory of Deneen Leigh Lins and Nicolas Allen Bowling
 Lee Zillig in memory of Deneen Leigh Lins and Nicolas Allen Bowling
 Kimberly Bagby in memory of her sister Deneen Leigh Lins and her son Nicolas Allen Bowling
 Rosalyn Garcia in memory of Deneen Leigh Lins and Nicolas Allen Bowling
 Jack and Audrey Bagby in memory of their daughter Deneen Leigh Lins and their grandson Nicolas Allen Bowling

Service of Remembrance Donations (continued on following page)

Elizabeth and Barry Aikin in memory of their grandson Jon Russell Aikin
 Jayne and John Astle in memory of their son David Sheridan Astle
 Theresa and Steve Bleemke in memory of their son Paul Shane Brough
 Bonnie Boone-Adamecz in memory of her daughter Traci Lynn Boone
 Carol Boslet in memory of her grandson Christopher Ryan Boslet
 Cora Boyce in memory of her daughter Linda Lou Boyce
 Robert Bramhall in memory of his daughter Christine Elaine Bramhall
 Rose Marie Carnes in memory of her son Walter H. Maynard IV
 Ann and Noel Castiglia in memory of their daughter Tria Maria Castiglia
 Gerlinda Coleman in memory of her son Herbert John Buzby
 Mary and Tom Cranston in memory of their children Ashlea, James, John, and Joseph
 Laura and Mark DiBerardinis in memory of their son Vincent Mark DiBerardinis
 Diana and Bill Durner and their daughter in memory of their son and brother Brian Edward Durner



Service of Remembrance Donations (continued from previous page)

Aurealia Ferraro in memory of her son Jeff Baldwin
 Melanie Freeburger in memory of her son Daniel P. "Danny" Freeburger
 Rhonda and Norman French in memory of their son Brandon Robert French
 Carol Fritz in memory of her daughter Katie Fritz
 Robin Stallings in memory of her son Roderick William Stallings
 Peggy and Lewis Strader in memory of their son Christopher Lewis Strader
 Pam and Jerry Haley in memory of their son Brian Jeffrey Haley
 Betty Hodges in memory of her son Charles "Chip" Hodges
 Jan and Leo Hylan in memory of their daughter Alison Marie Hylan
 Charlette Koehler in memory of her son Stephen Aaron Luck
 Marlen and Gene Maier in memory of their son Eric Eugene Maier
 Kathleen McGlew in memory of her daughter Jennifer Lynn Hamilton
 Norma and Donald Melcher in memory of their son Brian Richard Melcher
 Sharon Poe in memory of her son John Christopher Poe
 Linda and Robert Rasmussen in memory of their son Steven Craig Rasmussen
 Joyce and Thomas Schall in memory of their son Thomas Jeffrey Schall
 Dee Spirt-Rayment in memory of her son Gary "Jake" David Spirt
 Lorraine Tarr in memory of her son Russell "Rusty" Joseph Tarr
 Mary Ellen Young in memory of her son Zachary Daniel Robertson
 Jeanne and LeRoy Jones in memory of their sons Jeremy Scott Jones and Brian Keith Jones,
 and Jeanne's brother Roger Wallace Johnson



Donations are gratefully accepted to offset the cost of: printing and mailing our Chapter's monthly newsletter; maintenance of our website; our annual events -- Memory Walk, Remembrance Service, Conference of Hope and Healing; as well as books and other materials for our Chapter's library.



Happy 25th Birthday
Aaron
Our Forever
18-Year Old Son...

I struggle to come up with the appropriate words which will reveal the positive influence our youngest son Aaron had on countless lives. He was such an optimistic force of nature! His Aunt Karen describes him best when she says, "He was like a ray of sunshine bursting into the room whenever he came to visit"...his brilliant red hair added to that image, Aaron was as bright as the sun shining on a delightful spring day.

Therefore, in remembrance of Aaron's 25th birthday on December 21st, I think I will let the words of another honor our wonderful, affectionate, and deeply missed son, Aaron Sebastian Royer. The following is a letter from the lovely wife of one of Aaron's lifelong friends, David Casamento, named Katie. David and Katie are a lovely couple and graciously named their first son Aaron which, to say the least, touched us profoundly.

She writes:

Mrs. Diane,

I have been thinking about you and your family lately and wanted to share a story with you that I think you will enjoy.

A few months ago I was putting Aaron down for a nap and he was as usual taking his beloved blankie and doggie to bed with him. (They are the blanket and dog that you all gave him two years ago, he sleeps with them every night and absolutely loves them!!!) During the course of our conversation, I suggested that he name the dog and he excitedly agreed. I named several names, all of which he said "no" to as soon as it was out of my mouth. After 10-15 names, one randomly popped into my head, I said it and Aaron right away said, "Oh yes!" As I was thinking about it later, I realized that the name we had picked for the dog was quite ironic. Aaron chose the name Sebastian.

How funny that I would think of it and he would like it. I am sure it was not just coincidental. It is an honor to have my son named after someone so loved and dear to so many, especially my husband. I just wish I had the privilege of meeting him myself.

*Love,
 Katie*

Therefore instead of a poem for Aaron's special day I think a note of "Thanks" is in order. Thank you to the accommodating support group, The Bereaved Parents of the USA, Anne Arundel County Chapter, for your empathy and compassion. The willingness of other bereaved parents to share their stories, pain, and most graciously their children, with us thereby permitted us to reveal our stories, pain, and share our son, Aaron, with them. It is truly an enormously big hearted and kind gift to open up to strangers who simply share a similar burdensome bond - the loss of a beloved child.

In addition a deep hearted thank you, with our love, to family and dear friends for your understanding, concern, and tenderness over the last six plus years. Our indebtedness goes beyond words. Because of each one of you, we rest assured Aaron lives on in the memories of many treasured individuals. We know you grieve for Aaron and think of him often, also. This gives us, his brother, Nathan, and his sisters, Nikole and Janine strength, for we know we are not alone in the loss of our funny, loving, caring, and endearingly special rascal, Aaron.

With Great Appreciation and Love,
 Aaron's Mom & Dad, Diane and Bob Royer
 Anne Arundel County Chapter/BPUSA
 (Aaron's photo can be seen on page 1 of this newsletter)



SIBLING PAGE



My Sibling

At night, as I sleep,
I wonder if my brother will wander
the streets of my dreams.
In the morning when I rise
sometimes all I can see is the rain.

It seems so lonely without him,
There are days I feel pain
and some nights I lie awake in sorrow.
It's just not the same anymore,
Without him it's hard to face tomorrow.

My friendships aren't what they used to be,
It's hard to explain... **Oh I know!!!**
it's because he's not standing next to me.
As crazy as this may sound
At times, I try to talk to my sibling,
Hoping to see his face in a crowd.
I'll be honest, I miss my loved one
The bond between a brother or sister
is as strong as they come

My heart goes out today,
To all of you who came

It's nothing, but respectful
for us to light a candle in their name
I've learned a big lesson in my life,
It does hurt to grieve
And a blessing can come
Even in the misery of a tragedy.

The pain is written on our faces
From all the places memories were made
The valuable times we shared together
are now the reasons that we're afraid.

Every year brings tear after tear,
our struggles grow, they know no limit
Grief doesn't show favoritism
the hurt is on the inside
it's never finished
It won't one day feel better
it's not supposed to
you won't wake up changed forever
This is something you go through

Your loss has a name, so speak that name
Because what you find from here on out
will never be the same

as the body you had to bury and you're left
without
Your knees will be weak and your eyes will
flow
Your heart will ache as you speak that name
You'll see the face of the one you knew and
hope to know
You'll believe in faith,
So speak that name every day
for your peace remains in how you release the
pain

One day we will see our purpose
as we spread love through what hurts us
We see long faces leave us
and we depend on the one and only Jesus
To break free, what we can't seem to just let
be
Here let me speak that name: **Ryan Michael
Sheahy**
that's who matters to me...



Michael Joseph Sheahy
Anne Arundel County Chapter/BPUSA
in memory of his brother
Ryan Michael Sheahy
May 4, 1977 - March 16, 2001

SIBLING GRIEF

I was a sophomore in high school when my little brother, Arthur, was killed. As a sad coincidence, the woman who killed him was the secretary at my school. I must have seen her at school the day he died, but I am not able to consciously remember it. I can't remember seeing Arthur lying in the street either, though I know I did. All I can recall is being horrified and needing to get away from there. I took my younger sister home and never saw Arthur again. It was the dreadful beginning of a very long and painful journey.

The pain of the grief is unavoidable, so is the family disruption. What can be changed, however, is the length of the grieving process. There are things that can be done that will help or hinder this process. Unfortunately for our family, we were given no help and we stayed a mess for a long time. I would like to share some of my experiences in the hope that they will help you to cope with your brother's or sister's death.

The first thing I remember is not knowing how to act or what to do. I felt terribly alone and awkward. I was shocked. One minute it was a nice, normal day and the next minute everything was changed. I didn't know how I was supposed to act at school. Part of me wanted to tell everyone what had happened and part of me didn't want to talk to anyone at all. I felt guilty for getting some comfort from the attention (I asked myself if this meant I was "glad" my brother had died), but on the other hand, I felt that people would think I didn't care when I said nothing. It hurt either way. One way I dealt with my grief was by being sarcastic and laughing whenever something painful came up. I laughed outside, but I think my friends knew I was crying on the inside. Many people don't know how to help us, but hopefully you will have someone you can talk to. If not, perhaps you will be able to talk at home about how you feel.

Home may become a pain-filled place. Our parents have been hurt badly. They aren't the same parents we knew

before the death. The biggest mistake I made in my grief was trying to "fix" my parents pain. I wished for and acted in ways that I hoped would change them back to happy, whole people again. I know now that it was not my responsibility to do this. In fact, I couldn't do it, no matter how "good" I was, or how much I tried to make our home pleasant, they were still sad. The bad thing was, by trying to make them better, I stuffed a lot of my own sadness, fears and worries inside. This added even more problems to my grief. In some ways, it felt better to worry about them instead of myself, but as I got older, those old painful memories wouldn't stay covered up anymore. It is like a splinter that gets covered up with skin and feels better until the infection sets in, and then it hurts so much more when it comes out. We have to take care of ourselves and trust our parents to take care of themselves.

For years I rarely cried about my brother. I always thought that was strange. It was years before I was able to let the tears flow and then I cried for him and for me. I cried for Arthur because he was dead and I missed him; I cried for myself because of all I had missed. I missed feeling happiness in myself and my family. I missed feeling safe and secure. I missed the attention my parents were no longer able to give me. I missed the years of carefree childhood that were ripped away. Those are all losses that siblings grieve for besides the loss of a brother or sister.

Yes, it hurts! Cry about it. Laugh about it. Talk about it. Write about it. Pray about it. Just don't try to bury it, that won't work in the long run. And you know, I can do all those things today and it doesn't hurt nearly as much as it did when I started.

I now realize that my feelings about my brother's death were not the same as my parent's feelings. I used to think that I didn't love my brother because I wasn't as sad as long as they were. They hated the holidays, but I wanted the fun of the holidays. They couldn't be happy, but I could, especially after the first terrible set of holidays. Our parents have

the right to feel sad because that is how they are feeling. We have the right to be happy if that's how we are feeling. Each one of my brothers and sisters had their own feelings. Each was sad, happy, and regretful in their own way and time. We grieved with our separate timetables. Sometimes we shared feelings, and many times they were different. None of us, however bad we felt, came close to having the depth of the pain that our parents did. I didn't understand this then as I do now. This is an important thing to know so that we don't feel guilty about getting on with our lives.

I remember that I used to think about things I did or didn't do with my brother before he died. I felt guilty because I didn't play with him the last time he wanted me to. Of course, I didn't know at the time that he was going to die. I remember times when I got mad and yelled at him for no reason. I felt guilty about that too. I know now that this is just a normal part of a brother-sister relationship. I can now realize that what I did or didn't do had nothing to do with his death. We need to be careful not to take on guilt. One of my brothers had always felt guilty because Arthur was riding his bicycle when he was killed. My brother did not kill Arthur. The woman who was driving the car did. It is important not to blame ourselves. Even if we did have a part in the death (or think we did), we need to forgive ourselves as we certainly didn't deliberately do it.

My brother's death definitely changed my life. It brought pain and unhappiness, but it also brought an awareness of other people's pain and the ability to understand and help others. I hope that you can take something from my experience and use it in your grief and maybe you can pass it on someday, too.

Marggie Gerner, Bereaved Sibling
St. Louis, MO/BPUSA
from *A Journey Together*
www.bereavedparentsusa.org

OUR CHILDREN REMEMBERED

Please remember the following families this month.

Cito Arán
Son of Sandra Aran
December 2, 1978 - July 11, 2000

David Sheridan Astle
Son of John and Jayne Astle
October 21, 1974 - December 6, 1997

Matthew Stephen Auer
Son of Carol and Steve Auer
December 11, 1982 - May 4, 2004

Christopher Lewis Borngesser
Son of Diane Borngesser
December 21, 1961 - May 28, 2001

Nicholas Allen Bowling
Grandson of Jack and Audrey Bagby
December 27, 1979 - July 31, 1985

Christine Elaine Bramhall
Daughter of Robert and Patricia Bramhall
December 21, 1961 - May 9, 1981

Herbert John Buzby
Son of Gerlinda and Clark Coleman
December 31, 1961 - December 19, 2003

Russell Joseph Calo Jr.
Son of Denise and Russell Calo
March 15, 1983 - December 30, 2006

Gary Lee Downey Jr.
Son of Pat and Gary Downey
Brother of Melissa Barnhart
October 30, 1980 - December 24, 2005

Tyler Dudley
Son of Julie Cremen
December 29, 2000 - February 23, 2001

Rebecca Lynn Faires
Daughter of Georgia Nelsen
March 16, 1985 - December 18, 2003

Christina Ann Fisher
Daughter of Rick and Carol Wilson
December 17, 1985 - June 30, 2001

Melissa Ireland Frainie
Daughter of Kathy and George Ireland
December 12, 1971 - February 12, 2007

Phillip Wayne Gray Jr.
Son of Joan Gray
July 8, 1970 - December 22, 1986

Michael Thompson Heany
Son of Frank and Jean Heany
February 7, 1973 - December 23, 2004

Mallory Heffernan
Daughter of Dianne and Edmund Heffernan
December 19, 1985 - April 18, 2003

Kurt Willard Johnson
Son of Willard and Marian Johnson
December 9, 1963 - August 11, 2003

Gary Wayne Keats
Son of Delores Shuey
December 3, 1964 - March 8, 2004

Logan Robert Kugler
Son of Sherry Kugler
December 10, 2000 - December 10, 2000

Michael Robert Legér
Son of Daryl and Elizabeth Legér
July 11, 1986 - December 29, 2000

John F. Marinelli
Son of William and Annette Marinelli
May 30, 1964 - December 19, 1986

Joseph A. Miller
Son of Mary J. Miller
Brother of Marlene Miller
December 13, 1956 - May 12, 1977

Kim Jonathan Nixon
Son of Stephen and Carolyn Tew
December 5, 1957 - December 16, 1984

Michael Henry O'Malley
Son of Margie and John O'Malley
August 25, 1971 - December 7, 1991

Michael Patrick Patterson
Son of Sylvia Simmons
September 6, 1965 - December 18, 2006

Phillip "PJ" Bernard Riek Jr.
Son of Pamela and Tracy Peterson
December 29, 1989 - January 17, 2000

OUR CHILDREN REMEMBERED (continued)

Daniel Burwell Robinson
Son of Jerry and Sara Robinson
September 20, 1972 - December 14, 1995

Aaron Sebastian Royer
Son of Diane and Robert Royer
December 21, 1982 - July 5, 2001

Gary Lee Ryon Jr.
Son of Betty Ryon
August 24, 1989 - December 1, 2002

Timothy A. Scaggs
Son of Bette and Tim Scaggs
December 29, 1996 - March 23, 2005

Donald "Donnie" L. Severe Jr.
Son of Chuck and Issy Mattis
August 23, 1956 - December 13, 1984

Donald "Donny" Lee Seyfferth Jr.
Son of Jody Seyfferth
December 16, 1977 - May 8, 2000

Phillip David Sharrow
Son of Sandra Sharrow
December 8, 1976 - November 17, 1995

Victoria Shimonkevitz
Granddaughter of Jim and Margaret Williford
December 9, 1993 - December 12, 1993

Jason Edward Skarzynski
Son of Benjamin and Sharon Skarzynski
December 19, 1977 - December 14, 1995

Mark Edward Smeltzer
Son of Peggy Smeltzer
December 11, 1969 - March 15, 1997

Russell "Rusty" Joseph Tarr
Son of Lorraine A. Tarr
December 22, 1963 - May 12, 1994

Marie Rose Trehey
Daughter of Greg and Chere Trehey
December 21, 2000 - December 21, 2000

Renetra "Nee" Lotrice Wallace-Connor
Daughter of Pamela Davis and Vernon Wallace
December 22, 1972 - September 22, 2006

Richard C. Watts
Son of Tom and Fran Cease
December 28, 1966 - October 28, 1998

Miriam Luby Wolfe
Daughter of Larry and Rosemary Mild
September 26, 1968 - December 21, 1988

Note: If your child's name appears in the printed version of our newsletter but does not appear in this online version, it is because we have not received explicit permission from you to list it online. If you would like your child's name to also appear in future online editions of the newsletter, please send an email to drallex@sdalex.com

Perhaps they are not the stars
but rather openings in Heaven
where the love of our lost ones
pours through and shines down upon us
to let us know they are happy.

Inspired by an Eskimo legend

A GRANDPARENT'S HOLIDAY DILEMMA

A difficult part of being a bereaved grandparent at the holiday time is that we are expected to be all things to all our children. To those who have healthy and complete families we are expected to share in their joy. To our bereaved child we are expected to understand, empathize and, above all, be aware of the special difficulty the holidays bring for them. We are put in the middle between our children, happy families on one side, and a sad one on the other. In addition, we have our own pain to deal with.

It seems to me that this is an impossible situation and frequently we are expected to do the impossible, but I don't think we can, nor do I think we should try. Because I am a bereaved parent myself and I have experienced that special grief, I know my bereaved daughter's second Christmas without her Emily will be a hard one, maybe even harder than the first one. It will be especially hard for her because this year my oldest son and his (complete) family will come from Minneapolis to St. Louis for Christmas. He has three little ones; the oldest is the same age that Emily would be. Seeing Bob's children, especially Robbie, will remind Dorothy even more that Emily will not be physically a part of our holidays.

For weeks I have been tormented with thoughts on how I will handle this situation. Will I act at the holidays in a way that will make my son happy, or in ways that will be supportive of my daughter? Granted, there will be separate times when I can be happy that my son and his family are here and happy to see my grandchildren, whom I don't see often; and there will be a time when I can be totally supportive of my bereaved daughter. But this will not be possible for all the time, especially on Christmas Day.

I have decided that, as hard as it may be to do, I must make a choice between them this year, and I choose to be supportive of my bereaved daughter. This may sound unfair, but is it? When our children were younger, weren't there times, such as when one was sick and needed our special attention, didn't we give it to them, oft times to the neglect of the others? This didn't mean we loved the sick child more than the others. It simply meant that the sick one needed us more than the others at that time. Our bereaved child is experiencing the most pain he/she will ever experience in his/her life and right now, needs us more.



Unfortunately, our child with the complete family may resent our attention to the bereaved child and feel neglected maybe even hurt, and for that we are sorry, but our child who has not lost a child has not experienced the constant pain and hurt our bereaved child has for a year or longer. We cannot let ourselves be too concerned that he/she may feel neglected or hurt for a few days. To benefit ourselves as well as our bereaved child, we may consider changing some of our holiday traditions this year. Have a buffet instead of a sit-down dinner. Put the tree in the living room instead of the family room this year. A number of changes are possible. As in my case, my bereaved child lost her only child. I have asked her to come later, after my son's three little ones have opened their presents, so that she won't have to see the joy in their eyes that she will never again see in Emily's. Even as parents of grown and married children, we never stop being teachers to them. We can take this opportunity to teach our non-bereaved children empathy and concern for others. This too can be a special lesson for our surviving grandchildren that they can learn from us.

We can enlist our non-bereaved children's aid in helping the bereaved child get through the holiday with a little less pain. We can remind them that while it may be somewhat uncomfortable for them to acknowledge or talk about a child who is dead, how much more uncomfortable it is to the parent of a child who is dead. We may suggest some special ways to remember the dead child in our family celebration.

Each person may make some statement about how they miss that child or a certain thing they remember about him/her. Or, we might light a special candle on the dining room table or hang a special ornament. This serves two purposes. It is helpful to the bereaved child because it lets him/her know his/her child has not been forgotten and is still, in a special way, a part of the family. And, it helps the non-bereaved children because it clears the air of unspoken thoughts and feelings.

Margaret Gerner
Bereaved Grandmother and Bereaved Mother
St. Louis, MO/BPUSA
from *A Journey Together*
www.bereavedparentsusa.org



There is an interesting discussion in the Talmud, an ancient Jewish writing. Those Jews who had the custom of tearing their garments – literally tearing their clothes – to symbolize the ripping apart that death brings. But the question was raised, after the period of mourning, could you sew the garment up and use it again? The teachers answered yes, but when you mended it you should not tuck the edges under so it would look as if it had never been torn. This symbolized the fact that life, after grief, is not the same as before. The rent will show. The next question was, can you sell that

garment? The teachers answered no. The rending and mending of our life is ours and others cannot wear it.

No, we don't get over it. We change and grow. Our life has a difference which is ours alone. Perhaps we can help each other make that difference, the kind of difference that increases the world's supply of compassion, love and healing.

Dennis Klass
Advisor to BP/USA
from *A Journey Together* (Fall 2001)
www.bereavedparentsusa.org

Not This Christmas

Please don't ask me,
to say the word "merry",
It's a tune my heart
just can't carry.
It's the same with
Saying "happy"
When the state of my world
is unhappy.
I would like to give "thanks"
but my heart is not in giving.
Now that my son has been
ripped from the living.

I can't smile
because it's a holiday.
I'll try to pray and pay homage
on this holy day.
No never,
I won't be joyous.
No drinks, no cakes, no toys,
for us.
On and on,
the onslaught of greetings.
I can't utter,
another good tidings.

It's not that I deny you
the pleasure of a good season,
The hurt and the pain
have taken my reason.
Lord, with your mercy and love,
help me find a way
To smile with others
on this blessed day.

Bob Katz
Anne Arundel County Chapter/BPUSA
in memory of his son
Matthew James Katz
March 13, 1982 – September 7, 2003



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 expectation.

Drink deeply, friend, so that
fortified with the promises it brings,
this New 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
Bereaved Mother
Denton, TX/BPUSA
from A Journey Together,
www.bereavedparentsusa.org



December

Everything I did this week
I did because of you
You might not see me doing it
But I promise that it's true

I began the week with Candlelight
Well...maybe it was two
I really can't remember much
The week flew by that's true

They sang, they talked they even cried
I guess they always do
That really doesn't matter much
It's all done because of you

I might've even helped some folks
Maybe one or two
I hope they know I do it
It's all because of you

Then, did I mention, there's a Meeting?
They're family there "to me"
Although they're not related
That doesn't have to be

We brought you gifts, we talked a lot
Our gifts were from the heart
It really didn't matter
Because – we're still apart

But one thing that I know today
This week was just for you
I might've helped a couple of folks
But it was just for you.

This special week in December
I always will maintain
It gives me strength
To hear folks speak your name

All year I know you're with me
That never can be changed
But this week it's all different
Because they call your name

This week in December
I am so filled with joy
Especially this week in December
You're still Mama's little boy.

Carol Welch
St. Louis Chapter/BPUSA
in memory of her son, Sean Christian Anderson
from A Journey Together
www.bereavedparentsusa.org



12 Days of Holiday Wishes from your friends of the Anne Arundel Chapter/BPUSA

1. **THE ABILITY TO COMMUNICATE.** An openness in sharing your grief and talking about your child.
2. **THE ABILITY TO CONQUER FEAR.** To overcome anxiety surrounding the holidays and those special days.
3. **A SAFE PLACE TO SHARE YOUR GRIEF.** Someone you trust. Someone to listen.
4. **PERMISSION TO FORGIVE YOURSELF.** For backsliding into deep grief or for at times feeling guilty about feeling good after the death of your child.
5. **THE ABILITY TO BE ABLE TO DO OR CHOOSE SOMETHING SPECIAL FOR YOUR CHILD.** Perhaps a candle, a tree - a special tribute to their memory.
6. **PLEASANT MEMORIES.** The days you were together as a family. Those magic moments in life.
7. **OPTIMISM.** Thoughts of a cup half full, not half empty.
8. **HOPE.** To find a dream, something to add new meaning to your life.
9. **THE ABILITY TO GIVE OF YOURSELF.** To be able to do something positive with your life, like helping others.
10. **THE ABILITY TO ACCEPT YOUR LOSS.** Not the deep well of sorrow, regret and despair.
11. **THE ABILITY TO PARTITION YOUR GRIEF.** To accept life itself - the joy, the pain, the love, the anger, the hugs, the laughter, and enjoying the moment.
12. **THE ABILITY TO SAY OUR CHILD'S NAME** without pain and to accept our shoulder to help share the burden.

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MEMORIAL SERVICE - DECEMBER 2 at 3:00pm
NEXT MEETING - DECEMBER 6 "Introducing Our Children" and Toy Collection



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UPCOMING MEETING TOPICS AND EVENTS:

December 6: The focus of this evening will be on our deceased children and giving us a better sense of who they were. There will not be a presenter; sharing groups are the focus.

For the non-newly bereaved sharing group, each person brings a picture or some memento of his/her lost child; each person holds the picture or memento facing the rest of the group, "introduces" his/her child and describes what the child was like, etc. We also invite you to bring a gift in memory of your child to be distributed to a needy child.

January 3: Monthly Meeting

WHAT TO EXPECT AT OUR MEETINGS:

Each of our monthly meetings follows the same basic format. We open with a general session attended by all for the first half hour of the evening. We usually schedule a program with a speaker or panel to address a topic that may be of interest and value to families mourning the death of a child. After this talk, everyone in attendance is invited to introduce themselves and say their child's name if they are able. Then we break off into sharing groups.

We always have these sharing groups and - particularly for the newly bereaved - the issues that are discussed do not necessarily have to focus on a program's topic, unless it is relevant to the members in the sharing group. We try to cover a range of topics in our scheduled programs that we hope are of value to a broad range of our Chapter members. We appreciate your feedback and suggestions for future program topics. Please contact our Chapter's Program coordinators Paul Balasic or Jane Schindler.