



Honoring the Past and
Rebuilding the Future

www.wingsgrief.org

Published by Nan Zastrow

Contents of this ELetter

- Feature: An Extraordinary Experience That Eased the Burden of Grief
- Editor's Journal: Pop Up Memories are Not Grief Bursts
- What's on the Calendar
- Inspirational Story: The Stump Story
- Freedom Is Not Free
- On the Lighter Side
- From the Archives: What Do You Think?

Please read our ELetter and pass it on!

If you are not a subscriber and would like to subscribe to the Wings ELetter, contact Nan Zastrow at wings1@charter.net or subscribe (or unsubscribe) at wingsgrief.org. Articles and stories may be reproduced providing you include the Author, Source, and Permissions.

AN EXTRAORDINARY EXPERIENCE THAT EASED THE BURDEN OF GRIEF

By Lou LaGrand

For over 25 years I have been studying the effects of the Extraordinary Experiences (EEs) of the bereaved. These events are spontaneous, not invoked, and those who experience them are convinced they come from an outside source--their deceased loved one or a Supreme Being.

There are numerous positive effects from these encounters, not the least of which is the conviction by the mourner that consciousness survives bodily death and the loved one lives on. Following is an unusual EE that had three positive effects on the recipient in addition to the two just mentioned.

The recipient of this experience was a devoted wife and helped her husband through many months of coping with prostate cancer. As she said, "Being present when he was dying was an incredibly profound experience that changed my life. However, I knew his time was very short, and he would not die in my presence, as he wanted to spare me the sadness. He passed away shortly after I went home that last night."

In her own words, here is her Extraordinary Experience. "My EE occurred approximately 30 hours after Peter's death.

I awakened around 7:00 a.m. and saw my 'Happy Birthday' balloon in my bedroom. He had ordered flowers and the balloon for my birthday two weeks earlier. He hadn't gotten me a balloon for years but this one turned out to be significant. During the four days he'd been in home hospice care, it hovered around the ceiling in the room where we spent our time talking and watching television ('hanging out' he called it). This balloon had never left that room before, and would have had to go up and down through two doorways to get to the bedroom--so I knew it had to happen on its own.

When I saw the balloon that morning, I immediately knew it was a message from him that he had arrived at his destination, and wanted to thank me for taking care of him. I went down a short hallway to our front door to get the newspaper, and when I came back the balloon was in his bathroom. He had told me earlier that since his shower was better than mine, I should use his bathroom after he was gone. I felt the balloon was reminding me of that, so I took my shower there immediately.

Continued on page 4



POP-UP MEMORIES ARE NOT GRIEF BURSTS

NAN ZASTROW
Co-Founder,
Wings – A Grief Education Ministry

A few days ago, we experienced a pop-up memory of Chad. We (my husband and I) were driving home and stopped at the signal lights. A shiny beige pickup truck came whizzing through the intersection of the busy street and easily caught our attention. In the bed of the pickup truck was a 3' x 5' American flag whirling in the breeze. Simultaneously, Gary and I had an instant pop-up to a long ago time, when our son Chad, did the very same thing! I haven't seen such a display since Chad's death, and this pop-up brought kudos, a smile and a story to Gary and me.

If you are a web surfer, you are familiar with "pop-ups" and in many situations, they are frustrating and distracting, but they do get your attention. Web pop-ups are those images that appear suddenly and unexpectedly in the middle of something else you were doing. Pop-ups in the Internet world can also lead you on a trail from site to site to discover a hidden piece of information. You are intrigued, and your senses become alert challenged by the clue.

As your grief begins to heal, you are likely to experience more pop-ups than grief bursts. I define grief pop-ups as a light-bulb kind of recognition that instantly recalls an event or moment in the life of

your loved one that may have been a forgotten or a "buried" memory. It doesn't require a specific trigger; it often just surfaces. It usually occurs when the mind is peaceful and is not focusing on any outside stimuli. The memory suddenly pops-up in your thoughts (whether stimuli or non-stimuli induced) and creates a highly pleasant sensation that brings a smile and a story associated with the recollection.

The story behind our pop-up memory on this particular day, was a high school senior, our son Chad. At the time, he was a member of the Wisconsin National Guard, and passionately patriotic. His patriotic spirit was displayed every time he donned his army fatigues with the bloused pants over his tanker-style, infantry boots (not typical army issue). He was the young man who, with permission, drove an Army jeep to his homecoming celebration. He slept beneath a patriotic quilt. Camouflage was his preferred choice for casual dress. He joined the Army National Guards in his junior year of high school because he was motivated by Desert Storm. He lived and breathed his commitment. But the pop-up memory smile had to do with his 1976 Chevy truck. In the bed of his truck, he mounted a 3' x 5' American flag and proudly drove to school, work, the National Guards, and play with this symbol of pride. Seeing some other young man with the same spirit of adventure on this day invoked an awesome pop-up memory from the past.

Differences between Pop-Ups and Grief Bursts:

The important element of pop-up memories are the stories. These differ from grief bursts. Most bereaved are familiar with the term grief burst and can attest to having one. Grief bursts typically bring on a feeling of being overwhelmed with resident emotions of grief. They create a sensory jolt that typically comes from something that triggered the recollection. Grief bursts signal a single characteristic of a loved one that coincides with a familiar place, a smell, a song, a fragrance, or a glance of someone who looks like your loved one, just to name a few triggers. They may bring happy or sad memories. They create an opportunity for you to express your sorrow and re-acknowledge the reality of your loved one's death. In contrast to pop-ups, they seldom tie to a life-story or event to go along with the memory.

Pop-up memories can happen when you least expect them. Working in my kitchen one day, I had a pop-up memory of Chad and Jenny making pizza in a different house that we built. The pop-up memory recalled the story of the two of them camping on the shore of the Rib River and raiding the refrigerator and house for camping supplies. While writing this article, I had a pop-up memory of Chad returning from advance military training sporting his proud tattoo. I easily recalled the story that went along with the conversation over the phone with Chad about

Continued on page 3

POP UP MEMORIES ARE NOT GRIEF BURSTS

Continued from page 2

making an appropriate choice for a tattoo. The reality about pop-up memories is that every story recalled through a pop-up memory revives our connection to our beloved son. Pop-up memories always connect to a life story. You feel a need to retell the story or discuss it with someone else because the vision recalled is so captivating it begs repeating! You visualize your loved one in his/her time actively doing exactly what the pop-up memory awakened in your mind. It's every bereaved person's wish to be able to talk about the times in the life of their loved one that were special and pop-up memories provide that opportunity. These stories bring great comfort. What I like about pop-up memories is the warmth I feel years after the

death. It allows me to re-live the happiness of who this person was and the special joys he brought to my life.

Embrace your pop-up memories! There will always be a place in your heart and your life for memories of your loved one. It's a comforting and healing part of grief when the memory you experience can bring you moments of joy as you recall the story of what created the memory. Pop-ups can create instant connections to positive feelings like an instant replay at a sporting event. Details, sights, sounds, colors, and joyful emotions are vivid. It seems as though you are right there again. Pop-ups interrupt the moment and connect the past to the present moment in your life. Merging the two confirms that out loved

one lives forever in our hearts, our stories, and our memories. Love lives on!

The pop-up memory of Chad driving his truck with the billowing flag stayed with me for days. It encouraged me to look through a couple picture albums again. Maybe it was a fluke that the summer's patriotic holidays were upon us. Or maybe it was just coincidental that we crossed paths at the intersection at the same time as the beige truck. What are the odds of that? Or maybe it was just one of those little miracles that Gary and I have recited almost every day in the past 20 years since Chad's death that remind us that Chad will always live in our hearts and will always be the wind beneath our Wings™!

Note: Pop-up memories is not a clinical word or familiar word in the vocabulary of grief counseling. It was adopted by me as a result of this experience and its likeness to every day Internet surfing! Please feel free to use it as a means to describe healing grief stories! It is my wish that you too can recall the joy and pass it on! – Nan

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

37th NATIONAL COMPASSION-ATE FRIENDS CONFERENCE

July 11-13, 2014, Chicago, IL

Nan and Gary Zastrow will be presenting 2 workshops at the conference. You can still register to attend.

18th ANNUAL HOLIDAY REMEMBRANCE PROGRAM

When the Holidays Hurt - for the Bereaved

Each year, a theme-based program is presented with fresh ideas and personal insight about coping with grief during the

holidays. When someone loved dies, the holidays can be a source of anxiety and added grief. Join us for this inspirational program that helps families cope by giving them options and suggestions for managing their traditions and emotions. Discover ideas for ritual, celebration, and remembrance. Watch for theme information in Oct./Nov. 2014. Presented by Nan & Gary Zastrow

***New Time and date: Sunday, December 7, 2014, Holiday Inn & Suites at Cedar Creek 2:00 p.m.

For information about any of these events, contact Nan at wings1@charter.net.
Subscribe to Wings and receive updates and announcements by email.

AN EXTRAORDINARY EXPERIENCE THAT EASED THE BURDEN OF GRIEF

Continued from page 1

The remainder of the morning the balloon would be in whatever room I was in, although I never really saw it move. I would just look up and see it with me. This lasted for a few hours, then it was over. The balloon lost all its air and to this day rests on a shelf by a jade plant in my sunroom. I felt this episode was a moment of magic and joy in the midst of my new and overwhelming sadness.”

This experience was a major factor in how Marilyn was able to cope with her great loss. I asked her what was most helpful about it for her. She said, “The timing of the experience set the tone for my grieving process: Happy images (balloon, etc.) immediately linked to the sad ones (Peter’s dying moments). Also, the encounter

reassured me that his suffering was over. Finally, the details of this EE seemed designed by Peter to be a very personal and unique message for me.”

These three items are critical to understand. Setting the tone for grieving means knowing that all is well, though sad, and all is not lost. Reassurance is an important factor in accepting her loss (a major task of mourning) knowing that his pain is over. And finally, realizing the personal meaning of the message adds to reassurance and her belief that love lives on.

Experiences like Marilyn’s have happened to millions of people in a variety of different ways from sensing the presence of the deceased or having a vision to hearing the

loved one’s voice or experiencing a visitation dream. The general public is not aware of the frequency of these contacts or the degree of help they provide to the bereaved. They remain another example of the mystery of life.

Dr. LaGrand is a grief counselor and the author of eight books, the most recent, the popular *Love Lives On: Learning from the Extraordinary Encounters of the Bereaved*. He is known world-wide for his research on the Extraordinary Experiences of the bereaved (after-death communication phenomena) and is one of the founders of Hospice of the St. Lawrence Valley, Inc.

Editor’s Note: In April, Lou LaGrand was our guest speaker at the Wings Understanding Spring Seminar in Wausau, WI. The feedback in regards to EE’s (extraordinary experiences or after death communications) was remarkable. Our conference room was nearly “standing room only” indicating both curiosity and interest in a topic not often discussed. His second seminar the following day gave our audience countless tips and information about healing grief. By request, I’m including another article with Dr. LaGrand’s permission in this issue.

How to Connect with Wings:

- Email: wings1@charter.net
- Postal: P.O. Box 1051, Wausau, WI 54401
- Phone: 715.845.4159
- 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

W Grief Tip:

Grief and the Patriotic Holidays

The patriotic holidays that dot our summer calendar remind us to honor the military, law enforcement, and all those who protect our safety and freedom as Americans. And, for others who have died, we remember the holidays as a time in the past when we shared good times. Most of us honor those days with time off work (vacation) and give credit to the holiday as a coincidence. But this year when you salute the red, white and blue, watch the display of fireworks, host a barbeque, take a picnic lunch, swim at the beach, fish at your favorite spot, or take a mini trip—remember that there is some mother, father, spouse, sibling, parent, friend or grandparent who marks this day with different emotions. Their thoughts go to a loved one who didn’t come home for the celebration. Say a silent prayer and be thankful for the good times you remember and for the courage to get through the sad times with dignity. Today, be thankful for this moment...because life can change in a blink of the eye.

THE STUMP STORY

An Inspirational Story

Do you know the legend of the Cherokee Indian youth's rite of passage? The young Cherokee boy is taken to the forest by his father. His father places a blindfold on him and tells him that he will be left alone. According to the custom, the Cherokee boy is required to sit on a stump the whole night. He is directed not to remove the blindfold until the rays of the morning sun shine through it.

The boy must not cry out for help to anyone. Once he survives the night, he has completed his rite of passage and is considered a Man. He must never tell the other boys of this experience, because each lad must come into manhood on his own.

The Cherokee boy is naturally terrified. He can hear all kinds of noises. Wild beasts must surely be all around him. Maybe even some human might do him harm. The wind blew the grass and earth, and shook his stump, but he sat stoically, never removing the blindfold. He was committed to get through this test so he could be considered a man.

Finally, after a terrifying night of the unknown, the sun appeared. The Cherokee boy felt the warmth and brightness through his blindfold and carefully removed it. It was then that he discov-



ered his father sat next to him on the stump the whole night through. The father watched his son the entire night, protecting him from harm.

Editor's Comment: The editor chooses to interpret the moral of the story:

Grief is like a rite of passage. Everyone must go through it at some time. When we grieve, we may feel like we are sitting on a stump, blindfolded, unaware of most things around us and not quite sure what we should do. There is fear. There is uncertainty. There may even be an overwhelming urge to give into your fears and abandon your quest. But remember, grief is a journey that many have taken before you and survived.

You can do it too!

Of course, the moral of this story points to the concept of faith and the protection of a Heavenly Father who watches over you. All you need to do is reach out to him in your grief or fears. Faith is trust. He is there through all life's circumstances, even in your moments of doubt, anger at God, or denial. Not only does He protect you when you are alone, He invisibly gives you courage and strength along the way.

If you are a maybe, kinda, sorta person, in regards to the concept of faith and a Supreme Being, you have options. Sitting on the stump in what appears to be a dark, lonely world, imagining the scariest of all situations could be the turning point that directs you to search for meaning in life. You may make a commitment to discover and chose a faith-system that meets your needs. Or you may go blindly forward, never trusting or believing in anything but yourself to provide for your most intimate needs. The choice is yours!

Lastly, if you are sitting on the stump, alone in the night, clearly defiant that there is no such thing as a mighty One who protects, guides, and comforts, ... you might want to take off the blindfold and run!

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.

Freedom Is Not Free

- Cadet Major Kelly Strong 1981



*I watched the flag pass by one day, It fluttered in the breeze.
A young marine saluted it, And then he stood at ease.*

*I looked at him in uniform So young, so tall, so proud,
With hair cut square and eyes alert He'd stand out in any crowd.*

*I thought how many men like him had fallen through the years.
How many died on foreign soil? How many mother's tears?*

*How many pilot's planes shot down? How many died at sea?
How many foxholes were soldier's graves? No freedom is not free.*

*I heard the sound of Taps one night, when everything was still.
I listened to the bugler play and felt a sudden chill.*

*I wondered just how many times, That Taps had meant "amen".
When a flag had covered a coffin, of a brother or a friend.*

*I thought of all the children, Of the mothers and the wives,
Of fathers, sons, and husbands, With interrupted lives.*

*I thought about the graveyard at the bottom of the sea.
Of unmarked graves in Arlington
No freedom is not free.*

On the Lighter Side

The Most Grief

A dietitian was once addressing a large audience in Chicago. "The material we put into our stomachs is enough to have killed most of us sitting here, years ago.

Red meat is awful. Soft drinks erode your stomach lining. Chinese food is loaded with MSG. Vegetables can be disastrous, and none of us realizes the long-term harm caused by the germs in our drinking water.

But there is one thing that is the most dangerous of all and we all have, or will, eat it. Can anyone here tell me what food it is that causes the most grief and suffering for years after eating it?"

A 75-year-old man in the front row stood up and said, "Wedding cake"

Three Guys on an Airplane

There were three men on an airplane somewhere above the atlantic ocean. Suddenly Death appears on the plane. He says "Before I take you all with me I'll give you a chance to survive. Each one of you will throw something to the ocean and if I find it you will die".

The first one throws a needle. Death goes down to the ocean searching for it. After a couple of minutes he comes back with the needle

The second one throws a hair. Death goes down and after ten minutes he comes back with the hair

The third one throws something quickly and Death goes down again. About an hour later he comes back and says to the guy "Ok you win, I'll let you live. But tell me what did you throw?"

The guy says "An effervescent tablet."

Reader Feedback



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What have you discovered that is a positive outcome of grief?

Sometime after the event of death, loss, and grief of a significant loved one in our lives, we discover that we have changed. Often this change creates a time for renewal and character building as we adapt. There may be changes in relationships, routines, priorities, goals, faith, and many other aspects of your life. Typically, when we look back at our journey, we find that some changes were positive. Maybe you accomplished one goal. Perhaps you mended a failing relationship. Did you take up a new hobby, passion, or learning experience that brought you joy? How did helping others make you feel good? In what ways have you changed what makes you feel good about yourself, your place in the world, and your attitudes about life?

Due to overwhelming response and many detailed replies, content has been edited for space. We believe we have saved the main thoughts to inspire you.

It's been 3-1/2 years since my husband passed away. The kids tell me that I'm always going somewhere---I work a little, but mostly visit family and friends. I built a new house last year and have a lot of work to do on the outside this year. I'm very busy with my kids and grandkids. As busy as I am, I think about Dan every day and miss him. I have met some new guys who might be fun to get to know, but I just can't find it in my heart to let anyone new in.....and right now I like it that way... maybe time will make changes.

Ann (Wausau, WI)

After my son's suicide, I thought I would literally not survive. Today, I am one of the happiest people I know and my life is about as good as I can imagine it. How I went from that place of total darkness to the place I am now is not a simple story to tell, but I do know that his death was the catalyst for all of the good I am experiencing now. Probably

the biggest gifts are the strength and confidence I gained along with a healthy dose of reality that prompted me to live a more authentic life. Change took place in many areas of my life. I got a divorce based on a marriage that wasn't working. I started writing poetry and doing other things I found personally fulfilling, I quit drinking and now I am a life coach. My son's death shattered my facade of having a perfect family not living a false life just because it was easier and better for everyone else. My son's death gave me a second chance at life. It is a gift I didn't ask for or want, but that I am grateful for nonetheless.

Stephanie, (Wausau, WI)

My loving, patient and compassionate son, Jon, lost his battle with depression during his senior year of high school. He had aspirations to attend college and study the environment in order to preserve our surroundings and establish a handicap accessible hunting area

on his ancestors land. Since his death, to honor his memory, I became a student at NTC studying Human Services with a goal of opening a youth crisis center in Antigo. This is my way to help others.

Tara (Antigo, WI)

It's been 19 months since the death of my daughter. I think it opened my eyes to the possibility of the fact that there is no death. That even though our loved ones are gone from this plane of existence, they continue to communicate and live on. Love never dies. I also know that I have a much different view on addiction, drug addiction in particular. I have continued to try to understand why it happens and how hard it is to abandon those habits. I have learned that love is all that really matters and often we get so caught up in the silly little things that don't matter 5 days or 5 months or certainly not 5 years from now. I've learned to live in the "now" and appreciating the "little things".

Continued on page 8

WHAT DO YOU THINK...

Continued from page 7

I joined an online photo-journal group called Blipfoto. It is based in Scotland and they ask that each day you submit a photo and a description of what is going on in your life or something that interests you on that day. You can comment on others photos and the photographers range from amateur to professionals. It is an incredibly supportive group and has focused my attention on something positive to get done every day.

Lois (New Boston NH)

My husband, Jim, and I have always been close, kind of a “normal” couple. After the death of our daughter, Pam, we both have developed a new closeness. We take time to share, talk and appreciate more. We understand what each other is feeling or where each of us is coming from. We are fortunate to have each other and the rest of our family.

Gale (Wausau, WI)

I think for me the most positive thing that has come from my grief is a gentleness. I am a type A personality: demanding, uptight, loud, time orientated. Since the death of my sister-in-law, I found I was a bit easier on my own daughter and sisters. Then with the passing of my father-in-law, I became less demanding of my own family, looking at my dad in a different more gentle way. I am more thoughtful of my parent's needs, emotions; and I don't worry about the time spent with them. Now that my own father has just passed, I find myself looking at other people's feelings, time, emotions, listening more, and apologizing for my

demanding ways. I think that grief has made me look at myself and reflect on “how will people remember me”.

Kim (NSW, Australia)

I've had several encounters will 'grief' and each time I came away with something different. My mother died very suddenly when I was only 27. At first my grieving was more anger at her, but soon I began taking over some of her many 'projects' and found great peace in serving others. Later losses led me to take courses in helping people face and prepare for end of life issues. Just being with a person in his/her last moments is a true honor. As a Christian I hope that my presence brings them comfort. I stress the fact that I don't have all the answers, but I'd be honored to listen to their memories, concerns, hopes, fears and dreams. More than anything - I have learned to accept what I can't understand. That acceptance allows me to ignore time-wasting anger and concentrate on the how much good can be accomplished one day at a time - one person at a time. The Wings presenters have been wonderful sources of strength and inspiration for me. Thank you for being there.

Jan (Wittenberg, WI)

My husband Bill died 4 years ago after a 5 year journey through Alzheimer's disease. He was a clinical psychologist, and I am a clinical social worker. I lost my colleague in our private practice of many years. As a result of this loss, I can identify some positive outcomes: I have met many “real” people, most of

whom have experienced a significant loss and who are compassionate and understanding of grief, unafraid to share and listen. I have taken up watercolor and find it a good outlet for my pain and sadness. I also paint with a group of 6 other women. Together we have an art show. We live in a small Wisconsin town and call ourselves Local Color. I also enjoy writing. I am currently working to my CT (Certified Thanatologist) certification through ADEC. It is very rewarding and helps me feel meaning and purpose in my life that was shattered by Bill's death.

Mary (Spring Green, WI)

I was always an “A” type personality. But after Darren's murder in China, I made my mind up to do two things. First, I honor Darren's memory in positive ways. That has given me purpose and special goals. This includes sending 6,600 CARE packages to our troops in Iraq and now Afghanistan; doing pet therapy with my dog Dara at the Naval Hospital in San Diego; doing a memory book, becoming a grief counselor and helping the military and other homicide survivors at no charge, and donating my time to various military causes. Secondly, I will not rest until I get justice and the truth re: Darren's murder in China. We have finished in Federal Court re: my FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) lawsuit for documents regarding Darren's murder. Now we go to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals in San Francisco. We are also working on legislation to change the protocol of the State Dept. so no one else is ever treated like this again

Continued on page 9

WHAT DO YOU THINK...

Continued from page 8

when their child is murdered abroad.
Maxine (San Diego, CA)

My daughter died over 17 years ago due to a semi-truck/ car accident. My mother died 11 months after my daughter due to pancreatic cancer at age 55, and my brother died at age 40 of ALS several years after that. The #1 and foremost positive outcome of my grief is my recommitment to God and my faith. It was a very long, arduous road that took about 10 years to put an end to the anger I felt toward God. Once I was able to set aside the anger and forgive myself, my spiritual growth and faith has been phenomenal and very rewarding. Secondly, with other mothers, we started a Compassionate Friends chapter in our county which I was a co-leader for 7 years until our chapter dissolved. Another positive outcome of my grief was the opportunity of putting my life into perspective...prioritizing what is truly important. The "little things" that people tend to overdramatize over means nothing to me. I no longer take my relationship with others for granted. And lastly, I like the person I have become... strong, faith-filled and compassionate.

Lynn (Phillips, WI)

The positive for me has been the gift of authenticity; the desire to live and search for deeper meaning of love and to journey within that invisible mystery space. Infused with the sacred energy of grief, the gifts enter offering the capacity to heal.

Darlene (Ringle, WI)

Over the past six years, I've experienced multiple deaths of family members. One of these was my brother-in-law who died as a result of suicide. I asked my counselor, "How can this happen to us," and she said, "Why not you?" That was an eye opener. I learned that with grief it was OK to cry, to share, to talk about it. In fact all of that is good for us. I learned to take one day at a time and enjoy anything I could from that day. Grief has made me stronger in my faith with God, in my relationships with those of us left behind, my husband and children. I have more empathy for those who are grieving, I am a better listener. There are more hugs, more I love yous, more I appreciate you just because. I can talk about death and life more openly. Time does heal, but in the mean time we need to take care of ourselves during the process i.e. eat right, sleep and exercise - even if it's a short stroll. Exercise is extremely important.

Cindy (Appleton, WI)

My heart has healed and changed since the death of my son, Brad in 2000. I don't think any parent can remain the same person after the loss of a child. When Brad died, I experienced shock, numbness, resentment, anger at myself for not being there for him. I didn't have a lot of family support so I found support with others who had similar losses. When I heard the local college was looking for American "parents" for young people coming to this country, I decided to give it a try. The first experience went so well that my husband and I soon had other students with us for even longer--and now we're

hooked. This experience has been very positive. I've learned that caring about other wonderful young people helps fill the big hole that developed in my heart when my child left. I know my heart is now capable again of great love, compassion, patience and understanding, and wanting what's best for them. I believe it's the Lord's way of helping me better understand my purpose and why I'm here--and for that I'm grateful too. Yes, because of the most painful experience in my life, I've learned that there can be a good life and even joy again. We just have to be open for it to happen--and to develop a loving, grateful heart.

Betty (Wausau, WI)

I am a totally different person since the loss of both of my adult sons. I am more aware of what is important in life and what isn't. I know what it feels like to have great loss and am able to help others with their loss. Doing this brings significance to the lives of my sons. My relationships with other people are richer because I know that no one is guaranteed tomorrow. I once thought that bad things happened to other people, but I know it can really happen to me. Also, my relationship with God became one of substance. Some things I thought were true, were not, so my wall of faith came crashing down and it was rebuilt with truth that I trust in completely. The promise for believers is not that we will not suffer but that we will be held, comforted and given strength by Him. He has done that for me.

Paula (Medford, WI)

Continued on page 10

WHAT DO YOU THINK...

Continued from page 9

The most positive outcome of my grief for Ted has been the affirmation of my faith; my belief that I can trust God above all. I journaled a lot during my husband's illness, and found strength in my faith. The little "visits" that I still get from Ted, also serve as confirmation that all is well in his new home. I know that some people who grieve get angry at God for taking their loved one. I feel blessed that God took Ted when he did; he suffered much too long. God was merciful.

Shelby (Schofield, WI)

I treasure family and friend relationships more deeply and put much more effort into maintaining them and keeping them. I don't like being single so I've found it necessary to do more activities with other women who are "single." I now do a lot of volunteer work. Giving back brings a sense of comfort and peace to me. My Christian faith has deepened a hundred fold. I was ordained as a Deacon at my Church. I have also learned that in order to survive the loss, that I had to channel my time and efforts elsewhere. That brings

the joy and peace And, even though , we don't believe it at the time, life truly does get better and there is joy and laughter in all the small things. We need to look for the positive signs because they really are there for us.

Barb (Wausau, WI)

FOR OUR NEXT ISSUE: *What do you think?* LITTLE MIRACLES

Whether or not you have experienced the death of a loved one or faced a traumatic life event, the days following are often filled with many mixed emotions, questions, denial, and regrets. One of the rituals that my husband Gary and I followed after the death of our son, was to daily find just one thing we called the "little miracle of the day". Sharing it gave us something to be thankful for, something to hang on to and give us hope for the coming days ahead. It could be as simple as spotting a scarce red cardinal in our yard, getting a phone call from a friend, having lunch with another bereaved person who could share our grief, or revisiting a beautiful memory in a dream.

Please share with us one of your "little miracles" that you remember helped you through a difficult day –and gave you hope or a grand moment of happiness.

"Memory has a way of holding on to the things you love, the things you are, and the things you never want to lose."

– The Wonder Years

