



Honoring the Past and
Rebuilding the Future

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TEN TRICKS YOUR BRAIN PLAYS ON YOU DURING GRIEF

By Bob Baugher, Ph.D.

Your brain—what an amazing organ. It can outthink the most complex computer. It is—well—it's who you are. Your brain—or you—is reading these words and taking in information in microseconds. So, with all its wondrous abilities, why would your brain trick you, especially at a time when you need it most? Because it's not perfect. However, don't let your brain (or you) take it personally. Just keep reading and you'll begin to recognize how these brain imperfections can influence you during the most difficult time of your life.

Trick #1: I will feel this way forever.

When the death occurred, you absolutely believed that you would never laugh again; but you did. Do you remember that first time? Were you surprised when you heard laughter and realized that it was coming from you? After you recovered from the shock, you may have chastised yourself for "forgetting" your loved one. As time has gone by, however, you have hopefully begun to realize that your loved one would want laughter to return.

Trick #2: Guilt

Perhaps the cruelest trick your brain plays on you is one where the past continues to be rewritten. Just look at all the ways that

guilt can complicate your grief. See if any of these sound familiar:

If-Only Guilt—After the death you find yourself revisiting events in the life of your loved one in which you say, "If only..." Or "I should have..." or "Why didn't I?"

Role Guilt—"I wasn't a good enough _____ to this person." We're still waiting for the perfect (choose one) parent/spouse/sibling/grandparent/child.

Death Causation Guilt—"The death occurred because of something I did or failed to do. It matters little whether I actually had anything to do with the death. I still feel guilty."

Trick #3: I'm not like those people who use clichés.

If you're like most bereaved people you've heard so-called words of wisdom and comfort from those folks who think they are somehow helping: Everything happens for a reason, I know just how you feel, and It's time to move on. No doubt these feeble attempts at soothing your pain have caused you some degree of frustration as you say to yourself, "What is wrong with these people? Don't they get it?" However,

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NAN ZASTROW

Co-Founder,
Wings – A Grief Education Ministry

Isn't it interesting how the suicide death of a celebrity invites people to talk about suicide? But talking about the death of our child, parent, spouse, cousin, friend etc. as a result of suicide is still socially taboo? The recent news about the death of Robin Williams, by suicide, briefly gave all of us the freedom to "talk" about suicide...no matter what our person beliefs might be. And wasn't it refreshing to see the cloak of shame removed if only for a while?

Since suicide has undoubtedly affected the life of Gary and me, it's a subject we are open to talking about. And, Robin William's death provided many opportunities because it seemed okay for others to acknowledge that life sometimes surprises us and robs us of people when we least expect it.

Our society, today, believes that they are more compassionate, more knowledgeable, and more accepting of death than any other generation. But when it comes to suicide, this isn't the case. We are reluctant to discuss the suicide death of someone we know because it is "uncomfortable". Sometimes, there is an unconscious decision to distance ourselves from the victim which ultimately affects the family. The family, then, often becomes

IT TAKES A CELEBRITY'S DEATH TO INVITE US TO DISCUSS SUICIDE

disenfranchised by our inability to acknowledge their loss, adequately.

Most often, the disassociation is because the stigma of suicide is strongly related to mental illness. Though Robin William's suicide was linked to depression as a life-threatening disease, not all suicides can be linked to mental illness. The author of the article printed in *USA Today*, by Liz Szabo, makes a strong point about the need for creating better methods of detecting fatal intentions, proper treatment, and acknowledgement. And the journalist goes further to point out that industries have improved automobiles with technology to protect against crashes, and other industries follow similar plans. Yet, as a society we do little to change the way we think about handling mental illness.

Not all suicides are the result of mental illness. But the common denominator in all suicides, I believe is fear and the loss of hope.

My husband and I just passed our second decade living in the shadow of death by suicide so we speak from our personal experience. In the 1990's when the death of our son occurred, we expected silence and taboo, because that is the way society treated the survivors, family, and families of the victim of such a death. We were devastated by the silence! It was easier not to talk about it than to admit that you knew someone or were related to someone who suicided. Why?

Suicide was, and still is not, considered

an "honorable death". There are no heroes, no martyrs, or no innocents. Society unconsciously equates such a death as immoral, wicked, or disgraceful. The victim is subconsciously labeled along with those who had criminal intent.

Unless we discuss suicide openly; acknowledge the deaths of those who died by suicide; and provide avenues for prevention, suicide will continue to be taboo. We may never understand the "whys" of its victims. But, we can give them the benefit of believing that their life was extremely painful and there was no solution to "stop the pain", visible or invisible—emotional, spiritual or mental, at that moment in time. And none of this excuses us from acknowledging the life he or she lived!

This fall, our community held its annual Out of the Darkness, community walk for the prevention of suicide. It's part of the AFSP—American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. The number of participants continues to increase every year. However, typically those who walk are directly affected by the completion of suicide either because they are a family member or very close friend who wishes to show support for the survivor. This year, to our surprise, there were at least two people who walked-in and knew nothing about the event prior to that day, but admitted to being suicidal. Our task force was able to offer them help.

Casual or interested people in suicide prevention are not typically among the

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walkers. Why?

Unless you are directly affected by such an event, many people will shy away from an association with such a type of death... because they don't want to be asked personal questions. Ask any walker...and there will likely be a direct link.

As I survivor of suicide, I don't feel any different because my son completed suicide rather than dying tragically in an accident, from a dreaded disease, or serving his country. "Suicide is just death by another name."

Those who die in the line of duty or service (military, police, firemen etc.), those who die of terrible diseases, and those who have suffered disability—mental or physical—can quickly be acknowledged as "heroes" of sorts. We ask such survivors about their life, their accomplishments, their families, and

their dreams. We listen intently to the stories of who they were and what they accomplished. We care about their grief and how their families are coping. We promote and fund "causes" that create awareness and research. We hold candle-light vigils and life celebrations. We post roadside markers. We publish meaningful obituaries. We tell stories, share fond memories, and sob over their lost dreams.

But, if suicide was the circumstance of death, none of this seems worthy. This person often dies with an unwritten legacy and leaves a permanent scar for his/her survivors. We forget that first; he lived and was a human soul just like any one of us. Secondly, we label his cause of death as reason to dismiss how he lived.

In our public presentations about suicide, we boldly remind people that it's important to remember the PERSON--who he was,

how he lived, and what his legacy might be. His or her story is not one about the cause of death because frankly, we don't often know. When there is fear and loss of hope in any circumstance, suicide becomes a viable option to ending the emotional turmoil within.

I'm asking and will continue to ask, that we "Stop the Silence". We need to treat the victim and the survivors with dignity and compassion. We need to tell their stories and allow their survivors to emerge from the shadows of death.

For more information on the approach to Suicide, read my articles at the Wings website:

Sometimes We don't Get Second Chances

Stop the Silence

Without Warning

What's On the Calendar of Wings – a Grief Education Ministry – June to December

HOW GRIEF CHANGES YOUR LIFE – Learning to Live with your Loss

A Six-Week Series: Education and Support for Grief, Loss and Transition at Aspirus Wausau Hospital

2014 FALL SERIES:

Tuesdays: Sept. 16, 23, 30, and Oct. 7, 14, 21

Facilitators: Nan & Gary Zastrow

Time: 6:30-8:00 p.m. No charge.

Place: Conference Room A-1 Quality Services

18th ANNUAL HOLIDAY REMEMBRANCE PROGRAM

Dream Catching - How to Build a Holiday Dream After Loss

We all fantasize about "living the dream" until life hands us a blow and all our dreams seem to shatter after the death of a loved one. For spouses, growing old together fades; and for parents, after the death of a child, dreams of their child's future are crushed. When a parent dies, we lose our past. Holiday celebrations remind us about what we are missing and result in anxiety and a strong desire to skip the celebration this year. Come to our workshop and discover how to become

a "dream catcher" who can build a new dream for the holiday season and cherish the pleasant memories of the past. Leave with a plan for capturing the "best possible dream" that can guide you through your loss this holiday season. Presented by Nan & Gary Zastrow

Sunday, December 7, 2014, Holiday Inn & Suites at Cedar Creek 2:00 p.m.

For information about any of these events, contact Nan at nanwings1@gmail.com. Subscribe to Wings and receive updates and announcements by email.

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your brain has deceived you again. Why? Because weren't these some of the same statements you offered to others in grief before you knew better? How quickly our brain "forgets" that we, too, used to be a member of the insensitive crowd.

Trick #4: I need to grieve just right.

This trick is often played on those of us who have issues with perfectionism. The death you've experienced is like no other. Therefore the grief reactions you've been experiencing have thrust you into a world that is foreign to you—into a confusing array of emotions and thoughts swirling around in your brain. As these reactions continue, another part of your brain is asking, "What's wrong with me? Why am I so _____?" Following the death of a loved one you'll never hear someone say, "You know, I'm grieving just right." Instead you hear, "I'm not crying enough." Or "I'm crying too much." Or "I should be more angry." Why these reactions? It's just your struggling brain doing the best it can.

Trick #5: The second year will somehow be easier.

Another trick your brain will play on you is that it will convince you that nothing can be worse than going through each day of the first year—the first birthday, the first holiday, the first mother's day or father's day, the first Thanksgiving, the first anniversary. All these firsts without our loved one can add up to a great deal of pain. For many of us, once the first year is over, our brain conjures yet another deceptive scheme by offering convincing guidance, "Whew! I've made it through one whole year. As difficult as it was, I made it through each day.

Year two should be better." Better? Well, maybe for some people. But if you are like many people you discovered that your brain lied. You found that, in some ways the second year was more difficult. Why? Because much of the first-year shock had worn off and now the pain is raw.

Trick #6: My grief is worse than anyone else's.

At first, as you came across other people who had a loss different from yours it may have been easy for your brain to come up with the belief that went something like this: "Yes, these people are also in pain. But their loss is not like mine. Their pain cannot be as intense, as deep, and long lasting as mine." When you began to meet people who had a similar loss, your brain may have concluded, "Their loss is terrible, but they must not have loved their person as much as I love mine." Later, as you look back, you may have realized that the pain you were going through made it difficult to really feel the depth of grief and despair experienced by others as they coped with their own loss. You now realize that you can never measure the amount of another's pain. You have come to understand that, in our humanness, we are all united by our grief because it demonstrates that we all have loved.

Trick #7: Grief feels like going crazy.

Because the death of a precious loved one is so foreign to any experience we've ever had, our poor brain suddenly finds itself in a world of chaos. The coping techniques we've used with past negative events just don't work as well when it comes to grief. Therefore, our brain can only come to one conclusion: You are going crazy. It certainly feels that

way. However, if you were really going crazy, you wouldn't have had a funeral, you wouldn't cry, you wouldn't have memory problems or feel anger or guilt. You would go through each day behaving as if the death never occurred. Instead you absolutely feel that you are going crazy because you do experience all these things in ways you've never experienced before. A mother whose 20 year-old son died in an auto accident explained her grief to me by saying: "Grief is unfinished love." Yes, you feel like you're going crazy because you have loved and will continue to love until you die.

Trick #8: Relatives who haven't spoken to one another will put aside their differences because of this death

When the death hit you and your family, your brain might have concluded, "The tragedy and finality of this death in our family will surely bring people together. Family members will awaken to the fact that life is too short to hold grudges, to persist in silent indifference to the feelings of others, and to withhold forgiveness." However, you have sadly realized again that your brain was wrong.

Trick #9: I will get a little better each day.

In the past, when other negative events occurred in your life, you may have found that, day after day, things did get a little better. In the case of grief, you almost cannot blame your brain for coming up with a similar belief. However, you may have discovered that day 90 following the death was worse than day 30 and that you may have felt worse at the ten month point than you did at the five month point. Why is this? One reason is shock,

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which is your brain's way of cushioning the intensity of the blow. Whether death is sudden or expected, our brain goes into shock for a period of time. The length is different for everyone. As you know, when shock begins to wear off, the pain begins to set in. This is one of the major reasons that, when people look back on the weeks and months following a death, they report that it was like they were in a fog, like they were going through the motions much like a robot. People use terms like, "I was on automatic pilot." Or "I was a zombie." Again, shock is your brain trying to protect itself (you) from the full impact of the pain.

Trick #10: Letting go of my grief means letting go of my loved one.

This brain maneuver is one of the biggest challenges in coping with grief. If you could actually hear your brain speaking to you, the words would sound something like this: "Now that some time has gone by I can feel that the intensity of my loss easing up just a little. But wait! I can't let this happen because if the pain begins to leave, the memories of my loved one will slip away as well. So, I must hold on to my sorrow, heartache, and anguish in order to preserve the connection with this person." This brain tactic is related to a type of guilt called, Moving On Guilt in which guilt feelings surface at the moment

the bereaved person begins to feel a little better. As you know, an important part of your grief work is to hold on to the memories while simultaneously letting the pain of the loss gradually subside.

So, there they are: ten tricks of the brain that complicate the bereavement process. Some you knew already and found yourself nodding your head. A couple of them may have been new to you as you have come to realize that the death of your loved one has challenged your brain in ways it has never experienced before. In considering these tricks, you will now hopefully be a little kinder to your brain as it continues to cope with loss of someone you love.

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Thanks to Grief Digest reader Patti for pointing out that Trick #7 was missing from the original article.

NOTE: Bob Baugher, PhD will be our guest speaker at the Wings Spring Seminar in Wausau on April 23-24, 2015. Save the date!

How to Connect with Wings:

- Email: nanwings1@gmail.com
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- Follow the EVENTS calendar posted at the website wingsgrief.org
- Subscribe to the free online ELetter sent quarterly.
- Order a Free copy of Grief Digest at www.centeringcorp.com
- Visit Wings on Facebook

Grief Tip:

When Grief Returns:

For some of us who think we have healed from the loss of our loved one, we are startled by the strong emotions that surface unexpectedly. What happens? What creates this backward movement that catches us off guard and makes us think we are going to go through all of it again?

Typically, a trigger such as a grief burst or "pop-up" occurs that transcends us backward and touches the memory bank of emotions—both sad and pleasant. We remember; we react; we feel. The moment reminds us that "Grief is Forever". We will never "get over" the loss of our precious loved one, but we learn to cope with the occasional return of grief emotions.

Be prepared. Know that this can happen to you. You most likely are not losing the healing you've come to know, but you may be feeling the love you still carry. For those approaching seasoned grief, we are survivors. We made it this far and we can do it again and again.

CAN GOOD COME FROM DEATH?

An Inspirational Story

Personal reflection from Arla Luetschwager printed with permission

All things work together for good to those who love Me and are called according to My purpose”. This is my favorite Bible verse, and it has gotten me through down times in my life. I had to remind myself of this verse many times when I lost my brother in an untimely death. All things, Lord, even this?

I was the youngest in a family of 6 children. My brother, Herm, was 4 years older. We both came long after Mom thought her family was finished so Herm and I grew up together as the oldest four siblings were already out of the nest. We were close and it saddened me when he moved his family a great distance away. At this time in my life, his family was living in the state of Maine. My husband and I had raised our own 4 children and although I married a guy who doesn't like to travel, I knew some day, my first retirement trip would be to see my brother.

The summer of 2007, Herm came to Wisconsin to visit our two oldest brothers who were both in nursing homes, to say his “good byes” should anything happen to either one of them. What we didn't know was, we were all saying “good bye” to him. The end of September, he called to tell me that he had esophageal cancer and it had metastasized to his brain. He had brain surgery, but they couldn't get it all. God provided me a plane ticket and I flew out to be with him 1 week in the

hospital. Even then, I just knew he would pull through. After all, he was probably the healthiest of all 6 of us siblings. He wasn't on any medications, he walked 7 miles a day due to his retirement job as a security guard in a mall, and there wasn't an ounce of fat on him. I know now I was in denial. Two weeks after I came home, he was flown to a larger hospital in Maine due to complications. Seven weeks from original diagnosis, on 11-20-07, he was gone. I was overwhelmed with grief. I always figured that, as our older siblings were leaving this world, he and I would be there to comfort and support each other. I also had guilt feelings for not visiting him when he was well. I waited too long, after all, that was going to be my first retirement trip someday.

My sisters and I planned a memorial service at our home church in the country, to give closure to family and friends. God says “all things work together for good to those who love Him and live according to His purpose”. Well I knew I loved God and trusted Him, but my heart was aching so much. A few days later, I had a rare heart attack that is also known as “the broken heart syndrome”. Due to deep grief, in some instances, a hormone is released which blows out the left ventricle. Normally, one does not live through this. The doctor told me “You know you had a rare heart attack”. The heart cath showed no heart disease what so ever. The paper he gave me to read about it said, “Providing you live through the initial presentation, your heart will heal

again in 2 months”. Well I figured God had work for me to do yet as I was still here and it did heal again.

After the healing process, my sister and I went to the movie ‘The Bucket List’. One of those men in the movie was dying of something very similar to what my brother died of. At the end of it, the theatre emptied except for me and my sister. It left such an impact, we just couldn't leave. We discussed how fast our life could be over. Herm's death made us so aware. I said I was going right home and making out my bucket list, a list of things I wanted to do before I died.

On the top of my list was to meet my pen pal of 55 years. She lived in New York State. I wrote her and made plans to visit. She was so excited. We had written since 3rd or 4th grade, through dating, getting married, having our children and grandchildren but never met face to face. My husband still didn't like to travel so I went all alone and had a most wonderful time meeting her and her family.

The 2nd thing on my list was to get my childhood girl friends together to catch up. I knew some from the age of 3 in Sunday School, or grade and high school. We would see each other, usually at a parent's funeral, and we always said, “We should get together some time for a weekend and catch up”. Well my brother's death showed me there is no time like NOW! I called them all, set a date, and the 5 of us met in Appleton, Wisconsin, for the weekend. We picked up right where we left off in high school. The

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CAN GOOD COME FROM DEATH?

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years melted away. We laughed so hard till we cried. We cried together as we shared our sorrows, and we prayed together as well. Two of the girls had never been on vacation or away from home. Within 2 days after returning home, I heard from them that we had to do this again. It was so healing and refreshing, they said. So we continued

the tradition of a Girlfriend Weekend at least once a year ever since. Last year we included our husbands for dinner one evening. It helps the guys understand why we need a whole weekend with the “girls.”

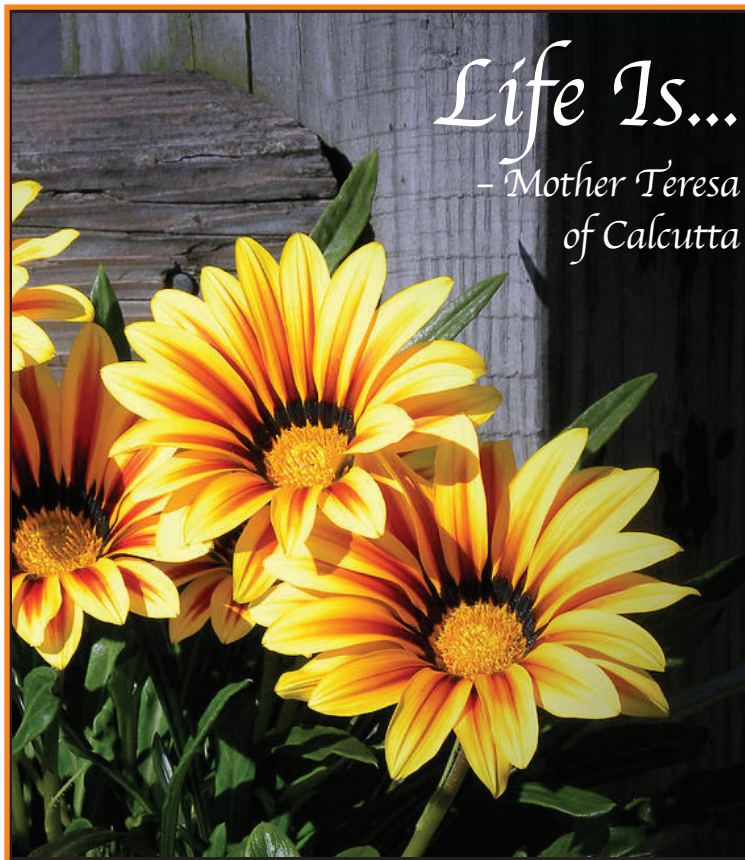
Regarding my favorite verse, Romans 8:28, “Yes, Lord, you showed me once again your Word is true. I would never

have made those things happen if it weren't for my brother's untimely death, to teach me that life needs to be lived to the fullest since we don't know when it will be over.” I just retired this year, so excuse me, I have to check what else is on my ‘bucket list’.

Would you like to share your story or poem?

If you would like to submit a short story, poem, or article, we welcome it. The material does not need to be original, but if it isn't, please include the author or credits that can be printed along with the material. We are looking for articles that inspire the bereaved, teach, and offer hope which is the focus of our ministry of Wings-a Grief Education Ministry. Poems or material may be submitted in memory of your special loved one.

“Grief never ends. It changes. It's a passage, not a place to stay. Grief is not a sign of weakness, nor a lack of faith.. it's the price of love.”



Life Is...
- Mother Teresa
of Calcutta

*Life is an opportunity, benefit from it.
Life is beauty, admire it.
Life is a dream, realize it.
Life is a challenge, meet it.
Life is a duty, complete it.
Life is a game, play it.
Life is a promise, fulfill it.
Life is a sorrow, overcome it.
Life is a song, sing it.
Life is a struggle, accept it.
Life is a tragedy, confront it.
Life is an adventure, dare it.
Life is luck, make it.
Life is too precious, do not destroy it.
Life is life, fight for it.*

Reader Feedback

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

WHAT LITTLE ROUTINE OR RITUAL DID YOU FOLLOW AFTER THE DEATH OF YOUR LOVED ONE TO HELP YOU HEAL YOU COPE WITH THE DIFFICULT DAYS?



Whether or not you experienced the death of a loved one or faced a traumatic life event, the days following are often filled with mixed emotions, questions, denial, and regrets. Many people practice something repetitive or soothing to help them cope with their emotions such as saying a mantra, meditation, or writing a journal.

For Gary and me, we started looking for the “little miracles” each day that made the day just a little brighter. It could be as simple as spotting a new bird in the backyard feeder, getting a phone call from a friend, having lunch with another bereaved person, or taking pleasure in the beauties of nature. Sharing the “little miracle” made us feel better and gave us hope for the days ahead.

I listened to a CD of instrumental music every morning when I was getting ready for the day. The title of the CD was, “The Seasons of New England.” As I listened to those songs over and over, soon they started reminding me of Zack at different ages, in different situations, even the moments leading up to his death, and how we felt after his memorial service. There was a song that reminded me of the busy Christmas season... I could almost smell the sweet bread as I remembered it coming out of the oven. The very last song started with the low rumble of a ship’s horn; and I could envision Zack on Heaven’s shore watching with anticipation to welcome newcomers as they arrived on the next boat. It was good therapy for me and gave me a special time every day to review many wonderful memories of Zack’s life for the first 3-4 years after he died.

*In loving memory of our son, Zack,
Chris - Roseville, California*

When Stefan and I faced the endless days after our Zachary died, we, too, had to find a reason for breathing. Even our other children on some days were not enough. Just walking outside to sit on the porch and breathe fresh air was a change and often physically made us feel less broken. I was lucky enough to be able to hide my face in Stefan’s chest and I think he could hide with his arms circling me. At the end of each day, I would find myself running

(figuratively) to my daughter’s home and rocking my granddaughter while she slept. I could weep silently and pretend for a moment or two that I was holding my Zachary again. Stefan would visit the cemetery every evening for years, cleaning the site and doing something for the son he could no longer hold. Life slowly, painfully, sadly moved forward.

*In loving memory of our son, Zachary
Stefan and Barb - Aurora, CO*

When I lost my brother almost 4 years ago, I would hold onto the little “signs” I would receive day by day... I strongly believe in “pennies from heaven” I used to find pennies in the most random spots and in the most out in the open areas! I remember finding one in my shoe and under my pillow! I later found out that all coins have meaning, quarters are representing a sibling, dimes are a grandparent and a penny is simply leaving behind wealth/a simple hello. Something so petty brought happiness to my heart. I also loved going for a long drive, it made me become so relaxed and soothed. I felt as if Colin was with me cruising around town. My mom used to get a phone call from an “unknown” number everyday and no one was there she would simply say “I love you” and hang up. Signs in any kind of a way. My brother died before my 21st Birthday, so that morning I was pretty down, I found the song “Wish you were here” By Pink Floyd

on YouTube and posted the song to his wall. After doing so I closed the laptop and turned the radio on. “Wish you were here” started to play right from the beginning! I, of course, began to cry, and I knew that was his way to say “Happy Birthday, I love you”.

*Love and Miss You Always Colin,
Love Brittany - Wausau, WI*

I found that writing letters, poems, thoughts, ideas, stories or what is happening in the family to my dad helped the most. I also have written down the stories that people tell me about my dad. I take time to call (internationally) all my brothers and sisters once a month to see how things are with them. We often end up laughing about something that happened when we were little. I text message them every week. I call my mom two to three times a week. After I do any of these things I say a prayer of thanks for the memories and my family.

Kim - NSW, Australia

I read Portals of prayer and a daily meditation book on grief. The daily meditation book I read really is a good little book and is a good fit for me. A lady at church gave it to me. She said she still reads it and her son has been gone for three years. I still cry a lot and my moods are up and down. It’s not that I don’t appreciate the great things and people in my life; I just think

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WHAT DO YOU THINK...

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too much I guess. Helping others seems to help me feel better at the moment. I try to keep busy and do things for myself too. Sometimes nothing helps and I just have to get through the moment.

Julie - Wausau, WI

First (and foremost) I keep a "gratitude journal." I found that over the months, and now years, that have passed since my husband died, this ability to sit down and express my feelings to "someone" who will not judge me and my feelings, has become a very important to my process of grief and mourning. I actually started this type of journaling many years ago, and though there have been some very difficult times to find something to be "grateful" about, I always managed to do so. . . even on the day Joe died. I feel making my daily entry is a vital exercise, and helps me to move on. Secondly, I talked (out loud) to Joe very, very often, asking him for his thoughts, and especially for his guidance through those especially difficult weeks and months following his death. I found that if I listened very carefully and very quietly, he always answered me. This form of communication with Joe has lessened somewhat over time, which I believe is the way it should be. But he's always there if I need him. I also mediate on a pretty regular basis. I found that this period of "quietude" became vital for me to think clearly. Sometimes, it was only for 5 to ten minutes, sometimes longer. To this day, I treat myself to a shot of rye on the rocks before dinner, which Joe and I always did when he was alive.

We would toast each other with "To life!" Now, I turn to face west, lift my glass, and say "To life!"
*In Loving Memory of My Husband Joe
Teri - Merrill, WI*

I believe I was in shock for awhile. Family were here for a week after the service. Then I was on my own although I received many phone calls from my sisters. My girls called a lot but, because they worked, it was hard for them to come over. Great friends helped a lot. I seem to be having more times when things come that upset me as times go by. Thank goodness for phone calls that helped me. Finding a new way of life has been hard. I did do some writing in a journal. My faith help me greatly.

Joan - Wausau, WI

Our son, Tommy, was murdered on 8/14/08. I went back to work 8/25/08. I had to keep busy, besides we are only allowed three days to get it together. I journaled some, took writing classes, joined support groups like Parents of Murdered Children and The Compassionate Friends. Because of my employment, I could not commit to a schedule with therapists, but the few times I sought therapy, it didn't seem to help. Unless one has had the death of a child, they can only relate to the books. The books teach stages of grief, burying your child, at any age, brings such intense grief that only the solace of POMC and TCF can help soothe.

*In Loving Memory of Tommy Lee
Marsha - Tommy's Mom*

My level of appreciation for the people in my life and the kind things that they do for me has always been a natural expression. When we tragically lost our 12 year-old son, Sean, in a vehicular accident on 9/1/2002, my natural expression of appreciation for kindness that was being showered upon our family had now become magnified. I had such an awareness and deep sense of thankfulness for EVERY kind and compassionate act – no matter how little it may have been or how enormous or generous it was. I was very aware of this at the time and it surprised me! Still, my gratitude remains to be ever present for all of the Love and Support that our family, friends and community surrounded us with in those dark days and still to this day. I know within the core of my soul that the gift of thankfulness at that time is what helped us to survive the shock of what had happened. It then caused us to respond with a "thank you" to literally each and every person in a deliberate and personal way. We wrote a letter of thanks to some, and to some we called on the phone to say "thank you". There were some that we went to visit and personally say "thank you" and yet with even some, it had caused us to reciprocate kindness right back to them! I will forever be grateful for this unexpected blessing. Although it was the darkest time of our lives, there were so many sprinklings of sunshine and love over us it was hard to not notice it, feel it..... and be grateful for it.

*In Loving Memory of Sean
Denise - Sean's Mom
Phoenix, Arizona*

FOR OUR NEXT ISSUE: What do you think? UNFINISHED DREAMS

At our December Wings Holiday Program, we will talk about our Loved One's bucket list. Everyone has dreams and plans in their lifetime. Sometimes they never get to finish the plans they have. What dream did your loved one have that he/she was able to accomplish in his/her lifetime? Or what dream or plan did he/she have that never was completed? If you were able to complete that plan for him/her, we'd love to hear your story!

Send your response to nanwings1@gmail.com. Please limit your feedback to about 250-300 words. To be printed in the January 2015 ELetter. Only your first name and city/state will be printed. Submit your response by email before January 2, 2015.