We as bereaved parents, help grieving parents and families rebuild their lives following the death of a child

A BEREAVED MOTHER’S LOVE
By Jessi Snapp

There is a love so pure, so tender, so strong. A love that spans over a lifetime and pours in and out of other realms. It is higher than the stars that fill the moonlit skies. Wider than the earth itself. It is deeper than the most forbidding places of the ocean. A love that radiates brighter than the sun and pulls just as mercilessly as a black hole. A love that is insurmountable in all regards. It is a love that transcends time and is completely unrestrained. It is free.

There is a love so sacred, so cherished, and true. A love that is incomprehensible to the world around. A love that can exist where others think it wouldn’t. A love so perfectly intertwined deep within your heart, your soul. A love that makes the because it’s beauty and depth is it sheds beauty upon the earth

Nothing compares to this love.

This love – it does exist. It exists can exist even though unseen. remaining, it still survives. But More and more each day this love wildflowers in an untouched never run dry and the gusts of its

The depth and intensity of such about in fairy tales and happily something far from that. This love grounds. It lingers in silent tears the most isolated place. It lives to longer. This love rests in the irrecoverable pieces of our souls and the gaping wounds of our shattered hearts. It sways elegantly with joy in the darkest places of desolation and despair. For even in darkness it continues to grow and rejoice.

It is beauty and chaos released in the same breath.

This love – this unchanging, unwavering, unbreakable love – is that of a broken heart. This love belongs to the bereaved mother. For even in death, she loves endlessly. For even in darkness, her love is
scintillating. Not even death could extinguish this love, for it is a love like no other. Unmatched and unparalleled – it is truly one of a kind.

The beautiful love of mother and child – put to the ultimate test and stretched far past the breaking point. Yet it remains untouched – only to grow stronger with each pull. The world stands idly by waiting for the bond to break. For the bereaved mother to let it go – to give up. Little do they know, they will wait for an eternity.

The love of a bereaved mother is a force to be reckoned with. A force so powerful that nothing can stand in its way. Time nor death can change it. Sorrow nor pain can break it.

This love – it is our love. It survives where they are not. It is the love that occupies the space in our hearts and in our lives where they once were. This love saves a sacred space for them. It exists only because they lived. It remains even though they left. It is neither theory nor fiction – it is an incredible, powerful truth.

The love of a bereaved mother is an implausible, fierce, interminable love that defies all odds.

This love is what has taken root in every single cell of my body and pulses through my veins with purpose and meaning. This love has wiped my soul clean. It has changed my very being. This love lightens the burden of loss. For it is this love that makes the pain more bearable. Perhaps, even worthwhile.

Death does not define me – it is life and this love that defines me. It is this love that has changed the course of my life and has separated me from the rest of the world. This love – it is my love. And for the life of me – I will never let it go. It is the one thing that binds my broken soul. This love – it is what keeps me going. It is the echo that ripples from all that I do. And all that I am.

No matter the distance, no matter the time – this love is prevailing. And it is mine.

Editor’s note: May the pure and sacred bond between you and your precious child bring you peace, love and joy on Mother’s Day. KC

LOSING A SIBLING: A DIFFERENT KIND OF GRIEF
From Science Care

A child’s loss of a parent or a parent’s loss of a child leads to immeasurable grief over generational loss. Loss of a sibling creates a particular kind of “horizontal” grief in which shared histories and futures are fractured, creating uncertainties and insecurities that are often unacknowledged or misunderstood. As a result, surviving siblings may suffer from long-term depression. Because of this, surviving siblings are often called “forgotten mourners.”

When an adult loses a sibling, especially one who lives far away, the surviving sibling is often left to mourn alone with much of the support directed towards the grieving spouse, children and parents.

When a senior citizen loses a sibling, there is often a lack of good support as society accepts death easier when it comes at an older age. But sibling loss is painful at any age. A senior who has lost a sibling is likely revisiting feelings of other losses including parents, spouses and friends, and likely has fewer family members to offer comfort and support.

Common Feelings for Adult Survivors of Sibling

Survivor guilt. Surviving siblings can suffer from feelings of failure to protect their sibling, or failure to be supportive of the sibling in life.

Guilt over a rocky childhood. Siblings commonly outgrow childhood rivalries, but guilt over past tensions can surface even when the adult sibling relationship has been strong.

Anger. A surviving sibling may feel stress or even anger over roles that he is now expected to fulfill such as caring for the nieces, nephews or aging parents.

Distress. The decisions at time of death often fall onto surviving siblings who must agree on arrangements such as burial or cremation, whole body donation, organ donation, and memorial services. Funeral expenses can be very expensive and surviving siblings are often accountable for the financial burden of these arrangements.

Fear. A surviving sibling may become fearful of the end of life and have anxiety of how their own families will manage without them.

Getting over the Loss, or Allowing Yourself Not to

Siblings can try to stay connected through shared memories, in family discussions, and in memorials. Journaling or sharing your thoughts with others you do not know can also help healing. Blog spots such as http://losing-a-sibling.blogspot.com have become a place for individuals to share grief with others who
have lost siblings. Remembering your sibling does not have to be sorrowful. Laugh at the memory of the time your sister tried to pierce your ears, or when your brother tried to teach you how to ride a bike.

Society often encourages bereaved individuals to feel guilty for grieving too long. There is no magic technique that will make the grief go away. There is no defined right way to grieve in the length of time that one is expected to move on.

Moving on with your life does not have to mean forgetting your lost loved one. In fact, allowing yourself to hold your grief in a special place in your heart can help you to be okay to move on with your life.

In this moving video, Billy Bob Thornton talks about why it is okay to allow grief in your life. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Pn3y7S5FAw

There are many ways to create a living memorial by turning grief into something positive, including continuing charitable work your sibling did, establishing a fund in honor of your sibling, and being a good listener for another person going through a similar loss. Remember your sibling by pursuing the happiness your sibling would want you to have.

Excerpt from TOPICS IN GRIEF BY A WOMAN WHO LOST A SON by Leila H. Koepp

Now that spring is in the air, the tears seem to flow at a constant pace. People ask me as to why I am sad. I answer “Don’t you know it is spring?” Someone responded with a quote from T.S. Eliot “April is the cruelest month.”

Part of a poem that I wrote about spring goes like this:

“Tears continue to water the flowers as I till his garden. My heart skips a beat each time I realize my son was cut off in the spring of his life.”

BLUEPRINTS OF FATHER’S DAY
By R. Glenn Kelly
www.grievingmen.com

Spring comes with its warming breezes gently nudging Mother Nature to wake from her dormancy and renew a once bleak landscape. It is a magic time, where jackets donned in the morning are slung over shoulders by 10am. April showers bring May flowers, and then almost as if spring were just a dream, summer is upon us and we find ourselves either in shorts, tee-shirts and sandals, or darting from air conditioned cars to air conditioned homes.

June seems to be a transition month, of sorts. While we are beyond the threats of freak spring snowfalls, and our attire is down to just a single layer, we are not quite into the full bore of summer where we will spend our lives searching for water. If we cannot find it at the beach, a backyard pool or at the local water park, we will go as far as to carry it around with us in little plastic bottles. It makes sense. If one were to look at the blueprints of the human body, it is commonly known that we are made up mostly of that wonderful wet stuff. Water is an unquestionable an instinctual need for us all.

June also brings Father’s Day, which is another transition point for me, and for many other fathers who have experienced the traumatic loss of a child. This year, Father’s Day will fall on Sunday, June 19th. In the year 2013, Father’s Day came just 3 days after I lost my sixteen-year-old son and only child when his precious heart failed during a “relatively” simple surgery. To me, June and Father’s Day will always be a trigger to remind me of the “New Normal” of my life now.

Like every parent who has lost a child, I mourned for my son Jonathan. I was anguished greatly for his short life, and the adult life he would never experience. Although I could look back over his sixteen years and take solace in the fact that he had an incredibly happy childhood, there was so much more of the magic of life he had yet to encounter, and he will not get the chance. Without question, the majority of my great remorse was for my lost child.

Yet, while it is not often discussed, I also had to face the fact that there is a great deal of mourning to be done for myself, as well. Yes, while many men may think of this quietly, we do not often speak it aloud; lest we fear being thought of as insensitive and self-centered. However, we must openly admit that while we feel immense sorrow for what was denied our child, something incredible, something anticipated, something natural, normal and “instinctual” was taken against our will. Not only against our will, but against our presupposed blueprint of a man’s life.
Whether one believes that we walked from the Garden of Eden or crawled from the primordial ooze, the strongest instinct for man, and mankind, is to procreate. It is a commonly accepted finding in psychology that the greatest emotional achievement of a man is to father a child. Like our other DNA infused traits of being systemizers, organizers, hunters, and builders, there is an undeniable instinct to create offspring to grow the legacy of our tribe beyond our own mortality. If we have done that, we will live forever.

We know we will never completely heal from our loss, but to continue on our journey towards healing, we must look inward and recognize that part of losing a child is “Our Loss” too. Deep inside, even at that place where the unconditional love of our child resides, we must be able to come to terms with the fact that something has been taken from us. We had a “Blueprint” for our lives that was taken against our will. We absolutely expected to father a child, and then teach, nurture and mentor that child until they could stand on their own, only to leave this world ourselves, content that our legacy continues. Such is the blueprint of life since the dawn of humans.

As a father and author of this article, I chose to use Father’s Day as a platform. Yet, bereaved mothers certainly experience the very same avoidance of recognizing their own deep remorse. It just does not seem right to think of ourselves, be us father or mother, when a child has been taken from our arms. Yet, in order to heal and get beyond any unresolved grief, all pains must be given attention, even if it seems selfish to even consider.

Like so many areas of the grieving process, emotions which are avoided and stuffed back inside will eventually find a way to get out. If one will not consciously face and express painful grief feelings, they will eventually find a home within the subconscious of the mind. The subconscious is that area of the mind that acts on our behalf without any conscious effort. It is that area that causes a heart to beat 100,000 times a day, and lungs to take in air without a single thought from the conscious brain.

The subconscious is normally beyond our control, as well. Try to tell the heart to stop beating, or veins and arteries in the body to stop constricting in order to move blood through the body. It simply cannot be done. So, when it comes to bitter emotions which have found a home within the subconscious, they begin to negatively take over the natural personality, and they begin to escape without conscious effort or control. Further, once negative, repressed emotions reside in the subconscious and assume the personality, they become very difficult to extract. Soon they become the new you, always angry or bitter, possibly depressed or always sullen.

This year let springtime, with its transitional month of June and celebration of Father’s Day, be a period of reawakening for you, too. Our once coveted blueprints have changed into a New Normal. Yet, we are always aware in our journey towards healing that a New Normal is one where we once again live a life of peace and purpose, all the while carrying the unconditional love of our lost children with us every day.

Be it Mother’s Day in May, or Father’s Day in June, take time to recognize the pains of unexpectedly losing your own blueprints for life. Even if repressed emotions may have moved back to the subconscious, recognition is as healing as the spring time sun to withered flora and fauna. Do not beat yourself up, however. It will take time. If bitter emotions do act on your behalf without conscious effort or control, simply recognize them each time. As you do, they will slowly move back to conscious thought, where your healing journey through grief can reawaken life from what was once dormant and barren.

Happy Father’s Day…
…and “Peace and Purpose” to all.

Editor's Note: Ron will be one of our speakers at the Gathering July 1-3 in Indianapolis, IN.
We are the parents whose children have died. We are the grandparents who have buried grandchildren. We are the siblings whose brothers and sisters no longer walk with us through life…

Grief is a process. Recovery is a choice. The way we grieve is a decision.

*Terri Guillemet*
CREATING A MEMORY GARDEN

By Keith Swett

Spring in Wisconsin mirrors the life of a bereaved parent perfectly. One day is bright and sunny and beautiful. We cannot wait to get outside to enjoy the promise of summer and the hope of rebirth offered by green buds everywhere. Then we move from 50 degrees to 12 inches of snow. We are trapped in a bleak almost hopeless isolation as the roads freeze tight and communication dwindles to a bare trickle.

Isolated and lost in pain, the bereaved cannot believe that this too shall pass. The pain is intimidating as the snow. Many from Wisconsin avoid the snow, obsessing endlessly about when the snow will strike, how much snow we will get, which cities will become frozen wastelands. Many bereaved are the same. Worrying about where and when and how much pain we will face limits life and joy and happiness.

I wish I could say there will be no more pain but pain and love are linked. I am neither willing nor able to stop loving. Therefore I will deal with pain. I offer a simple consolation.

They closed school on Friday but Monday is predicted to bring us 50 degree temperatures. Yes you will have pain. Yes it may also be overwhelming, but I promise summer is coming and in time all the joy and love and happiness your child generated returns. When the storm hits, slow down, be cautious, stay in the moment. When the storm passes, embrace the opportunities life offers.

As Matt said so often, "Come on! Come on! There is more to see."

From Yankee Magazine

Memory gardens are a beautiful way to honor and remember lost loved ones. They don't have to be elaborate or require a lot of maintenance. They can be as simple and as personal as you like.

To start your garden, pick a place in the yard that can be easily seen from a favorite window or an outdoor seating area. Be sure and keep the light requirements of your plants in mind. Sun loving plants need at least six hours of direct sun to thrive, and shade plants will wither in direct sun.

There are several kinds of elements you can have in your garden.

**Trees.** Keep the size of your yard in mind. For smaller yards, choose a tree that’s compact in height and width. Japanese maples, weeping mulberries and dogwoods are good smaller-sized trees.

Think about the seasonal look of the tree, as well. Spring flowering trees include Eastern redbuds, Bradford pears and saucer magnolias. For fall color, consider sugar maples or ginkgo. Evergreens give color and structure all year long.

**Flowers.** If your loved one had favorite flowers, incorporating them into your garden is a good way to honor their memory. If possible, bring some plants from their own garden into yours.

You can also choose plants that remind you of them with their scents or color. If she loved chocolate, for example, you can find plants with chocolate in the name, such as chocolate columbine, chocolate daisy or even edible chocolate mint. Was he the life of the party? Then bright zinnias or wildflowers would be appropriate.

**Seating.** A chair or bench can be a soothing place to sit and enjoy the garden. Choose seating that reflects the personality of your loved one — classic stone, modern metals or rustic wood are some options available.

**Water features.** A fountain or bird bath can be a soothing feature in your garden. A small pond with some goldfish or Koi fish adds light, motion and a reflective element, as well.

**Art.** A meaningful statue, some original art, or a garden stone with a heartfelt verse can provide a focal point for your garden. Garden stones are available through your local florist, garden center or gift shop. Many retailers keep a variety of verses in stock and can also offer custom ordering.

There are no set rules to creating a memory garden. Quiet and reflective, neat and contemporary, or full of color and whimsy — the garden should reflect your loved ones and your relationship with them. Above all, it should be a place to remember them with love.

Editor's note: Send us pictures of your memorial gardens for AJT! newsletters@bereavedparentssusa.org
TO MY SWEET ONE
By Lexi Behrndt

If you ever wonder if I think of you, the answer is every second. Your essence is intertwined with my every thought, your heartbeat lives on within mine, your love gives me one more breath.

If you ever wonder if I miss you, the answer is always. Some days it’s fierce, but over time, it’s become gentler, like a constant melody, your name pouring through my mind, on repeat. Your memory the undercurrent of my days.

I hope you know how much I miss you. I hope you know that sometimes the tears overflow at just the thought of your smile. I hope you know that I sometimes giggle at our sweet memories. I hope you know that I would give it all for you. I hope you know that you are worth all the pain, just to know you, to hold you, to love you. I hope you know that I would give every last bit of me and more, all for you. I hope you know that I am still holding on to you, even though death separates us. I hope you know that you took part of me when you went. I hope you know that you have completely altered the course of my life. I hope you know that I’m waiting for the day when I can scoop you into my arms and tell you about how the world still trembles at the aftershock of your days.

I hope you know that I’m doing okay. I hope you know that I refuse to let my thoughts of you be tainted only by tragedy and loss. Death will not win here, you surely have not let it. Because of that, I won’t allow it, either. It won’t shatter me beyond repair. It won’t incapacitate me. It won’t hold me down forever.

Because you wouldn’t want it that way. You’d want me to live fully, to love deeply, and to leave an impact, just like you have done. I promise to stand, even if the only thing lifting me to my feet is the thought of seeing your smile.

I wish I could hold you now. Steal you away for just a moment. Just one quick glance into your eyes. And even if I couldn’t scoop you into my arms, just one moment to hear your laugh. See you running free, joyful, in complete peace.

I’m so sorry for the pain. I hope it wasn’t too much.

I love you. I love you. I love you.
You are mine and I am yours.
Forever and endlessly.

Until that day…

WHY ATTEND THE NATIONAL GATHERING FOR BEREAVED PARENTS?

Our gatherings provide an opportunity to hear some of the best speakers in the nation who are experts on many topics related to grief. They will inspire you with their messages of HOPE. They will offer you the tools you need to continue to HEAL as you transition from mourning to living again after the loss of your child.

You will also get to know many parents and siblings from different parts of the United States who have experienced losses such as yours. You will come to understand that you are not alone on this journey.

Please join us for 3 days of remembering, honoring and celebrating our children, brothers and sisters. Let this be the year that Hope & Healing will fill your heart.

REGISTER NOW AT WWW.BEREAVEDPARENTSUSA.ORG
FROM THE BPUSA BOARD PRESIDENT, DELAIN JOHNSON:

**IT COMES IN WAVES…**

For the past 10 days, I’ve had the joy of actually taking a “real” vacation. I’ve been on the Panhandle of Florida near Pensacola on Navarre Beach. Every morning I watch the sun come up and every evening I’ve witnessed glorious sunsets. We’ve watched dolphins greeting us in the early morning as they feed right off shore, found so many seashells as we walk most days. My favorite and most cherished find was the sand dollar. I will carefully carry them with me on the flight home making sure they are safe and in one piece when I return to South Dakota.

As I write this note to you all, I could not help but find many analogies to our grief and how this journey parallels the ocean, the beach and all it teaches us. I’ve often used the analogy of grief coming in like a tsunami, rip tides that will pull you under and sweep you out where you feel as if you might drown, calm waters that give us respite and peace.

The tsunami of grief comes in and destroys all that we know. The death of our precious child is that tsunami. It takes all that we knew to be beautiful, delightful, and loving and leaves us feeling like we will never be the same, life isn’t worth living without the one that gave us so many reasons to get up every day and be grateful. This week, I heard from a family whose son died by suicide. She was desperately wanting support; she found BP USA and reached out for that life line. There is no Chapter near her…perhaps someday she will want to pay it forward and start one. Perhaps when she is at that place where she can move to her “calmer sea”, she will be able to rebuild.

I thought also about the beautiful “sugary” sand that I walked in these past days. I could be walking along and it sometimes felt like cement and then it would be washed away by the waves and my footing didn’t feel so secure. I would then move closer to the berm away from the pounding surf. The sand was deceiving there as well. It appeared to be easy to move forward but there again, I found that it was a struggle. It was sometimes hard work to move forward. I know that our grief journey is also like that.

We struggle every day to find our footing. To get out of bed each day…meet the demands of life without our children. In my early days of mourning, I would say to those around me (if they really listened), “the sun comes up every day and sets in the west everyday”. “The world didn’t stop the day my world ended”. “When will this thing I hate most ever go away?” “Will I ever have faith again?” “Will I ever experience joy again?”

My dear friends, this much I know to be true…the answer is “Yes”. It has been 13 years this December 24th since my son was killed. Early on, I would never have believed that after my tsunami and all it destroyed in its wake that I would find treasures left for me under the pile of wreckage. Each one of you that I meet, speak with through emails, telephone calls and letters are my “treasure”. You are precious to me; I wrap each one of you up and carry you just as I will my precious sand dollars.

On July 1-3, 2016 I hope to meet you as we gather together to honor our kids, our siblings and our grandchildren at the National Gathering in Indianapolis, Indiana. It truly will be a time of respite where our grief and joy can coexist. It is the “Crossroads of our Hearts” that keeps us going…you are not alone.

**Editor’s Note:** I had the distinct pleasure of being the first to read Delain’s letter and I would like to share with you my reaction...

I grew up on Lake Champlain so I have always been a “water baby” yet the first time I stood at the edge of the ocean (still young and naïve at the age of 19!), I was pretty overwhelmed. The first thing I said was “But you can’t see the other side...” After Joe and I married, we bought a lake house on Lake Champlain and spent weeks in the summer there with our boys. My lake always brought me comfort and security – it represented home and family to me. After Michael died, my lake no longer gave me that same sense of safety and well-being; it had lost its allure somehow; it served as a reminder of all that could never be again.

We sold the lake house and started vacationing in southern Maine on the beach steps away from the water and, oddly, I no longer felt overwhelmed there. Instead, the vastness of the ocean and the mystery of the ebb and flow of the tide became my place of comfort and peace. I walked the edge of the water for miles and I asked myself the big questions and I began to sort things out... my healing began at the ocean; it is my warm and comforting place that I go to when I meditate... it is all that you describe in your letter and more...

Your analogy helped to clarify this part of my grief journey and to put it into words. Thank you so much for that!! KC
WHY DOES IT HURT SO MUCH TO SEE LIFE GO ON AFTER CHILD LOSS?
By Clara Hinton

If you’re like me, one of the most difficult things for me to hear is how quickly life has gone on for others following the loss of my son. I want to know others are feeling some of my loss. I need to know that others still remember my son. I want so desperately to know that others still think of him.

And, yet the fact is that life has gone on very quickly for most.
It hasn’t been quite one year since my son died, and I’ve noticed more and more that when I mention his name people are starting to shut me down. I think it makes it uncomfortable for them to hear me talking about him. Some people have said that they are afraid I might be stuck in too much pain. Others just get a pained look on their face as if to say, “Why are you bringing up this sadness again? Can’t we just focus on only the happy things in life?”

The truth is it comforts me to talk about Mike. I want to say his name. He is one of my children and his life was intertwined with us as a family for forty-two years. How can I talk of anything without mentioning him?

His memories dance within my head day and night.
Just before Easter my daughter-in-law said to me that one of the last pictures she took of Mike was with bed-head. She said he was standing in the kitchen making coffee and looking over at the kids when she snapped the picture.

I cried. I cried a lot when I heard of this last picture.
I cried because I know how much they miss him. I cried because I pictured him standing there barefoot as he always did getting his cup of coffee in the morning. A simple ritual, but one of so much meaning. He was ready to begin his day — watching his children, and planning on enjoying some quiet time with his wife at the beginning of a new day.

Yes, I cried. But, I need to hear things like this. I want to hear stories about my son. I want to hear the everyday things about his life.

I need to know that he is remembered and missed! I need to know that he is still loved!
I wish that people understood how important the little conversations such as this are to parents who have lost a child. I wish others understood how much we long to hear stories about the little things that our child did — the things that we didn’t always get to see or hear about.

I wish that life didn’t go on so fast for others.
When Mike died, I began journaling my thoughts. I live alone — the rest of the children are adults and I’m left with memories. Precious, beautiful memories.

And, some very sad memories, too.
With the help of my youngest daughter, I have written a book about this journey of child loss. It’s not just my journey. It’s the journey that each of us who has lost a child, a grandchild, or a sibling is taking. This is not an easy journey. It’s hard. It’s difficult. And, yes, it’s often very sad.

We are left with the job of figuring out how to rebuild our lives while living in our brokenness.
I hope you’ll read the book. I think it will help you. I think it will help you a lot. My life hasn’t gone on too fast. I’m still here, and I want to share my son with you as we travel this journey of child loss together. Child Loss — The Heartbreak and the Hope is a book that will help you understand more about this journey of grief we’re taking. Will you get the book and walk hand-in-hand with me through this pain?