A FATHER’S GRIEF

When asked, as fathers frequently are, about how his wife is doing, he is amazed that no one realizes he is barely holding himself together. How does a father grieve? Is the process different from that of a mother? I believe we fathers feel the same emotions, but it is how we experience these emotions and how we deal with them that can differ greatly from a mother’s grief experience. Men may be articulate, even garrulous, but women are expressive. Many men prefer talking about ideas; women feel comfortable discussing feelings. Yet grief is about emotions and feelings and how to work through them; it is not about ideas. Men are conditioned not to show feelings but to stifle them. We build a shell, layer after layer, as a defense against the bumps and bruises of boyhood, the hurt limbs, and the hurt feelings. For many of us, this is the perspective from which we must confront our grief. What do men do with pain they cannot shrug off? Men of my generation may try to ignore the pain, but the death of a child results in a level of pain that is impossible to ignore. So we acknowledge it, and then we try to carry on. Even in the business world, men are not granted leave to recover from a loss. We’re expected to observe the rituals of mourning and then throw ourselves back into our work, put up a good front, and continue to function at a high level of concentration and dedication. I carried this expectation to a ridiculous level. When I learned my son died, I flew out to the city where my son was attending college and made the necessary arrangements. Then I called my boss to let him know that we would be staying over one night and I would be back to work the next day! Grief is a label attached to such a myriad of emotions that it is impossible to identify all of them adequately or describe their intensity. For me, anger was probably the most intense emotion I experienced. As a parent, I expected to protect my family; and as a man, I expected always to be in control. The sense of helplessness I experienced and the lack of control over events overwhelmed me.

Anger was not the only intense emotion I experienced. Guilt consumed me. Why wasn’t I a better father when Bryan (my son) was alive? Why didn’t I spend more time with him? How could I have allowed my career to infringe on time with my children? I always seemed to be looking forward towards the future, rather than experiencing the present. Perhaps this issue is particularly significant for fathers who invest so much of their time and energy focused on the future, preparing a child’s way, too often deferring activities with the family. In the five years since Bryan’s death, grief has been like learning to climb a mountain. The slope is steep and often slippery, and the air is thinner the higher I venture. But as I work my way up, my muscles grow stronger. My perspective has changed. What drove me before, what seemed so Godawful important to me, has shifted in focus to my family, my work with The Compassionate Friends, and my work with children. How did I know when I was finally beginning to heal? It was simply this; when I first thought of the joy of Bryan’s life, rather than the pain of his death. Maybe in a year or so I’ll know what the other side of the mountain is like.

Reprinted in part from an article by Bob Rosenberg,
National Compassionate Friends Newsletter, Summer 1992
FORGIVENESS

Forgiveness may seem simple until we need to forgive following the death of someone dearly departed. A sea of unfamiliar emotions can make forgiveness impossible for a very long time. Until we forgive, as long as we harbor anger and resentment toward another, that person has the power over us, preventing us from moving forward. Anger, until it is transformed into forgiveness, can fester into bitterness that corrodes the vessel that contains it and disfigures all that it touches.

If we are to achieve healthy measures of healing, we must eventually deal with forgiveness. We may need to forgive ourselves for not being able to protect the beloved person or prevent their death. We may need to forgive our loved one because of the way he or she dies. We may need to forgive doctors or counselors for failing to properly diagnose, cure, or save our loved one. We need to forgive anyone - ourselves, our child, husband, wife, parent, sibling, or any other person - who intentionally or unintentionally contributed to events that led to the death of our loved one.

We need to forgive those who fail to support us in our grief, those who make clueless or insensitive remarks, avoid mentioning our beloved’s name or their death, or just stay away. Forgiveness does not come easily or quickly but there is no time frame for forgiving.

Forgiveness does not change what has happened, but it lifts a burden from our heart. It has been said that forgiveness is a gift we give ourselves. Forgiving frees us to heal, to love without fear, to live without bitterness and to know true peace in the future.

Finding Peace Without All The Pieces After a Loved One’s Suicide
by LaRita Archibald

“I’M SO SORRY I COULDN’T SAVE YOU”

During the mourning process after a suicide loss we often talk about finding forgiveness. Forgiving the person that we lost for leaving us. Forgiving them for not being able to see the world through our eyes. Forgiving them for not asking for help. What I have found is that this forgiveness often comes with relative ease. Sure, we still have anger but we have forgiven them for what they have done. The type of forgiveness that often takes the most time is the forgiveness we must find for ourselves. Forgiveness for not being able to save the person we lost. That is the tricky one. That is the piece that outsiders do not understand. “It is not your fault” I was told. My head understood that, but my heart could not accept that. It is in the aftermath that the signs become more clear. Seeing the signs more clearly can impact our ability to forgive ourselves. What we need to remember is that often those signs weren’t as clear prior to the suicide loss. They may have been more subtle. And truthfully, even if they weren’t we just never believe that this type of loss would actually occur. So, give yourself a break. Acknowledge that maybe there wasn’t anything more you could have done. Acknowledge that there might have been many things you did to keep the person you lost alive. Forgive yourself for not being able to save them.

Source unknown

“It’s toughest to forgive ourselves. So, it’s probably best to start with other people. It’s almost like peeling an onion. Layer by layer, forgiving others, you really do get to the point where you can forgive yourself.”

— Patty Duke

“Grief is not a mountain to be climbed with the strong reaching the summit long before the weak.
Grief is not an athletic event, with stopwatches timing our progress.
Grief is a walk through loss and pain with no competition and no time trials.” — Author unknown
**RECONCILING YOUR GRIEF**

by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

You may have heard — indeed you may believe — that your grief journey’s end will come when you resolve, or recover from, your grief. But your journey will never end. People do not “get over” grief. Reconciliation is a term I find more appropriate for what occurs as the mourner works to integrate the new reality of moving forward in life without the physical presence of the person who died. With reconciliation comes a renewed sense of energy and confidence, an ability to fully acknowledge the reality of death and a capacity to become reinvolved in the activities of living.

In reconciliation, the sharp, ever present pain of grief gives rise to a renewed sense of meaning and purpose. Your feelings of loss will not completely disappear, yet they will soften, and the intense pangs of grief will become less frequent. Hope for a continued life will emerge as you are able to make commitments to the future, realizing that the person who died will never be forgotten, yet knowing that your life can and will move forward.

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To make a tax deductible donation online by credit card, visit www.journeymhc.org/donate and designate “Survivors of Suicide (SOS) Support Group” in the pull-down menu option.

To make a tax deductible donation by check, make it payable to Journey Mental Health Center with SOS in the memo line. Mail to: Survivors of Suicide Support Group, c/o Journey Mental Health Center, 25 Kessel Court, Suite 105, Madison, WI 53711.

Please Consider —

* A donation in memory or honor of someone.
* A donation towards our Quarterly Newsletter so that we might continue to bring it to you and others.
* A donation toward resources that are provided to new survivors.
ALL I REALLY NEEDED TO KNOW I LEARNED IN KINDERGARTEN

Most of what I really need to know about how to live, and what to do, and how to be, I learned in kindergarten. Wisdom was not at the top of the graduate school mountain but there in the sandbox at nursery school.

These are the things I learned: Share everything. Play fair. Don’t hit people. Put things back where you found them. Clean up your own mess. Don’t take things that are not yours. Say you are sorry when you hurt somebody. Wash your hands before you eat. Flush. Warm cookies and cold milk are good for you. Live a balanced life. Learn some and think some and draw and paint and sing and dance and play and work every day some. Take a nap every afternoon. When you go out into the world, watch for traffic, hold hands, and stick together. Be aware of wonder. Remember the little seed in the plastic cup. The roots go down and the plant goes up and nobody really knows how or why, but we are all like that.

Goldfish and hamsters and white mice and even the little seed in the plastic cup – they all die. So do we.

And remember the book about Dick and Jane and the first word you learned, the biggest word of all: LOOK. Everything you need to know is in there somewhere. The Golden Rule and love and basic sanitation. Ecology and politics and sane living.

Think of what a better world – it would be if we all – the whole world – had cookies and milk about 3 o’clock every afternoon and lay down with our blankets for a nap. Or if we had a basic policy in our nation and other nations to always put things back where we found them and clean up our own messes.

And it is still true, no matter how old you are, when we go out into the world, it is best to hold hands and stick together.

From the book of the same name by Robert Fulgham
Source: Friends for Survival Newsletter, friendsforsurvival.org

REMEMBRANCE OF A FRIEND
TOBIN (HAROLD) OPHEIM
4/12/1949 – 4/7/2023

We sadly report Tobin’s death due to metastatic melanoma. He passed away peacefully in Ft. Myers, Florida.

The husband of our dedicated leader of SOS, Susan Conlin Opheim, Tobin was born and raised in Madison with a 37-year career with the City of Madison. He was active in sports including hockey, fishing, hunting, and others which he shared with friends and family. Upon his retirement he and Susan moved to Florida.

Susan was a long-time facilitator and advocate for Survivors of Suicide after the death of her brother, Bill Conlin, in June 1983. She was also a founding member of HOPES (Helping Others Prevent and Educate about Suicide) and worked tirelessly as an educator for QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) and support group leader in Madison while advocating nationally. She continues her SOS involvement in Ft. Myers. Tobin was a friend and supporter of Sue’s work with SOS and prevention.

Tobin’s survivors include Susan, his wife of 55 years, two children, four grandchildren, three siblings, two brothers-in-law and countless friends.

Celebration of Tobin’s life will be held on Sunday, July 23, 2023, from 1:00 – 3:00 pm with a memorial service at 2:00 at Olbrich Botanical Gardens, 3330 Atwood Ave. in Madison.

SOLACE
In the smallest hour of your day,
When you are alone with things remembered,
questions unanswered and unfinished dreams,
then:

give to yourself the gift of your kindness,
bringing to yourself the comforts of forgiveness,
share with yourself the mercy of your love.

From “For You From Sascha” by Alexandra Sascha Wagner
ONLINE (ZOOM) SURVIVOR SUPPORT GROUP CONTINUES FOR NOW

With no definite date set as to when in-person meetings might resume, we continue to offer **online group support**. We offer this option to survivors who would have normally desired to attend our in-person groups.

The following criteria are needed for participation.
- Be a survivor of a suicide loss and wish to interact with other survivors.
- Be over 18 years of age.
- Have technology available to use ZOOM either through computer, phone or another device.
- Be willing to register and speak with a Journey Mental health provider to be assured that a group experience would be appropriate and then receive an online invitation (Group entry codes).
- Be able to provide your email and phone contact information.
- Be aware that this is a discussion, support group and is **not** a “therapy” group.
- Be able to provide a quiet space, without interruptions when participating, insuring confidentiality of the group.
- Be available at the group starting time.
- Do not invite or include others who have not been specifically invited to the session.

All group discussions are led by a trained volunteer fellow survivor and supported by a Journey Mental Health professional.

Meetings for now will be held on our regular meeting nights, the second and fourth Tuesday of each month. The length of the meeting (usually 1½ hours) will be determined by the facilitator.

To request participation please email sos@journeymhc.org, or call and leave a message for call back at SOS Confidential Voicemail (608) 280-2435.

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SOS SUPPORT GROUP PURPOSE
To share experiences for living and coping beyond suicide loss

SURVIVORS OF SUICIDE SUPPORT ZOOM MEETING SCHEDULE

* A self-help group for adults who are grieving the death of a loved one by suicide.*

2nd and 4th Tuesday of each month, 7 – 8:30 p.m.

For extra support please use Crisis Intervention 24/7 phone line at 608-280-2600 or leave a message at SOS voicemail 608-280-2435.

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CONNECTING WITH JOURNEY MENTAL HEALTH

**SOS Confidential Email:** sos@journeymhc.org

**SOS Confidential Voicemail:** (608) 280-2435

24/7 Year ‘Round Mental Health Crisis Line: (608) 280-2600

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• By phone message to (608) 280-2435
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