



Honoring the Past and  
Rebuilding the Future

[www.wingsgrief.org](http://www.wingsgrief.org)

Published by Nan Zastrow

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## MAKING SPECIAL RITUALS

by Harold Ivan Smith

*Quote: "I have long appreciated the Fram Auto Filter ad: "You can pay me now OR you can pay me later." The wisdom in that ad is equally valuable in dealing with loss and bereavement."*

The funeral rituals moved me for the Queen Mother. No five minute "generic" service that could have been done for anyone, instead a highly crafted ritual extravaganza which celebrated Elizabeth's relationship with her family, with her country, and with her God."

### We need rituals

Unfortunately, some have missed the opportunity to do appropriate rituals immediately after the loss. In a sense, however, it is never too late to ritual a loss. Terese Rando says that "Rituals give form, structure, and meaning to our feelings. They are unique opportunities for communication, ventilation, and appropriate acting out." Nothing in the definition implies a time limit.

Rabbi Michael Zedek has identified four purposes of rituals.

- To help us acknowledge what has happened.
- To help us know what we are when something has happened.
- To help us proceed when something has happened.

- To help us act our way into right thinking.

Three millennia ago Jewish exiles asked, "How do we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" (Psalm 137: 4). Today, loss, particularly grief, makes us, too, feel like exiles--exiles from the familiar, from the secure. How do we "ritual" thoroughly in a culture impatient for us to move on?

Rabbi Zedek's use of the plural, "to help us" is significant. In a me-centric culture, while you are reading this article, someone will snarl, "When I die just take me out and dump me..." or conclude "We do not want any rituals. She was old. Who would come?"

I would add a fifth reality for rituals.

- To help us know we are not alone. Rituals provide venues for others to respond to and share feelings.

Many reading the article are long past "the ritual opportunity". That's what Meredith thought as she coordinated arrangements for the Grief Gathering I led in her church. Meredith had not planned to participate in the sessions since she disenfranchised her feelings, "my loss happened so long ago".

Meredith had a handicapped brother. In those days, it was something of a stigma.

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## MAKING SPECIAL RITUALS...

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Meredith's mother's life was organized around David's care. When David had to be hospitalized with pneumonia, Meredith looked after the other children. Then one day her mother came home and announced, "Your brother died. I am going to bed. Take care of the children."

Meredith became Mom, Jr. Her mother walked into her bedroom, shut the door, and emotionally disappeared for six months. Since her mother was an atheist, no rituals were held. I am not sure what I said in opening that grief gathering but something captured Meredith's unresolved grief for her brother. At the end of the six weeks, she requested a ritual for her brother. Fortunately, she belonged to a church that has a rich tradition of "making special". In some congregations she might have been told, "For heaven's sake, your brother died fifty years ago!" On a Wednesday night, friends gathered in the chapel for a ritual for David and for Meredith.

### **Something old; something new**

You know the guidance, "Something old, something new; something borrowed, something blue". As I have researched ritual observance, I have concluded those four guidelines are applicable in planning funeral and memorial celebrations.

### **Something old**

As I conducted my mother's funeral—although she was not Episcopal—I used words from The Book of Common Prayer. I took comfort that millions of sons grieving mothers had heard these time-tested words. Recently, as I watched the Queen Mum's funeral, I recognized the words. Queen Elizabeth II and I both had heard something "old" at our mother's funerals.



Unfortunately, we ritual in a culture that has elements that have thrown out the baby with the bathwater. Tragically, generic rituals never name or honor the deceased. I was in one mega-church recently where the senior minister does seven minute funerals. In an age of "one minute" management, I suppose the one-minute funeral is inevitable.

However, in reading Dennis Robert's Report from Ground Zero, I was moved by the use of old liturgical and fire department traditions in these funerals and memorial services for September 11th victims—even when there was very little "body" in the casket. While some firemen kept digging, other firemen found emotional grace in the familiarity of rituals.

Families and friends expected something old to comfort them just as other fire families had been comforted for generations. Firemen sat in that service knowing "someday" this is what my funeral ritual will sound and look like.

### **Something new**

A funeral ritual is a ceremony for a particular person. In the Appalachian folksongs, Will the Circle Be Unbroken, the lyrics sing, "Undertaker, undertaker.

Please drive slowly, for this passenger that you're carryin' is my mother." Not just any mother--my mother.

Too many settle for rote generic "by the book" funeral rituals. I wanted, in the words of the University of Washington anthropologist, Ellen Dissanayake, to "make special" for my mother. Did you ever respond to someone who wanted to do something for you, "Oh, don't go to any trouble on my part?" Fortunate are those who hear, "Oh, it's no trouble." Increasingly, these days we hear, "Okay, I won't."

Dissanayake urges us to take advantage of every opportunity to make special. Take the ordinary and "make special". Be intentional. Be ritual. My mother's favorite gospel song was And When the Battle's Over We Shall Wear a Crown, in the New Jerusalem. She had a great belief that God had invited her to spend eternity with him. So, we symbolized that belief by placing a gold crown on the pink-rosed casket spray.

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## WHO IS YOUR HERO

**NAN ZASTROW**

Co-Founder,  
Wings - A Grief Education Ministry

The Super Bowl is over and there are new heroes in town! Even though as a Wisconsinite, we are disappointed that our Packers didn't qualify for the Super Bowl, it's an event we don't miss watching anyhow. It's exciting to celebrate with the new heroes in the football world.

Several years ago, I wrote about the idea of heroes that emerge as the result of some event. And many of these thoughts came back to me that I'd like to share.

I never was much of a football fan, the kind that followed every game faithfully. But over the past few years, I've found a greater interest in sharing this sport. Our son's interest in football is probably the closet I ever got to the game before. Chad, played football in high school; and we watched his games with hearty bravos for his team. But Chad's passion for football never spilled over into my life that much. He became a pure, through-and-through Vikings fan. So, we humored him with a little Packer rivalry, for the fun of it. When Chad died, we had a teddy bear made with a Viking Tshirt, because it just felt right. Next to the Tshirt, Chad's Marlboro hat was probably his favorite piece of clothing. For a period-of-time, the Vikings were his heroes.

I believe that our heroes in life change from time to time. On a talk show, several years ago, the show host asked his guest

who his role model or heroes were in his life. For a moment, he hesitated, trying to decide how to answer that question. He went on to name a few childhood super heroes—mostly cowboys and a couple fictional characters. Then he commented that he acknowledged that his heroes in his life changed as he grew older...to be more realistic people like his dad and uncle.



When he became a dad, his heroes changed again as he tried to model himself after people he thought were super-dads.

I believe this is true. Our heroes do change. A few stay forever constant. Some of our heroes are living and some may have died. Characteristically, true heroes are those who have achieved against incredible odds or influenced our lives in positive ways. We want to believe in someone who seems to have figured

out life. We also want to identify with real people who have the courage to endure anything and everything.

Then there are the heroes who take their spot in our lives for a period-of-time. They may walk quietly into our lives and gently fade away. Perhaps he or she is the athlete, businessman, or teacher (to name a few). We follow their public lives,

their careers, and their successes. We connect with their goals or achievements and visualize what it must feel like to be in their shoes.

There is also the hero who is the unlikely hero, but something he or she does captures our attention; and we enthusiastically yell hurrah! The unlikely hero doesn't ask to be a hero and probably prefers anonymity.

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## ON A WING AND A PRAYER

*Our On a Wing and a Prayer column is reserved for inspiration. These stories demonstrate the inner spirit that survives through difficult circumstances. Often these are real life parables*

Our 14-year-old dog Abbey died last month.

The day after she passed away my 4-year-old daughter Meredith was crying and talking about how much she missed Abbey. She asked if we could write a letter to God so that when Abbey got to Heaven, God would recognize her. I told her that I thought that we could, so she dictated these words:

*Dear God,*

*Will you please take care of my dog? Abbey died yesterday and is with you in heaven. I miss her very much.*

*I'm happy that you let me have her as my dog even though she got sick. I hope you will play with her. She likes to swim and play with balls.*

*I am sending a picture of her so when you see her you will know that she is my dog. I really miss her.*

*Love,*

*Meredith*

We put the letter in an envelope with a picture of Abbey & Meredith and addressed it to God/Heaven. We put our return address on it. Meredith pasted several stamps on the front of the envelope because she said it would take lots of stamps to get the letter all the way to heaven.

That afternoon she dropped it into the letter box at the post office. A few days later, she asked if God had gotten the letter yet. I told her that I thought He had. Yesterday, there was a package wrapped in gold paper on our front porch addressed, 'To Meredith' in an unfamiliar hand.

Meredith opened it. Inside was a book by Mr. Rogers called, 'When a Pet Dies.' Taped to the inside front cover was the letter we had written to God in its opened envelope. On the opposite page was the picture of Abbey & Meredith and this note:



*Dear Meredith,*

*Abbey arrived safely in heaven. Having the picture was a big help and I recognized her right away. Abbey isn't sick anymore. Her spirit is here with me just like it stays in your heart. Abbey loved being your dog.*

*Since we don't need our bodies in heaven, I don't have any pockets to keep your picture in so I'm sending it back to you in this little book for you to keep and have something to remember Abbey by.*

*Thank you for the beautiful letter and thank your mother for helping you write it and sending it to me. What a wonderful mother you have. I picked her especially for you.*

*I send my blessings every day and remember that I love you very much. By the way, I'm easy to find. I am wherever there is love.*

*Love,*

*God*

## WHO IS YOUR HERO

Continued from page 2

“I think a hero is any person really intent on making this a better place for all people.”  
—Maya Angelou



He or she may seem like the underdog, the forgotten, or the impromptu hero that was in the right place at the right time. His or her choice to do something resulted in a heroic event.

And ultimately, there is the hero who affects one's life personally, for whatever reason. That hero may not have done anything that receives attention or deserves public recognition. It's a heart and soul connection. There is a tie that sings

to your soul and captures your love. He or she is the hero that motivates, inspires, and changes lives. He or she is the hero that becomes the “wind beneath my wings.”

My son, Chad, is that kind of hero to me. On April 16th, it will be 24 years since Chad's death, and his death changed me. It's not about how he died or why he chose to take his life, it's about the impact it created in its aftermath.

I know he didn't mean to hurt us. Nor did he desire to end life so abruptly. But it happened. The sacrifice of losing him took away precious dreams, but ironically gave Gary and me new dreams and purpose never imagined. We continue to try to live up to that “purpose” placed in our path.

We are grateful for all our “followers” that span over many years and some dating back to 1993 when this all began. We have been challenged and blessed at the same time. Each of our friends have touched our lives in their own special way. Many we share intimate stories and connections with. Many of you are heroes to us as we see where your journeys have taken you—and we watched you grow and “fly” on your own. Thank you for being a part of our journey!

*In Loving Memory of:  
Chad E. Zastrow  
12-4-1971 to 4-16-1993*

*Because he lived,  
I remember,  
Because I remember,  
he will never die!*

*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.



## MAKING SPECIAL RITUALS...

*Continued from page 2*

As I concluded the homily, I called attention to the crown. All her life, my mother sang that song—confident in her faith that in some distant moment, she would wear a crown. Stepping to the casket, I lifted the crown: “Mom, this isn’t much of a crown. It’s just a symbol. I am confident that today you are wearing the crown you sang about.” Then I laid the crown over her folded hands.

When I asked the director to remove the floral spray from the casket, people shifted nervously. What was going on? The spray always stayed on the casket. I

polished the lower lid of the casket. Then I faced the mourners. “You know my mother was quite a handshaker. She should have been a politician. So, as you come by the casket before you leave, place your hand on the casket and leave your fingerprints so Momma will know you were here.” Heads turned and eyes asked, “Did I hear correctly?”

As the organist played, we followed the old tradition of walking by the open casket. Some lightly touch the casket as if it were “hot”. Ralph Ferren, my mother’s Sunday school teacher for a number of years, tears streaming down his face, placed both hands on the casket. My Aunt Ellen lovingly stroked the casket, “I’ll see you soon, Mary.” With the first notes of Onward Christian Soldiers, the director closed the casket and the bearers took their places and we proceeded to the hearse.

“You know,” the director said as we drove toward the cemetery, “I’ve seen lots of things but I’ve never thought to ask people to leave their fingerprints on the casket. Would you mind if I suggest that to

families?”

That ritual innovation of placing hands on the casket cost nothing. But the comfort it brought us may, in turn, through the funeral director’s recommendation, bring comfort to others. Something you create may become the next innovation and comfort gift to a family. Your creativity could give another individual or family permission to “make special”.

Sometimes, we need to “stretch” an old tradition. In part of Kentucky, bearing a casket is “men’s work”. My brother did a double-take when I suggested that we have some female pallbearers. He had never seen such a thing (I had only once at the funeral of Cardinal Bernardin in Chicago).

As I concluded the funeral, I told the grievors, “Now keep your eyes open.” Many were stunned and pleased to see the grandsons and granddaughters carry their “Mam-Maw” to the waiting hearse. Again we took the old and tweaked it.

### **Something borrowed**

Innovation is a big theme in weddings; innovation should be borrowed freely in funeral rituals. I attended the funeral for John William Perry, a New York City policeman who died in the World Trade Center. As soon as I heard the first notes of the bagpiper’s Amazing Grace, I thought, when I die, I want a bagpiper!

My friend, Dot Culver, was a Purdue Boilermaker. For ninety of her ninety-three years. She lived within blocks of the campus and was an enthusiastic alumnus. As I talked with her daughter, Nancy, about the funeral and committal, she told me that she really wanted the Purdue Fight

Song for the recessional.

“But?” I questioned, noticing the hesitation in her voice. “Well, it’s probably not appropriate for a church funeral.”

“Sure it is,” I said.

So, Nancy “borrowed” the fight song. At the end of a wonderful celebration of the life and faith of Dorothy Culver, the organist broke into a spirited playing of The Purdue Fight Song! A Boilermaker was going home.

### **Something blue**

At an increasing number of funerals, planners try to avoid anything that might make someone cry. Indeed, many funerals are labeled “celebrations”. Well, some grievors need funerals. Some ritual elements might not only cause someone to cry but cause lots of people to cry.

Do it now! It is never too late to have a ritual. In working with grievors, I have learned that many have only snippets of memory of the rituals of their loved one.

I applaud the efforts of funeral directors to install state-of-the-art video equipment in their chapels so that individuals can have video memories to boot-up, refresh, or replace, their memories. I wish we had videotaped my mother’s funeral. I was so busy doing the ritual that, in a sense, I missed out on my mother’s funeral.

Many are so emotionally distressed that they remember nothing. That is why we do re-rituals at Saint Luke’s. We close each six-week group with a “Naming of the Name” service that lasts about 30 minutes. It is designed to give opportunity, repeatedly, to say the name of the loved one.

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## MAKING SPECIAL RITUALS

*Continued from page 6*

Anniversaries offer excellent opportunities to re-ritual. Recently, I counseled a family that had never purchased a marker for their mother's grave. I counseled them to make it a grand meaningful gathering of the clan. The ritual you create could be a great model for another. Do yourself a favor: ritual or re-ritual. Make special.

Harold Ivan Smith leads Grief Gatherings

at Saint Luke's Hospital in Kansas City and speaks to groups across the country on issues related to dying, death, and bereavement. The author of *A December Grief*, *When You Don't Know What to Say*, and *When Your Friend Dies*, he is a member of the Association for Death Education and Counseling.

*Printed with permission. Dr. Harold Ivan Smith is the invited speaker for the 2017 Spring Seminar in Wausau. He last spoke in Wausau in 2012.*

*And once the storm is over, you won't  
remember how you made it through,  
how you managed to survive.*

*You won't even be sure, in fact, whether  
the storm is really over.*

*But one thing is for certain. When you come  
out of the storm,  
you won't be the same person who walked in.*

*That's what the storm is all about.*

*– Haruki Murakami, Kafka*

### *How to Connect with Wings:*

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# Understanding Grief Spring Seminar 2017

*SAVE the DATE*

## Harold Ivan Smith *(Seminar Presenter)*

We welcome Harold Ivan Smith once again – one of our favorite and requested guest speakers – who is recognized as a Fellow in Thanatology by the Association for Death Education and Counseling. Though he is often remembered by the stories he tells about individuals with historical significance, we are intrigued by the lessons they give to each of us for our own life journey.

Harold Ivan Smith is a bereavement specialist on the teaching faculty of Saint Luke's Hospital, Kansas City, Missouri. He earned his doctorate from Asbury Theological Seminary and an EdS from George Peabody College of Vanderbilt University. Smith has written 12 books on bereavement and pastoral care including *A Decembered Grief*, *When Your People Are Grieving*, *GriefKeeping: Learning How Long Grief Lasts* and *Borrowed Narratives: Using Historical and Biographical Narratives with the Bereaving*.



### SEMINAR ONE

## Grief Ain't Exactly What I Had In Mind In This Chapter Of My Life

Thursday, April 20, 2017 | 7:00 – 9:00 pm  
Free of charge and open to the public

No one gets “a pass” on grief. Sooner or later, grief whispers, “You’re it!” However, contemporary culture insists that grievers “get over it” and quickly “move on.” Some can do neither so they sink the grief somewhere deep within oneself. Grief is about giving time and space to grieve deliberately and intentionally. It’s about declaring “My grief counts.” Each of us has a unique one-of-a-kind thumbprint. Therefore, each of us will grieve differently.

#### Both seminars will be held at:

Holiday Inn & Suites – Cedar Creek  
1000 Imperial Avenue, Rothschild, WI

#### For more information or a program brochure contact:

Wings—a Grief Education Ministry  
Nan or Gary Zastrow 715.845.4159 or nanwings1@gmail.com

Or Aspirus Comfort Care and Hospice Services  
Amy Kitsemel 715.847.2703

Professional CEU's available for both programs.

Presented by Wings™—a Grief Education Ministry who partners with Aspirus Comfort Care & Hospice Services to provide these seminars as a community service. Other major sponsors include Brainard Funeral Home, Helke Funeral Home, and Peterson/Kraemer Funeral Homes & Crematory. For a complete list of sponsors, visit [www.wingsgrief.org](http://www.wingsgrief.org)

CCHS-217a draft (rv 1/13/2017)

### SEMINAR TWO

## A Daunting Intersection: When Tragic Death Collides With Family Relationships

Friday, April 21, 2017 | 9:00 am – Noon | Fee: \$50  
Open to the public

Any family structure and security can be challenged by a death; more so by a traumatic death such as murder, suicide, substance abuse, or an act of terror. The grief is compounded with media coverage which the family finds invasive. The grief angst can be heightened when the death has a “tint” or hint of scandal and/or when linked to drugs or alcohol dependency. The death forces a family, or family members, to confront denied realities in the family narrative. Individuals in the family in “recovery” may be tempted to by-pass pain and grief by returning to abusing substances. The family structure can be challenged by a longing for revenge or vengeful behavior. For other families, the legal system further compounds their lives; some grievers identify themselves as dually victimized. The reality in today's society is that no family is immune from an unexpected, life-upending death by trauma.

Presented by:



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# Reader Feedback



## WHAT DO YOU THINK?

ABOUT RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS... AFTER THE DEATH OF A LOVED ONE, WE OFTEN FEEL ISOLATED FROM FAMILY AND FRIENDS FOR A PERIOD OF TIME AS WE WORK THROUGH OUR GRIEF AND FIND OUR "NEW" PLACE IN THESE RELATIONSHIPS. BUT SOMETIMES, WE ARE AMAZED AT THE CARING RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS BOTH BY FAMILY AND FRIENDS AS WELL AS STRANGERS. WHAT SPECIAL KINDNESS DID SOMEONE DO FOR YOU DURING YOUR GRIEVING THAT WAS UNEXPECTED AND VERY MUCH APPRECIATED.

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I'm not sure if this is the kind of thing your looking for or not, but here is something that immediately came to mind for me...

After my father's memorial service at the church, we all gathered outside to have the National Honor Guard gun salute.(He was in the Navy during WWII). After the gun salute, taps and the presentation of the flag to my mother, the Guard left. As we all started to leave the church, a middle aged man whom I don't know came up to me and said, "Hi, I see you're part of the family and I picked up an empty shell as I thought you might want to have one." I thanked him and took it. I have no idea who he was but it was such a kind and thoughtful gesture. It was something that would have never occurred to me at the time. It's a lovely memento of that day and the military tribute that I know my Dad would be proud of. I am thankful to this day that this kind stranger thought to get me one of those empty shells.

Well, that's it. You know, really, sometimes it is just the littlest things that can really make a big difference.

Marjorie – Clarence Center, New York

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The funeral director (Stahl Funeral Home) provided me with an afghan that has the date of Scott's death and it could

have had his picture on it but I chose to have a winter cardinal scene. They also had a candle that was at the funeral home with Scott's picture on it that they gave me. Also, he said that sometime he would like to go out to dinner with me and Jeff's wife. To me that was above and beyond the service. Also, when we were going to the cemetery, he drove past our house when it would have been closer to go another way.

Donna – Schofield, WI

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When my husband died, I was left alone with my sweet Golden Retriever. Random acts of kindness meant so much. One friend called me daily for three months, just checking on me and letting me know she was there. Others dropped off food. One called about a month later and asked if we could sit and look at pictures of Bill's and my life together and just share stories about Bill and myself. When the holidays came, I was invited to several people's home for a meal. These kinds of caring actions meant a great deal as I was just lost, sad, and empty. I have no family local to where I live so I was very dependent on friends for socializing, assistance and these random acts of kindness.

Mary – Spring Green, WI

---

The simple comment from a salesperson remarking she remembers my Dad. "He always was so friendly when he came into the store and purchased candy." Obviously she did not avoid the topic of my Dad which many did out of fear of making me sad or crying. It was so nice to hear of a kind memory someone had of him.

Kathleen – Wausau, WI

---

When my father in law died fairly sudden from a stroke and brain hemorrhage, I was a nurse educator at a technical college.

One of the nursing students the next day, stopped at my front door to bring my family homemade chicken soup and a homemade loaf of bread. It was not expected but was so appreciated since baking or cooking was the last thing on my mind in my family's time of grief. I will never forget that.

Sylvia – Marshfield, WI

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You know as I think back there is so much blur...but the following month after Kevin passed, Gene's brother and sister in law wanted to spend the day with us and just get us away from home...so they picked us up and we went to Westfield to the

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## WHAT DO YOU THINK...

*Continued from page 9*

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minature horse farm...big operation and we went on a guided tour. Diverted out focus on one of Gene's passions (horses). Before we left, I got the mail and in the mail was my very first publication of "WINGS" which I read on our way to Westfield...was so good for me...so good! Good day all the way around. When we got home, we had a bouquet of flowers delivered from an acquaintance which made me feel warm as Kevin's passing was not forgotten a month later...also perfect timing...I'll call that my random act of kindness...3 times in one day.

On the flip side...sad to say. I did my paying it forward to Pam after Elvio passed. As it was I was unemployed at the time and after Elvio died, I was there everyday to be there for her, unknown to me that my being there made her get out of bed and move forward with the little energy she had to get her into her day. And that's it..

Zofia – Mosinee, WI

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At wake of my mother, long after she lost her second husband, the niece of that kind man, gave me \$50 towards my mother's funeral expenses. Quite unexpected but gratefully accepted.

Micheline – Wausau

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My aunt got my mom and I a piece of clay shaped like a heart. It came with a note that said love on it. The artist who designs these pieces uses leftover clay from his big projects to make people smile. She saw them being sold at her work and thought of us. It was a very nice piece and makes me happy just knowing she was thinking of us!



I did this at school with the students I work with to give to other staff that make them feel special!

Sara – Weston, WI

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Random acts of kindness were very big during the difficult time of the lose of my spouse. It was while planning his funeral that somebody had donated the burial plot for my husband. Along with the donation of a burial plot, the opening and closing of his grave were donated also. The random acts of kindness helped very much with the planning of my spouse's funeral

Jen – Wausau, WI

---

Two weeks after our son died, my husband & I sat at the kitchen table eating the last of the food people had brought us. We made the comment that we probably should go to the grocery store. Neither of us had the energy or desire to go. Literally

5 minutes later the phone rang. A friend was calling to say that she was going to the store & wondered if we needed anything! We were so relieved & said milk & bread would be great. She showed up an hour later with two sacks of “staples” that we were so grateful to have. That random act of kindness arrived at a time when we were not yet ready to venture out. We would later come to realize that those small gestures always brought comfort.

Janet – Freemont, NE

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People ask me over for dinner.

Floyd – Marathon, WI

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I received a letter from someone my dad helped years before. They had run across each other a few times over the years. This person knew my dad from a

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## WHAT DO YOU THINK...

*Continued from page 10*

distance. When he read my dad's obituary in the paper, he wanted us to know what dad had done for him and how it changed this wonderful man's life. My dad did many things like this, I am finding out. My dad was famous, he wasn't rich but he gave the "shirt off his back" to those who needed it.

Kim – Naples, ID

---

Random acts of kindness can make a huge positive difference in someone's day! I support and encourage these.

In my grief, two co-workers gave me a book that they were told would be helpful. It wasn't since it was Kubler-Ross' Stages of Grief, but their thoughtfulness was appreciated. They showed they cared and were trying to help. They also called our company's Employee Assistance Program director (EAP) to ask if there was any help for someone grieving the multiple deaths of family members. They set up an appointment for me and it was very helpful to talk to a professional. At first I did feel these co-workers were overstepping a bit, but their hearts were in the right place, so I went. I continued to meet with the psychologist and it ended up being a good thing.

I don't know if I would take such a bold step for someone else, since making an appointment with a psychologist for someone can backfire, but I may suggest it to someone grieving.

Thanks for Wings and all you do!

Deirdre – Cordova

I did have one friend that always remembered dates & occasions with a card. It went on for a long time but now it's almost 5 yrs already, and this has slacked off. I don't think anyone realizes it unless they went through it themselves. It happens that she went through a loss before I did. You wonder how fast time goes and where it goes. It just flies on by. But I still feel isolated and I don't care to do things that I did before. You just carry it (the grief/loss) with you. Winter is the worst. Animals help and (give comfort to) keep you going.

Paula – Mosinee, WI

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My nephew, who had just gotten off of work, came to my house to be with me only hours after my wife passed away. He came on his own without being asked to. His timing was perfect. I had just finished making phone calls to inform family and friends of Karen's passing. I needed to get out of the house, so I had taken my 2 dogs for a walk when my cell phone rang. It was my nephew asking where I was, and that he was at my house. I told him I was only 2 blocks away, so he caught up with me and we continued our walk. When we arrived back home, he stayed with me until my stepson and grandson arrived from out of town 2 hours later. I truly do believe his unexpected, but greatly appreciated act was truly divine intervention. I will be forever grateful to him.

David – Wausau, WI

My husband, Tom, died on November 30, 2014, the Sunday following Thanksgiving. For me the holidays, and the months following have always been very busy times, and grieving was not something I had time for. First I get ready for Christmas with my children and grandchildren. After Christmas, I start a second part time job each year doing taxes. Something that meant a lot to me was a day when I just needed to talk about Tom and how I was feeling. One of my bosses was leaving for an appointment when I began talking to him. He listened to me for about ten minutes even though he had somewhere to be.

Another time, during my job doing tax prep, a client who was also a friend gave me a hug as she left. I, then, called my next client in who saw the hug I received. She asked,

"Am I allowed to hug my tax preparer? We heard about your husband." When I said, "Sure", they gave me a big hug. They have no idea how much I really needed it, and how much it meant to me. I am usually pretty good at hiding those types of feelings when I need to.

Linda – Loyal, WI

## FOR OUR NEXT ISSUE: *What do you think?*

Watch for our "What do you think?" question for our next issue in your email in about six weeks. Our readers input is very valuable to our readers; and we welcome your response.

*Send your response to [nanwings1@gmail.com](mailto:nanwings1@gmail.com) . Please limit your feedback to about 250-300 words.*

# PAY NOW OR PAY LATER...IT'S A CHOICE

by Nan Zastrow

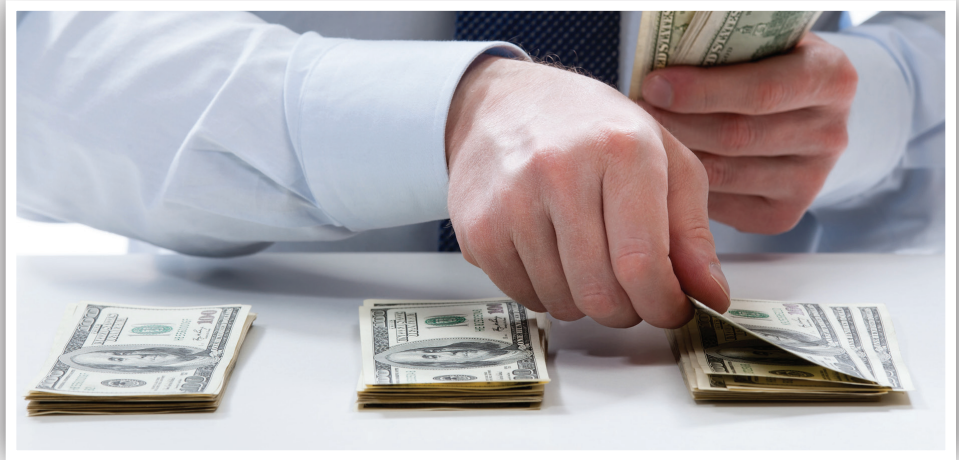
We purposely followed the shiny, big, brown, new Ram Truck with all its expensive chrome and trimmings. We were on a mission to help someone avoid a motor vehicle fine. The license plate on the truck was already four months past expiration and that comes with a hefty fine if the driver is stopped by an officer. We wanted to inform the driver, who may have been unaware, so he could take action.

From experience, we knew the cost. Someone stopped us not too long ago to let us know our plates didn't have a valid sticker. Fortunately, we had paid for new plates, but never received the stickers. We had proof of payment, and the person who notified us gave us the opportunity to correct the situation before it became a problem. So we thought it would be nice to "pay it forward" in this instance.

The pricy Ram truck drove through a Walgreens parking lot, around a building (with restricted access) trying to avoid turning back...and we followed! Then, through a green light, down a side street and it disappeared temporarily. I think the driver thought we were stalking him! We followed his path as best but a stop light interrupted our pursuit. We were about to give up when we again spotted the vehicle parked in a Panera restaurant parking lot.

My husband, Gary, got out of the car and went to the passenger window where the driver's friend sat. Gary told the young woman, "I just wanted to let you know that your license plates are expired so you don't get a fine." The woman responded, "We know that. We really don't care. We are "big" people, and we can handle it."

Who would have guessed such a re-



sponse? One never knows. When Gary told me what she said, I chuckled and remarked.... "All you can do is try to help someone. Doesn't mean they are going to accept the invitation."

You can relate a lot of life analogies to grief. This was a good example. People can ride around in circles and know they need some kind of support or help, but aren't really willing to seek it out or accept it. They trust that they can handle the situation on their own.

Grief is a stubborn emotion. It will continue to plague you until you do something about it. The more you ignore it, the more it will demand your attention. Until the reality finally smacks you in the face...and you know it's time to deal with it. The price you may pay at that point imposes even greater emotional trauma, selfdoubts, and a series of problems.

Unresolved (prolonged or chronic) or delayed grief may be the culprit of other life difficulties that plague you months or years later. Upon your own realization or with the help of an experienced counselor, you begin to relate some of your current problems to the death of a significant

person in your life that you, perhaps, did not grieve fully or grieve at all. You may have chosen to put aside grieving because you were too busy, too hurt, or too overwhelmed.

It's the penalty a bereaved person pays for ignoring the normal grieving process. Delayed grief can interfere with everyday life responsibilities, relationships, social commitments, and future happiness. Behavior is often altered and your family and friends may notice a "difference" in you. Unresolved grief can lead to depression, mental anguish, social withdrawal, and an inability to find joy in anything in life. You become a different person, but not in a positive way.

Sometimes giving in to your subconscious thoughts to learn, understand, and accept support during grief feels intimidating and very humbling. Each of us believes that we have the power within us to walk the path alone. We may think that grief will go away all by itself—without intervention. That can be true for some people—depending upon the

*Continued on page 13*

individual's ability and desire to do his or her grief work on his or her own time. True grief work is essential to healing. Also, not all grief bears the same intensity. Numerous factors contribute to the depth of grief...such as relationship, cause of death, faith factors, and many more. When a death is not deemed as a significant figure in a person's life; is not traumatic; or does not touch your daily life; grief work may be simpler, less formal, and of shorter duration. However, significant loss requires significant grief work.

Unresolved grief can affect children, teens or adults. It typically interferes with one's ability to handle day-to-day responsibilities. The individual may be unsure about their feelings towards the person who died and sometimes even feel personal guilt for the death.

Symptoms of unresolved or delayed grief may include these:

- Refusal to talk about the loss, denying loss, or minimizing connection to the person who died
- Avoid people, places, activities, memories connected to the person
- Act as though nothing has changed
- Preoccupied with the memory of the person who died
- Preoccupied with work, a hobby, or another diversion
- Addiction to alcohol, smoking, medication, sleeping pills, food
- Isolation, depression, avoids social situations
- Demonstrates new risky behavior
- Anger not validated or specific

• Chronic pain or illnesses without biological cause

• Exaggerated emotions to the loss

The good news is even unresolved grief can be treated through counseling, self-motivation to confront and cope with conflicting emotions/thoughts. Working through the process of feelings and giving voice to your relationship, your miscommunications, or your personal needs to understand the changes as a result of loss are key to healing. Even "big" people sometimes need help.

Like the occupants in that shiny Ram truck with an attitude...you have a choice. You can choose to take the necessary steps to live in peace and harmony (with your loss), or you can pay the penalty when it catches up with you.

**"Hold onto the love, not the loss."**

## *W* Grief Tip: **Healing a Broken Heart**

Many of us recently celebrated Valentine's Day—and for those who grieve, the celebration was likely one with a heavy heart. Physicians now accept and suggest that someone can really die of a broken heart. A bereaved person's risk factors increase and their tolerance for illness and disease spike. Don't just pretend that you are okay. It's important to socialize and talk about your loss. Grief can be a frightening and unfamiliar experience. You do not need to grieve alone. If you are suffering the loss of a loved one, seek and find ways to let go of the pain. Support groups provide a safe place with others who have had a mutual experience. Volunteering opens new social possibilities that can lighten your spirit and give you meaning and purpose to your day. Getting active and physical relieves stress and strengthens your body and soul. Be good to yourself. Explore the experience of grief and grow from your discoveries.

# Wings

©1993 Nan Zastrow

When I was just a spirit  
In God's presence long ago  
He offered me two borrow gifts  
Wings, and then my earthly soul.

"These gifts prepare you for a task,  
My child," he gently smiled.  
"If you want help, you need but ask,  
Your journey's just a while."

And did you stop to tell me Lord  
Before I came to earth  
The trials I would have to bear?  
And did I have a choice?

God patiently smiled down on me  
And His love came shining through.  
"Trust", He said, "and you will see  
I'll be there each hour for you."

"Your task will teach you how to seek,  
From your memory I have hidden,  
The ways to serve both God and man  
With the wings that you are given.

Your soul is yours to educate  
And return you to God's ways.  
Your wings to freely make a choice  
Of right and wrong each day.

Wings help carry laughter's ring,  
Wings help you soar above your fears,  
And those protective Guardian wings  
Of angels are always near.

Wings help make your heart sing songs  
Of sweet love and family there.  
Wings help mend your troubled mind,  
Send answers to your prayers.

Wings give flight to buoyant souls.  
Wings enfold you in God's care.  
Wings help shield you from life's storms,  
Tear and burdens help you bear.

You'll falter now and then, my child,  
But I'll forgive your earthly flaws.  
I'll overlook your weaknesses;  
And reward adherence to My laws.

And if you prove your love for me,  
And believe in Me with faith,  
The wings I give you then will be  
Eternally, so great.

And when your earthly time is done,  
Borrowed wings can bring you home  
By the strength of eagles and angels...some,  
You'll humble near My throne.

God's mercy and enduring love,  
Redeem the sins and errors I've made.  
Through the body of God's only son,  
My debts are fully paid.

On the "wings of angels" life me high  
Propel my soul through golden gates.  
Leave my borrowed wings as memories  
For those who grieve and wait.

*This poem was written in 1993  
after the death of my son,  
Chad E. Zastrow.*

*I believe that God gave us "wings".  
Wings represent our spiritual  
connection and the gifts (abilities)  
God gave us to use in our lives  
here on earth.*

*These gifts are the personal traits  
that others will remember about  
us when we are called home.*

*God gave us the potential; it is our  
choice to seek the spiritual growth.*

*This verse appeared in the Premier  
issue of Wings and represents  
the ministry of Hope that we've  
continued through all these years.*

*In Memory of Chad Eric Zastrow  
12-4-1971 to 4-16-1993*

