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FOCUS ON CONNECTIONS EVEN WHEN MOURNING THE DEATH OF A LOVED ONE

Lou LaGrand

Connecting with people, places, and things of interest is an integral part of joyful living. It is the lack of such connections that often perpetuate isolation and depression. This is obvious when we are not grieving. However, it is especially devastating when we have to face the challenges and transformation to be faced after the death of a loved one.

We are wired for connections. All of us need them as much as we need fresh air. Without connections we wither, live exclusively in the past, and fail to grow from the difficult experience of loss and change.

Examine the depth and number of connections you have. Become aware of how frequently you engage the connections in your life. Planning connections for each day is a powerful coping technique as you deal with the "new life" without the physical presence of the beloved. Increasing the number of connections is a worthy goal that can help immensely in adapting to your great loss.

1. Connect with yourself. You may feel this is a weird suggestion for coping with the death of your loved one. Never forget: coping well is all about the quality of your

inner life and doing all you can to strengthen it. Self-knowledge is a critical resource for managing change and accepting your new life.

We are all flawed and have our failures; it's what we do with that awareness that counts. Learn from others who have been there. Then make the changes your inner wisdom tells you to make. Friends and neighbors can help but only you can be the agent for accepting change. We are never too old to start the process.

2. Connect with others. This is an obvious coping recommendation. However, it takes much time, effort, and commitment to learn to love and build relationships with others. Understanding the power of relationships and a sense of community can be a great motivator for your commitment. We need each other, and most important to understand, is that we are social beings who thrive on loving relationships. Learn all you can about how to communicate as well as become a great listener. You will grow in the process and so will your outlook on life. Look at connection with others as a basic psychological need.

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3. Connect with your Higher Power.

Over and over again I hear people say how they have relied on their Higher Power to cope with the difficult situations that arise in life. No one is immune from failures or difficult circumstances that demand courage and faith in a power greater than the self. Humility itself is a mighty warrior bringing renewed energy and a willingness to persist. Talk to your Higher Power. Ask for the insight to make the right choices in adapting to change. Try going to church or hanging out with spiritually oriented people. The research is clearly on your side: spirituality makes a major difference on the perspective you have on life.

4. Connect with your purpose or mission.

We all have a need to recognize a purpose or mission for why we are here. You have skills and wisdom, sometimes unrecognized or forgotten, that can help others and affect your little corner of the world or people in need. Start by listing your strengths and what you do well. Take your time. Think carefully. You can create a purpose or mission based on past interests or current needs. Consider churches, community organizations or others who are doing things you would like to do. Remember back to when you were a child and the great interests that held your attention. Meditate on the values you hold, what moves you, and create a purpose from your musings.

5. Connect with loving memories.

Memories are potent coping tools if you choose the right ones and practice bringing them into view every day. In fact, you can create new memories to add to your storehouse of



past experiences. Consider taking the time to write down your great memories as they come to you. Add to your list as the days go by and another moving memory comes into your thoughts. What you choose to think creates your emotional state which then helps you deal with your painful loss. But it all starts with your choice of thoughts.

6. Connect with gratitude. Don't let gratitude turn you off as a coping technique. Read all you can about it. Regular expression of gratitude will have a major effect on your inner life, how you view the world, and a clear reduction in stress levels. The attitude of gratitude has been proven over and over again to be a powerful coping mechanism; it will bring great meaning into your life and help you adapt. Think of the little things, like the air you breathe, food you eat, or the energy you have, as well as the great friends and opportunities that present themselves.

Review what you have received from your loved one and how it can be passed

on to others. Examine what you take for granted and give thanks daily.

7. Connect with a hobby or a special interest.

What you do in your spare time is a crucial choice. Often, the choices you make need to be built on new ideas, subjects, and hobbies. Here is a partial listing I give out to all of my grief support groups to give them an idea of the wide variety of connections that can be made: writing, family history, nature, the arts, going to the library, travel, stress release techniques, communication skills, bio intensive gardening, mentoring, golfing or bridge, music, museums, historical events, storytelling, life gratitude memories, organizations, health foods, meditations, your capacity to play. There are many, many more. The world is full of untold amounts of knowledge waiting to be used.

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

ABOUT WINGS

the articles, and the accomplishments of Wings. So here goes.....

When did Wings begin?

On April 16, 1993, our son, Chad Zastrow died unexpectedly by suicide at the age of 21. His fiancée took her life 10 weeks later. The same year, Nan and Gary Zastrow created a non-profit organization—a 501 c3, charitable organization—in an effort to help them focus on healing and share what they learned with others in grief.

The organization's original adventure was to develop, print, and circulate a hard-copy newsletter (named Wings). We mailed

readers a chance to share their thoughts. Nan began accepting paid subscriptions to help pay for printing and postage. Then, some funeral homes began sending a year's subscription to their families. The newsletter developed into a magazine and was mailed throughout the USA and Canada for 10 years. Due to the rising costs of printing and mailing, in 2003, the Wings magazine became available electronically only. There is no subscription fee associated with this service.

How did Nan and Gary hone their skills to help the bereaved?

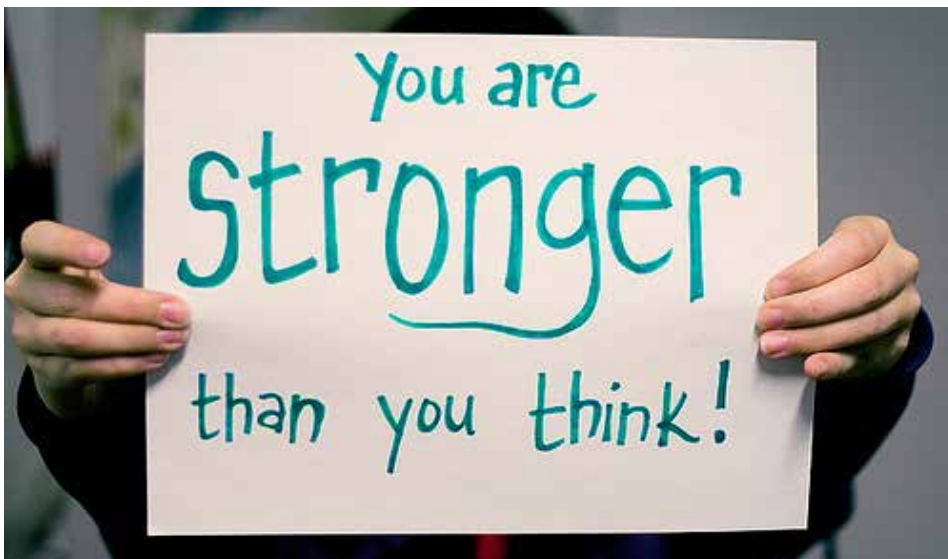
Beginning in 1993, they immediately set out to learn all they could about grief by attending seminars, classes, and workshops whenever they could. In 1997, they enrolled in classes at The Center for Loss and Life Transition in Fort Collins, Colorado. After many years, they earned their Certificate as Grief Educators through Dr. Alan Wolfelt. Continued education about all subjects related to grief are a priority for Nan and Gary. They attend classes, forums, conferences, and participate in many special interest groups.

What else does Wings do?

In 1997, the Zastrows began doing seminars, workshops and support groups for the community. Local Funeral Homes and sponsors fund the events. The Zastrows facilitate 3 six-week support group sessions. Each spring they host and invite a national speaker for a two-day seminar. This seminar also includes an education session for professionals.

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Our Wings newsletter is emailed to hundreds of people on a quarterly basis. Many of those who follow Wings dates back to our original hard-copy newsletter published beginning in 1993. People who do not know the history of our organization often email us and ask us about it.



Because, we continuously add new readers to our list every month, we've decided to include a column, once a year, which briefly answers questions about who we are and what we do to bring our "new" readers up to speed so they can identify with the legacy behind the simple newsletter they are receiving. Many readers don't take the time to visit our website and explore the history,

Wings to friends and acquaintances to share thoughts and feelings about what it was like on the journey through grief. Suicide was taboo. People did not discuss death by suicide in the 1990's. Response to the newsletter exploded. It circulated from person to person. The magazine evolved to include positive shared stories, poems, verses, an article by a professional, and a "what do you think" column to give

THE BEST THING

Author: Tim Nichols (from the Internet)

Sometimes in life, we are challenged by changes that seem impossible to live with. But, many times imposed changes are the best thing that ever happened.

Newspapers from my hometown said there had been a rise in suicides. Crisis centers were straining. Thousands were suddenly out of work. Factories that had given Akron its nickname, “The Rubber Capitol of the World,” were shutting down. No retirement would go to those who dreamed mainly of it.

I was stationed with the army in northern Italy at the time. I found a place to be alone and I wept. I lost weight while I got used to the idea, over the next few weeks that my dad was out of work.

Like droves of others in the 1940s, my dad moved from West Virginia to northern Ohio to find work. Grandpa and uncles moved too. The lumber industry in central West Virginia had dried up. Coal mines provided few jobs at that time. So my dad migrated from the mountains to the flatlands, from a dirt farm in paradise to a new way of life where smoke belched among a people who both ridiculed and admired the newcomers from the hills.

He married my mother. They had six children. I’m number four.

The factory pay was good. My dad earned his. He went to work a full hour before he was required to be there. His hands and his tools were already prepared to go to work when the time clock registered that he was there.

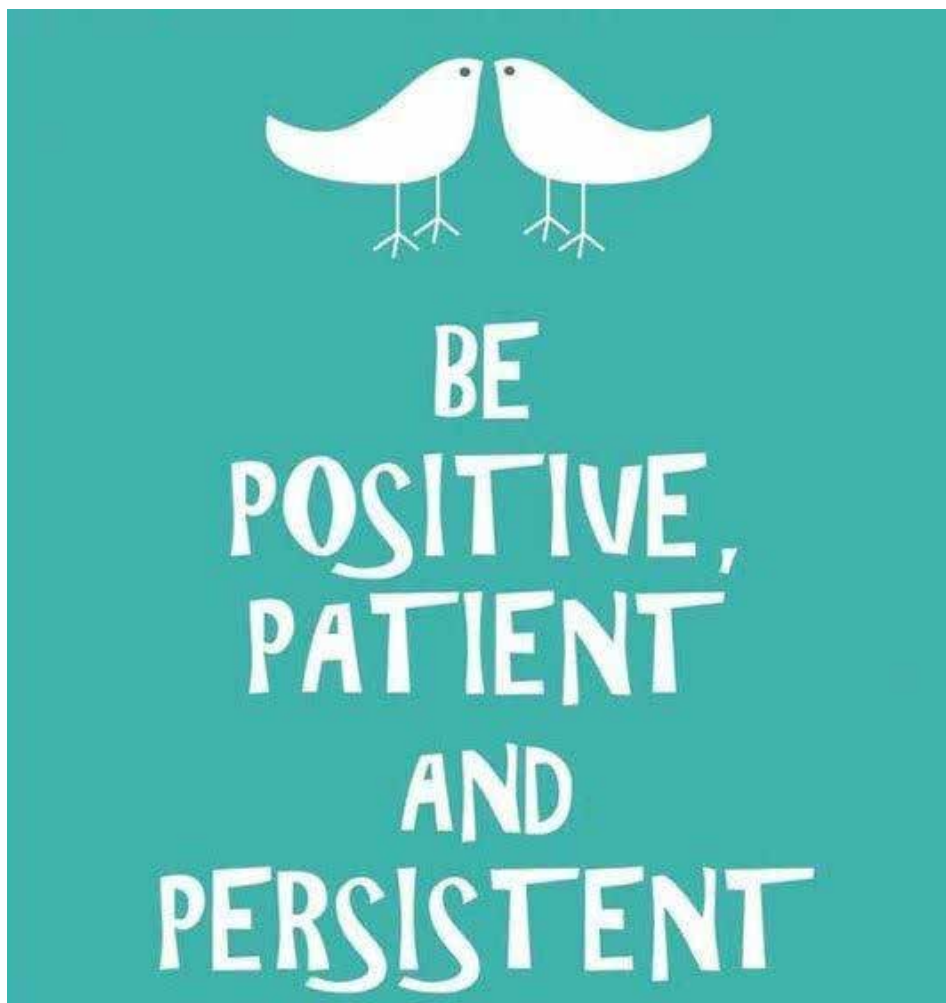
He made up for what he lacked in education in effort and raw ability. Eighth



grade was the norm for his generation and place of birth. He had milked a lot from the limited opportunity. He was a fast learner. Without formal training, Dad was a skilled carpenter. When he was not at the factory he was usually working on odd jobs. He roofed houses, built garages and porches, and developed human contacts to help him find more of these opportunities. I recall, as a youngster, seeing only a few books beside his bed. The only title I remember is, HOW TO WIN FRIENDS AND INFLUENCE PEOPLE, by Dale Carnegie.

He never complained, but Dad did not especially love going into the factory and sweating for more than eight hours at a time. I infer that from his frequent mention, in those days, of the number of years he had left before he could retire. Every time the union negotiated a new contract the number changed. He had it down to years, months, and weeks. Retirement was the glorious carrot dangling out there, coming closer all the time. Quitting was not an option that he ever mentioned.

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He had only a few years left before he could retire when I joined the army. He knew exactly how many.

Then the newspaper came. They stole my dad's carrot. How would he find a way to land on his feet after that? I called home. Dad said they were offering some sort of retraining benefit, but it did not sound like much at the time. It felt like a tiny handout compared with the withdrawn promise of retirement.

A few months later he told me that he was enrolled in a class preparing him to take the GED. He passed that. He enrolled in a real estate course. Then he said that he was selling real estate. Then he was building another house. He bought a place in Florida. He bought one property after another, houses needing work. Restoring these and then selling them or renting them, he seemed to be doing well. I don't remember exactly when it first dawned on me that he had

recovered from the tragedy that caused me such distress.

I do remember the moment it became crystal clear. I had left the army after my enlistment, gone to college, married, and was working out my own future. He said to me, "Timmy, you know what? The best thing that ever happened to me was when they shut down that factory."

I think of that when my own options seem limited and when I'm uneasy about forced choices and forks in the road. When I catch myself demanding that the world line up with my own intentions and hopes I remember the "best thing that ever happened" to my dad.

When fate robs us of our carrot, it's probably time to plant brand-new seeds in fresh soil and grow our own carrots. Life is seldom fair. It's up to us to so order our response to changes that we can later return and thank those who've slammed and locked doors. The world is indifferent about our success or failure. That's why we must not be. It is up to you-- and no one else--to turn blighted hope and defeat into the best thing that ever happened to you.

Each holiday season, they hold a remembrance program for the bereaved. Nan and Gary also speak at invited events which has included the National Compassionate Friends and many other venues.

What about Nan's books and articles?

Nan became a regular columnist for Grief Digest magazine in 2003 in addition to her Editor's Journal which is a regular column of the Wings newsletter and ELetter. She is the author of 5 books. She has written over a hundred articles available through the website and across

links and shared links on the Internet.

How are the events and activities of Wings funded?

Wings is an all-volunteer organization. There are no paid staff. All events, activities, and operating expenses are funded through donations from the loyal support of several local funeral homes, a local hospital, and wonderful friends and families of Wings. Donations are tax deductible and truly help us to continue our ministry to the bereaved.

If you enjoy this newsletter or Wings events, please consider a small donation

through PayPal to Wings or you can send a check directly to Wings, PO Box 1051, Wausau, WI 54402-1051

What are the reprint privileges of this ELetter?

Articles may be reprinted with permission statements including the source and date. We encourage our readers to PASS IT ON!

If you have questions or comments regarding the Wings ELetter, please feel free to contact us and let us know. Wings1@charter.net.

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

Sept. 17

Out of Darkness

Walk for Suicide Prevention

Marathon County, Riverside Park, Wausau. Contact Nan for more information.

Sept. 27

Support Group/Education Series

6 consecutive Tuesday evenings. See page 8

Oct. 5

Wings presentation to Wisconsin Funeral Director Association

LaCrosse, WI

Dec. 3, 2016

When the Holidays Hurt

Program hosted by Wings for the community. This year featuring Living River Quartet. Plaza Hotel, Wausau. Watch for details on our website.

These are known calendar events at the time of printing this ELetter. Details will be available on the website as information is finalized. Some events are not listed. Call for information if you are looking for resources. Subscribe to Wings and receive updates and announcements by email.

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

How to Connect with Wings:

- Email: nanwings1@gmail.com
- 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



Wings Grief Tip:

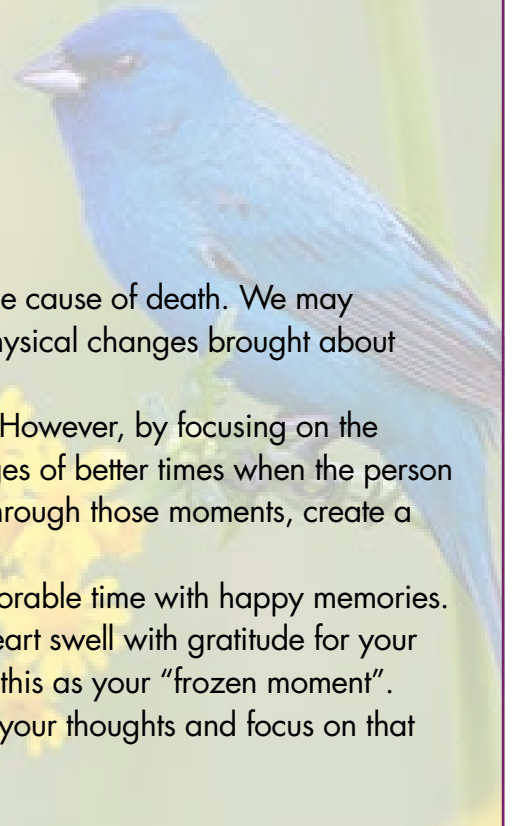
Create a Frozen Moment

Sometimes after the death of a loved one, we are obsessed with the cause of death. We may spend an inordinate amount of time recreating the scene, or the physical changes brought about by disease, or the horror of tragic death.

It's normal, initially, to be absorbed with the circumstances of loss. However, by focusing on the cause of death, you are likely dismissing the relationship and images of better times when the person lived. You may become "stuck" on a painful image. To help you through those moments, create a "frozen" moment in your mind.

This requires looking back on your relationship to find a very memorable time with happy memories. It should be a moment that brought a smile to you or made your heart swell with gratitude for your relationship. Find a moment that's a source of pride and love. Use this as your "frozen moment".

Anytime your thoughts stray to the painful images of loss, interrupt your thoughts and focus on that "frozen moment" to reset your mental attitude instantly.



- To know the road ahead, ask those who are coming back. - Chinese Proverb

FOCUS ON CONNECTIONS...

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Remember, changing beliefs about compassion for yourself means changing some of the previous choices that have kept you down. True progress in grief work usually requires questioning beliefs.

Your connections can be filled with many thoughts that can positively influence your emotional life and your ability to adapt to change. Consider the following: (1) Examine the number of connections you have presently. (2) How many can be strengthened? (3) What new connections can you add? Or restart?

(4) Make a plan to use a certain number of your connections each day.

Being open to new connections is a little used coping technique because it takes commitment and energy and a willingness to be vulnerable. Yet, the benefits far outweigh the effort needed. Think connections at each and every opportunity. Your connections will help you keep loneliness at bay and grow from the transformative grief experience.

*Dr. LaGrand is a grief counselor and the author of eight books, the most recent, **Healing Grief, Finding Peace: 101 Ways to Cope with the Death of Your Loved One**. He is known world-wide for his research on the **Extraordinary Experiences of the bereaved (after-death communication phenomena)** and was the founding **President of Hospice & Palliative Care of the St. Lawrence Valley, Inc.***

Fall 2016

Good Grief, Bad Grief.

How Grief Changes Your Life.

"Pain becomes bearable when we are able to trust that it won't last forever, not when we pretend it doesn't exist."

Grief is not an event that begins and ends. It becomes part of your life. It is an active, ongoing process of turning your sadness into a meaningful life again. Both good grief and bad grief can make an impact on your life, sometimes without realizing it. The ever-changing emotions of grief may catch you off guard. Sometimes family and friends just "don't get it." Our group offers companionship and understanding from others who have experienced loss in many different ways, but all are experiencing the challenges that living with grief brings.

If you are looking for understanding and support, you will likely find it here. You will have the opportunity to begin your healing process through sharing your story and hearing the story of others. The facilitators will offer coping skills to help through difficult situations physically, socially, and spiritually. We give permission to grieve and encouragement to seek purpose and meaning as you move forward. Grief is a life-long journey, but you do not need to face it alone. Learn how to invite your family and friends into your world to understand your grief. Your experience will allow you to look back someday and see that good did come out of your journey.

Presented by:



Sponsored by:



Fall 2016 Sessions:

Meets Tuesdays for 6 weeks:

September 27; October 4, 11, 18, 25; November 1

6:00 p.m to 7:30 p.m.

Aspirus Wausau Hospital, Suite 0-850

Facilitators:

Nan & Gary Zastrow
Certified Grief Educators

For more information:

nanwings1@gmail.com
Call Nan Zastrow at 715-845-4159
Group size is limited. Free of charge.
Pre-registration is appreciated

ODHS-267 Fall (7/6/16)

Reader Feedback



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

IN TODAY'S WORLD, WE ARE ALL PLUGGED INTO TO SOCIAL MEDIA, CHAT LINES, INTERNET ARTICLES AND A VARIETY OF OTHER RESOURCES TO SHARE OUR EMOTIONS. NONE OF THESE PROVIDE FACE-TO-FACE RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE PEOPLE WHO OFFER THEIR OPINIONS OF HOW TO DEAL WITH THE EMOTIONAL CRISES IN OUR LIVES. WHILE THESE MAY BE INSTANT RESPONSES TO OUR IMMEDIATE NEED, THEY LACK THE INTIMACY OF TELLING ONE'S STORY (EXPERIENCE). FACE-TO-FACE COMMUNICATION VERIFIES SHARED EXPERIENCES IN THE REFLECTION OF ONE'S EYES, THE TIMBRE OF THEIR VOICE, AND THE LOVE THAT EMANATES FROM THEIR SOUL WHEN THEY TALK ABOUT THEIR LOVED ONE WHO DIED.

WHAT VALUE HAVE YOU FOUND IN FACE-TO-FACE CONTACT IN SUPPORT GROUPS, SEMINAR/WORKSHOPS, OR BY ATTENDING PRESENTATIONS ON GRIEF?

I began facilitating a grief support group 6 years ago. My husband, Dr Patrick Klein passed away 12 years ago. I've found that when you hear stories of others' struggles, it makes your own struggles easier to bear. Within your own loss, this sharing helps place things in perspective in the totally unfamiliar world of grief.

It is the shelter of each other that we live, heal and find our joy once again after a great loss. It is in the security of this circle that the grip of loneliness and fear is loosened. There is a promise of connection, a loving alliance of grief and hope. The cycle of giving and receiving is very humbling; this is one of the group's quietest gifts. Those of us further along the path, are reaching back for the hands of those just starting the journey.

We become real friends in community because we understand, accept and have experienced some painful times in our private lives. That enables us to open to each other in order to let the light and love in, and the laughter too.

We wish the gift of memory whenever there is a need to know the one you love

still walks with you wherever you go.

When we can make a place where memories can be found, then we can make a place where the Lord can remind us of the ways His grace had found us. The sadness will never go away, but it will change as we integrate it into our new lives.

Kathe – Santa Maria, CA.

I agree that face-to-face communication is more intimate and personal. Unfortunately, in society today, even when you are trying to speak with someone face-to-face, they have to stop and get a call on their cell or text while you are speaking. It is good to go to a seminar/workshop and actually look people in the face when speaking to them and have them respond in kind. "The eyes are the window to the soul" it has been said. I say, the eyes are the connection to the soul!

Micheline – Wausau, WI

I have found my relationships with my support group to be invaluable. I have enjoyed our small group that continues on in a sort of way and whenever we get together face-to-face, we are as one and have great unity. Since we each have lost a loved one and can empathize, it is common ground. I also have kept in touch with at least one member of the group. I'd like to say that our group has a kindred spirit and I love our group. Just wish life wasn't so busy.

Ruth – Athens, WI

(Ruth was a recent member of one of the Wings grief groups in Wausau)

I have been wanting to write to you about my One Year Goal that I received several weeks ago. I participated in your Part Two class in June 2015. Well, I had forgotten that I had written goals at the end of that class! When I opened the envelope and read what I had written, I was dumb

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WHAT DO YOU THINK...

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founded. I have met each of my one year goals! It's hard to explain the feelings of accomplishment, pride, and shock that washed over me. Here are the goals that I wrote:

- I have a new home, that honors who I am and remembers Steve.

- Get involved in a cause, or learn something new or learn more quilting.

It was a year and a half after Steve died that I was able to sell our house. I think I took the time I needed to adjust emotionally first to being alone, and then to being ready to make the move. I now have a two-bedroom condominium that is just the right size for me. I live nearer my children, grandchildren, and father. I kept some of our furniture, but got new living and dining room furniture that fits my new space. So I have made it mine, but I have kept the things that keep Steve close to me. I have attended several quilting classes and retreats in the past year and am learning new skills. I've found a church that meshes with my theology and is very involved in social justice.

So, amazingly, I have met my one year goals. So many people along the way encouraged me, listened, and helped. I also credit your classes! So often, I remember or refer to things I learned with you. You helped me understand what I was experiencing. I know I am not 'done' healing, I have grief relapses, when I don't want to get off the couch. But they pass. And when I look at what I have done, I feel strong. I think it's time to set another year goal! Thank you, thank you for the wonderful, life-sustaining work you do!

Peggy – Verona, WI

Here are my thoughts:

1. Group meetings force one out of the house if you are isolating yourself
 2. It does bring comfort to meet face to face with others who are also mourning, makes you know you are not alone in your loss
 3. Positive reinforcement from grief group members that is face to face, more meaningful than on-line
 4. Gives one the opportunity to ask questions and have back and forth dialog
 5. Helps you begin to tell your story, without the security of the group it could be more difficult
 6. Group members and leaders offer empathy and one can feel this emotion, whereas on-line you are not able to feel this concern and care
 7. Sharing of story, life's circumstances and feedback from facilitators and group can validate your feelings and brings encouragement to share not found on-line
- Connie – Wausau, WI
-

For my husband and me, the Wings grief sessions were the most help. It was very helpful to hear and realize many of the things we were feeling or experiencing were "normal" and to start to find a way to get through the process. It was especially helpful, to hear how this changes friendships, as this was difficult to understand and accept. Meeting and talking with others that were going through many of the same things was reassuring, and you are right, reaching out to someone when they have a loss or tragic happening in their lives, continues to help us and

hopefully them.

The speakers that Wings brings in for their Spring workshops also have been a huge help, and I look forward to them (I remember the first one I attended and how emotional it was). Thank You
Gale – Schofield, WI

If you are face to face you know that you are truly being heard. The person listening to you is not being distracted by other outside influences. If they are, you will know it. Because so many people are plugged in today, they are not good listeners. Really listening to someone is a skill. You have to be intentional in order to hear the verbal and non-verbal message. I believe we really need someone to hear us and feel the pain we are in before we can begin to heal.

Jeanette – Aniwa, WI

Communicating our story of grieving our loved one is consoling no matter what venue is used. I've found that sharing my loss on Facebook with pictures and special sayings provides a sense of sharing it with others, especially those who understand and can empathize with someone else's pain. Sharing my loss face-to-face is more difficult because it requires a willing listener, and to be honest, most people I know don't take the time or inclination to dig deeply enough to share discomfort or pain. So, it goes unsaid. Sharing at support groups is easier, but it only works if

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WHAT DO YOU THINK...

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those who are listening are truly listening. It does help to know that they've shared your pain and can more easily empathize with your sad story. Sometimes, however, those same people can feel like experts after a while and can tend to judge your journey. That said, sharing with anyone in any way is far more therapeutic than keeping it inside and not sharing at all.

Betty – Wausau, WI

On the Lighter Side...

Humor is a necessary emotion even in times of grief. We expect to feel sadness and even get a little nervous about making a joke or laughing in the presence of others who expect us to grieve. Humor is a defense mechanism in times of crisis and it helps us cope with the event. In the spirit of healing, we offer a story on the lighter side to brighten your day.

An archaeologist was digging in the Negev Desert in Israel and came upon a casket containing a mummy. After examining it, he called the curator of a prestigious natural-history museum. "I've just discovered a 3,000 year-old mummy of a man who died of heart failure!" the excited scientist exclaimed.

To which the curator replied, "Bring him in. We'll check it out."

A week later, the amazed curator called the archaeologist. "You were right about the mummy's age and cause of death. How in the world did you know?"

"Easy. There was a piece of paper in his hand that said, '10,000 Shekels on Goliath!'"

A woman from New York was getting her affairs in order. She prepared her will and made her final arrangements. As part of these arrangements she met with her pastor to talk about what type of funeral service she wanted, etc.

She told her pastor she had two final requests. First, she wanted to be cremated, and second, she wanted her ashes scattered over Bloomingdales.

"Bloomingdales!" the pastor said. "Why Bloomingdales?"

"That way, I know my daughters will visit me twice a week."

FOR OUR NEXT ISSUE: What do you think?

The approaching fall season reminds us that the holidays are soon to follow. Whether it is your first holiday after the loss of a loved one, or many successive holidays beyond the first, there is always that thought: "What am I going to do?" How are you going to celebrate the memory of your loved one this year? Please share with us your ongoing tradition for remembrance, or share with our readers a new idea of what you might do this year to honor the life of your loved one.

Send your response to nanwings1@gmail.com . Please limit your feedback to about 250-300 words.

*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.

