



A publication of HOPE FOR BEREAVED, a not-for-profit community organization providing hope, support and services for the bereaved.

I Thought We Were Going to Grow Old Together

By: Dominic Murgido

I wish I had a dollar for every time I heard this mentioned among those of us that grieve the loss of a spouse. We all believed that. And why shouldn't we? Life was grand for us in a relationship that was filled with love and companionship. No matter how much or how little amount of time we shared with one another, life was good.

Then it happened. Our partner was diagnosed with a terminal illness. They became very sick, very fast. They sustained an injury that became life threatening. Our soul mate had a heart attack, a stroke, an aneurism. They had an accident at work or while they were enjoying a favorite sport or past time. Our significant other was killed while on a boat or by a train or in a plane crash. They were killed in a vehicle accident or drowned, or even murdered.

However it happens, they are gone. Life as we knew it is gone with them. For it will never be the way it was from now on. We were comfortable with our partner and our lives together. We did not see this coming. No one did.

So much more that we wanted to do together, share with one another. Travel, explore new adventures, dine out more, visit friends and family more frequently, take extended weekends, and **grow old together**. None of that can happen with them anymore. We are shocked and somewhat traumatized by this life changing event that in some cases happened in the blink of an eye while in other cases death lingered on for some time.

Regardless of the circumstances, we now begin another part of our life but not before we accept the reality of the grief that we feel and the emotional experience that won't go away. Our grief journey begins here. This journey is not one to take too lightly. It will be difficult at times and you cannot do this alone. Support from family, friends, counselors, and bereavement support groups may be needed and are there for you to gain a sense of healing and balance within your life.

After months, maybe years, you will begin to feel better and as time marches on so will you. Our loss will eventually not dominate our thoughts and we will have many past memories to reflect upon as we look forward to our future.

Although we are alone now minus our better half, their presence is with us spiritually helping and guiding us through many tomorrows as we learn to live once again in a world full of hope and promise.

Special Dedication

In Loving Memory of Bryan Rossi on his 37th Birthday

When someone you love
becomes a memory,
that memory becomes
a treasure



HOPE

For Bereaved, Inc.

A Journey from Grief to HOPE

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After A Suicide

By: Stephanie Ann Dispoto

Suicide can be described as an interpersonal act. It is killing oneself, yet it also kills a part of everyone who is close to, or loves, the person who dies by suicide. The emotional pain for the suicide victim is over, but it is only beginning for the survivors.

If you have had a family member or friend die by suicide, you will be able to identify the sharp and long-lasting feelings that arise with grief. These emotions are similar to those felt while mourning any violent, unexpected death. Unfortunately, additional reactions occur when that violent, unexpected death is a suicide. The feelings themselves can be scary. The most frightening aspect is not knowing what to expect and being told trite platitudes in an attempt to cheer you up and "take away" the negative grief feelings.

Virtually all deaths bring a period of grief to the surviving relatives and friends, and sometimes anger—anger at the dead person for leaving us. It is a stage that many people pass through on their way to accepting the death. If the death has been expected, the grieving may be somewhat easier on us because we may have had time to communicate with the dying person, time to listen to his or her feelings and fears, and time to give help throughout the ordeal. We are not as apt to be angry with one who has, in effect, let us know he or she is going to die.

But it is not easy to deal with a sudden and unexplainable death, the kind that occurs in an accident or a suicide. We are denied the time with the person, the opportunity to tie up "loose ends" to make amends, to prepare ourselves.

Suicide, more so than even an accident, is very hard on the survivors. There may be anger at the person who chose death over life and perhaps over being with us. There is guilt, perhaps self-blame for not paying more attention to the victim when he or she was distressed; or there is self-hate because of those times when there was irritation or anger expressed towards the victim.

This reminds me of an incident some years ago in which a lover of a woman who died by suicide without leaving a clue looked down at her body in its coffin and spat out, "You rotten little b#@&%!" It is appalling to know that someone could feel that way when a loved one has died so tragically. But such responses are not uncommon among those left behind.

Those feelings, as scary and awful as they are (although not always as drastic as described above), have to be experienced and worked through for the grief to subside. The process will continue until satisfactory adjustments are achieved and firmly established. It is a growth experience in the direction of maturity. *Not exactly what one wants to hear.*

Because of the way suicide affects survivors, a lot of attention is now devoted to helping them deal with the suicide. Survivors must learn to deal with all of the mixed emotions churning inside them, with all of the unanswered questions that gnaw at them. Where did they fail? Could they have prevented the death? Why didn't they see the signs? Shouldn't they have returned the phone call after they cut their family member/friend off so abruptly because they were too busy or too tired to hear more of the old complaints? *What if? What if WHAT IF? Why, why WHY?*

There are instances where family and/or friends do not always pay attention to those who try to express their feelings. People become fearful when you mention the word suicide, they may ask you not to speak of it again. If a suicide attempt occurs in a family, there are those that will deny that it happened, preferring to maintain a strict silence.

Sometimes, the guilt of survivors is justified. People often don't spend the time they should with their children, their friends. Parents hear children talking, laughing, crying, but sometimes don't really listen. But what about the parents that do spend the time, do listen? Parents are the ones in the end that are responsible for their children in the truest sense of that overworked word; it is they who hurt the most when their own flesh and blood hurt.

One young woman wrote about how she was sick of the assumption that no child who has had a "hug, kiss and five minutes a day of undivided positive attention from their parents would never contemplate suicide." She had survived several serious and desperate attempts to kill herself. Her parents adored her, devoted infinite time to her—more than 5 minutes a day—and struggled through several hospitalizations with her, family and individual therapy and inpatient treatment and finally, she came to the conclusion that no one is to blame, especially her parents. They did all they could. She just couldn't accept what they gave her.

She is coping now, though; she has a part-time job in a therapy program that is working for her and has her own apartment. It wasn't an easy road. It won't be. But she is talking about it. One point she brought up, which makes one think with all of the anti drug commercials on television all the time, how come there isn't one that says: "Don't commit suicide. Call somebody." I think she made a very valid point. If you, or someone you know needs to talk with someone regarding suicide, please call: 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433) National Hotline

On Losing a Child

By: Kailah Eglington

My daughter would have been 22 today had she lived.

For anyone who has lost a child, and I myself have lost two, the pain, anger and sorrow don't become any less sharp. Those feelings may take a back seat to the inevitable everyday tasks and duties that we must carry out, but I find the smallest reminder can easily bring them to the forefront again. For me, it is birthdays or holidays, a certain child's cry, baby booties or a child's eyes looking into mine.

I used to ask myself if it was wrong to continue to feel the grief so deeply until I met another woman who had also lost a child. She, too, had the same conflicts of emotion: the need to "get on with life" and "snap out of it" versus the need to keep our children's memories alive.

When we lose a child, especially if it is sudden and unexpected, it is as if a part of us dies, too. There is a strong connection with our children which starts from the time a single seed is fertilized and becomes a living being. For mothers, there is no relationship more intimate than that of a woman with her unborn child during pregnancy.

Because of this, we feel our children's every hurt, we instinctively know what they need, and we live to protect them. When they die, the loss of this "human" connection can bring on the most terrible kind of grief. Because we feel that we must "move on", many of us keep this grief internally, afraid to admit that it doesn't get any better.

Having said that, there are ways of managing the pain and grief, so that it doesn't overwhelm your life and does allow you to move on. Here are the things that I found helped (and continue to help) me:

Grieve. I was unable to grieve properly for 13 years, until I went to Cruse, a bereavement society specializing in grief counseling. It is OK to grieve and there need be no time limit to your grief. Grieving is healthy and it helps you to rationalize your feelings.

Talk about it. You may feel that you don't want to talk to people because you don't want them to feel uncomfortable. However, not talking about your child may make you feel as if they never existed or were no longer a part of your life—and they are!

One of my greatest achievements was when someone asked me how many children I had and I said three, but two died. Previously, I would have said one. Yes, there may be an awkward moment on the part of the listener, but to me, I have acknowledged all my children. Once it becomes apparent that I am not uncomfortable discussing it, the listener will relax too and the awkwardness will pass—for both of you!

If you keep your child's spirit alive, you will keep yourself alive and your emotions balanced. Talk about your child, what they did, how they looked, their favorite toy, what they might have been like now. You will find the memories uplifting and your child will continue to be a part of your family. More importantly, you may find that the grieving process becomes easier.

I am not saying that we should build a shrine for a lost child, but by the same token, I personally believe that it is unhealthy to simply stop talking about them.

Take the good days with the bad. Even years and years following the death of your child, you will have your good and bad days. This is normal—we are not super women, we are human. When I woke up this morning, I said "It's Jennifer's birthday. She would have been 22 today" and I cried a deep, soul-wrenching cry. Then I talked about her. It helped a lot.

When you have a very bad day, keep busy. You may find that making something your child would have liked, then donating it to a hospice or charity might help. Bake some cookies and take them to an old people's home. Be with people. It's OK to lean on others when you need to.

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On Losing a Child *continued from page 3*

Don't forget your other children. It is easy to become so overwhelmed with grief, that your other children take a backseat to the child that died. For me, I was consumed with fear that something might happen to my son as well. I was afraid to get too close to him, for fear that he would die too, and I couldn't bear to go through that again. It is important to remember that our living children still need us, more than before. As adults, we understand what has happened; it is not so easy for a child, who could believe that it was their fault a brother or sister died.

Part of the healing process is learning to live amongst the living again.

- Talk to your children.
- Explain what has happened.
- Let them know that it was not their fault.
- Let them know that you are hurting and help them understand that it is OK for them to hurt as well.
- Let them talk about their brother or sister freely and try to answer their questions openly and honestly.
- Tell them how important they are to you.

Accept and be Blameless. This is the hardest thing of all. You may not accept that they had to die, but learn to accept that they did. One thing we will never know the answer to is why it had to be our child, so tormenting ourselves with "what if" and "if only" will only cause unnecessary and unhealthy guilt.

- Accept that what has come to pass cannot be changed.
- Accept that it is you who are still living and live.
- Accept that life can be too short and live each day as if it is your last.
- Accept that it is OK to grieve and lean on people when you need to.
- Get counseling if you are not coping.
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Most importantly, don't insulate yourself from your family and friends, for they still need you.

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About the author: Kailah Eglinton is a writer, designer and photographer who was disabled in a life altering accident in March 2000. Being housebound until recently, she taught herself web design and launched Kailah's Korner in January 2002, a place to celebrate being a woman.

Share Your Story/Underwriting Opportunity

If you would like to submit an article to appear in HOPELine Newsletter, please send it to Kelly O'Neill-Rossi, HOPELine Newsletter Editor, at krossi1@aol.com. We are looking for articles that inspire *hope*, *help* and *healing* for the bereaved.

Each month, HOPELine is sent to 800 families throughout Central New York and the United States. If you would like to underwrite the cost of HOPELine for a specific month, please contact Pat Kriesel at HOPE. It costs \$500 to underwrite the newsletter. Your donation will fund 100% of the expense of a newsletter for a month. You may include a special dedication to your loved one.

Thank you for your support!

Support Group Start-up Tips

By: Brenda Penepent, LPN

If you are interested in starting a support group in your area, you will need to do a little research first. First of all, check around with local hospitals, doctor's offices, mental health facilities and the Chamber of Commerce in your area to see if a group already exists. If not, then try the Internet. Check on groups under the guidelines of what you are interested in (like bereaved parents) to see if there are any nearby groups that you can join with. It is always better to have resource personnel available to help you.

It is very hard to start a group alone, but it can be done. Decide where and when you would like to have your meetings. Now you'll need to get the information to the media, radio stations, cable TV stations, newspapers, post a flyer in waiting rooms (with permission of course), to social workers, doctors, and mental health care providers. If no one knows about you, they can't attend. Be reasonable. It will take time to build up a large group. Even then, remember people will come and go often. Don't let this hurt your feelings.

You will need to have a plan for the meetings themselves. Do you want them to be informative or just people sharing their experiences?

How long should they last? I've found that more than two hours is too much.

There will need to be one person who is the facilitator of the group. That is the person who makes sure everyone gets to talk without dominating the whole group time. Often, this person doesn't really tell much of their own story. They are there to watch over and keep things moving along.

During the meeting, a small 5-10 minute break will be needed to stretch legs and lighten up the atmosphere a bit. You can also serve refreshments if you like.

You will need to get some basic information for the type of group you are running. If it is a bereavement group, handouts on grief, stress management, what to do when you are sad, and things along those lines gives people something concrete to take home with them. I encourage my members to bring things to the group that have helped them in any way. I also encourage them to bring pictures of their loved ones. It helps the others to put a face to their story. I call this show and tell.

The main Healing Hearts group in Covington, WA is available to ask questions, and provide a notebook for a guideline. If you decide on an individual name, be sure you are not compromising a trademark. It can cause legal difficulties. You may want to contact Healing Hearts, Bereaved Parents USA, or one of the other groups such as Compassionate Friends to get help in setting it up. Of course, if your group is for general grief, you will need to get help from like sources. You can still get a lot of good information from these groups, but use only the generalized grief material.

About the author: Brenda Penepent, LPN, Executive Director of Healing Heart For Bereaved Parents, Russellville, Arkansas Chapter.

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Thank you www.grieflossrecovery.com for sharing your articles with us.

Editor's Note: HOPE FOR BEREAVED has written materials available for anyone interested in starting their own support group. HOPE counselors and support group facilitators are also available to answer any questions you may have. Call 315-475-9675 or e-mail hopeforbereaved@cnymail.com

By: Sam Knight

Grief is a lonely process. Your days and nights are filled with memories. Sometimes guilt gets in the way. Sometimes you feel like "What's the point?" You don't like being alone and you don't want to think about getting involved with anyone else either.

I am a widow—a relatively young widow. I'm a 53-year-old "boomer" who hadn't given much thought to the possibility I would be widowed at my age. The fact that my husband was 17 years older than me didn't phase me much because in a lot of ways he was in better shape than I am. He exercised regularly (I hate exercise, always have), ate more carefully than me and was proud of his physique.

Come September, it will be two years ago that he passed away. I wish I could say what the hardest part has been, but there have been many "hardest" parts.

My husband took care of financial stuff in our home. Not that I couldn't, just that he was more organized, and we both preferred it that way. I made my contributions and he paid the bills for our home, our vacations, whatever. To be perfectly honest, I liked it that way.

He also took care of the management of our property—whether it be himself or hiring a contractor. I found myself at a great loss, but I had to learn the process or have my yard be a disgrace to this lovely neighborhood.

I still have major problems cooking for one, and I usually don't. I make too much, but cooking is a comfort for me, so I don't worry about it.

Having a "built in" date made social affairs easier to attend.

My job was a help at keeping me busy and preoccupied, but coming home to an empty house was difficult. Especially when I had something I wanted to share.

When my husband was first diagnosed with pancreatic cancer, we tried to be hopeful. It was diagnosed early. As it turned out, he died within six months.

We shared the same sense of humor, so believe me when I tell you I miss the times we watched TV or read a newspaper story we both found amusing or outlandish.

I have some wonderful friends, but they can't fill that particular hole.

At this point, I realize that time does heal all wounds if you'll only let it. It's okay to cry and moan and even holler occasionally, but life is for the living and you must carry on.

I've even gotten to the point where I can have "disputes" with my husband. For instance, a few month's ago I had some plumbing problems. Need I mention how totally inept I am in dealing with this sort of circumstance? Well, as I was wading around in all that water, I looked up and yelled, "Did you know about any of this? You did, didn't you!" Well, I composed myself and then broke out laughing. Another milestone. Before, I would have just started crying shamelessly and wallowed in enormous self-pity.

Late last year, my parents came for an extended visit. I gave up my master bedroom for them because it provides all the creature comforts they enjoy. I wasn't put out. I could easily move to another bedroom and the few things I didn't have were really no big deal.

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My mother and father, in an effort to show appreciation, went out and bought a whole new set of bedding material. As beautiful as it was, I burst out in tears. It changed the look of the room entirely, and I realized it came as a internal shock. They hadn't meant any harm, and I recovered shortly thereafter. It's all just part of the grief process.

Today, I would say that I'm just about back to normal. The missing goes on and the need to want to "hide out" pops up, but I consider it normal and don't give in to it on a steady basis. Instead, I focus on the eighteen years my husband and I had and the incredibly wonderful travel experiences we shared.

His ashes are on top of my fireplace (most people have no idea what it is, if they ever notice in the first place). Some people probably think I have way too many pictures of him around and other reminders, but for now they stay.

Bottom line, life does go on, and if you take it one step at a time, reach out for the numerous resources available and take advantage of the kindness of humanity, you'll live a happier, richer life. Get involved with projects such as the one I am developing over the Internet. Thank God for the Internet! It is crammed with all kinds of information and opportunities and has given me a brighter, encouraging outlook.

The same can happen for you, I promise.

www.grieflossrecovery.com

This issue of HOPELine is dedicated in loving memory of Bryan Rossi from the Rossi Family



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A Journey from Grief to HOPE

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