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From the January Issue

### Please read our ELetter and pass it on!

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## EDITOR'S JOURNAL

NAN ZASTROW

Co-Founder,  
Wings - A Grief Education Ministry

## HOLDING ONTO HOPE— OUR JOURNEY CONTINUES

*"We must be willing to let go of the life we planned, so we can accept the life that is waiting for us." (Joseph Campbell)*

There is nothing more difficult than holding onto hope after tragic or challenging life-events. But, it's also the most important thing we can do for ourselves. Hope is the one thing in our lives that can sustain us through the tears, uncertainty, and difficult days while we find peace with our situation.

Gary and I clung to the vision of hope through many years when we were trying to rediscover what life meant for us after the death of our son. Not only were our dreams shattered, but so was the fantasy bubble we were living in at the time. Life was good and happening just as we expected it would. Chad was grown and taking steps to live independently. He had goals and plans for his future. Life was progressing just like we thought it should. That was until Chad's death, at the age of 21 as a result of suicide, and his fiancé, ten weeks later. Hope remained fragile and elusive for many years.

Hope was elusive because I had to give myself permission to live and move forward. Allowing grief and self-pity wasn't going to change a thing. I was the only one who held the power to change the fractured moments and unfortunate event and make my life "whole" again. This was the time to call upon my internal and spiritual resources to restructure my life. I trusted that I could move forward with a positive approach and an attitude that would help me survive. Hope and Faith combined are two powerful forces that are invincible!

A recent life-threatening event in a dear friend's life, demonstrates the value of turning helplessness into hope. She revealed to me after the event, that she and her husband thought the death of their beloved daughter was the most terrible thing that could ever happen. They struggled in the aftermath of their daughter's death. They decided to attend our grief education/support series looking for peace with their loss and hope in the future.

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## HOLDING ONTO HOPE...

*Continued from page 1*

Slowly their lives began to find balance between the new normal and the absence of their wishful dreams. Finally, they were able to accept that “life does go on”; and they pursued new dreams. Then, this frightening close-call nearly claimed her life. She commented later, in the most critical moments, her husband was able to feel “in-control”, faith, and hope leading to a positive outcome. The event was nothing short of a miracle! Reliving the situation with her later, she believed attending our grief education classes were major factors that helped them handle another daunting life crisis and hold on to hope.

We can only conclude, that we are conditioned from our loss and life experiences to know that life is unpredictable. We are likely to face another challenge at any time. Overcoming crisis and struggles is empowering in future events. I felt incredibly blessed by my friend’s acknowledgement that our grief programs could have such an impact and truly make a difference in someone’s life! For 26 years, my husband, Gary, and I have tried to encourage others to search for hope after the loss of a loved one. We’ve shared our struggles and doubts; and my writing definitely reveals



those moments when we grieved for our loss, even many years after our loss. It also recognizes that grief becomes a part of your life. When you think you’ve crossed that bridge, there is always another challenge that makes you do it

again. We never forget life challenges, but can always use them for “lessons” going forward. Letting go of the life once planned isn’t easy; but there are

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### *How to Connect with Wings:*

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- Follow the EVENTS calendar posted at the website [wingsgrief.org](http://wingsgrief.org)
- Subscribe to the free online ELetter sent quarterly.
- Order a Free copy of Grief Digest at [www.centeringcorp.com](http://www.centeringcorp.com)
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## HOLDING ONTO HOPE...

*Continued from page 2*

options for building a new life—a new normal—that can be rewarding too. And, somehow when we really try, it all works out. I believe God planned it that way by giving us hope!

Hope is a gift that can't be purchased. It's developed within. I believe in the power of Hope. I believe that hope is always there, even in the most troublesome times. It may take perseverance to

find it, and courage to accept its call; but it has promises that far outweigh being miserable and helpless. And you may be surprised at how many “mountains you can climb” when you just try!

In my new book, “Holding Onto Hope When Loss Hurts—Finding a Reason to Shine”, I write about experiences that were “teaching moments” in our lives. Moments that helped us survive when

it would have been easier to give in. Moments that made us grateful for the special moments in our lives; and avoid focusing on what we've lost. Above all, hope reminded us that our loved one still lives in our memories and influences our lives, our choices, and our values in countless ways.

Read my Inspirational Moment “Message in a Bottle”, about our personal experience and absolute proof that Love and Life Lives on!

Find other moments of Hope and Joy in these chapters:

- Hope: In discovering that Living in the Shadow of Grief can be a good thing
- Hope: found in Courage and Sorrow
- Hope: In Pop-Up Memories
- Hope: In the Side Trips of Life
- Hope: In Discovering Who I Am now
- Hope: In the Power to heal your own grief

You won't be disappointed. I suspect you will re-consider and evaluate all the moments of Hope that have influenced you in your own life. How we look at an experience and how we used it to build our resiliency is a blessing we should never take for granted. Our journey continues and so does the Mission of Wings!

### Holding Onto Hope When Loss Hurts Finding a reason to shine!

**“We must be willing to let go of the life we planned, so we can accept the life that is waiting for us.” (Joseph Campbell)**

When the darkest moment in life changes everything you know to be true, it doesn't mean that your divine spirit can't be revitalized. After the suicide death of her son, Chad and his fiancé just 10 weeks later, Nan found that she was desperately searching for new meaning and purpose. Accepting that “this is real” and holding on to the belief that “I can do this!” begins the process of re-engaging in life again.

Nan vowed to live the best life possible under the circumstances and honor the precious memories of her son. She believes that everyone transforms through grief and moves onto to another stage, just as our loved ones who died move onto a new stage. They still live within us and influence our future choices and who we become after loss. Every dark cloud can have a silver lining of hope strengthened by not giving up or giving in. Nan offers her readers significant suggestions for healing after loss. This book is a testimony that the sun will shine again!

*“Nan's writing is always fantastic. She shares her knowledge and experience in terms that everyone can relate to and understand. She has an amazing knack of putting feelings of pain and loss into hopeful thoughts. I highly recommend everything she writes.”*

- Bunny, Florida

**NAN ZASTROW**

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# The Seesaw of *Resilience* and *Vulnerability*

It's this back-and-forth of grief that provides momentum for the journey.

By Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D.

*"To share your weakness is to make yourself vulnerable; to make yourself vulnerable is to show your strength."*—Criss Jami

As you journey through your naturally complicated and painful grief, you are probably being buoyed by—and perhaps also dismayed by—your resilience. After all, here you are. You may not have thought it possible at first, but you have indeed survived.

Military families are trained to be resilient. After all, military service is unpredictable. You may have had to pick up and move several times in the past, forcing you to leave old friends and make new ones and reestablish community connections. Deployments are also unpredictable, and before the death you may have been separated from your loved one

for long stretches of time. Through all this, and because of the military's resilience-focused culture, military families typically learn to keep putting one foot in front of the other.

It's true that your resilience training may have helped you and your family in your grief. The most profound change you could ever experience has happened, and now, as always, you've picked yourself up, dusted yourself off, and kept putting one foot in front of the other. Perhaps your resilience helped you with practical matters such as relocating.

You may have felt dismay sometimes at your own resilience, too. Maybe the fact that life goes on has made you feel distressed or anxious now and then.

Pay attention to those inklings of distress. When it comes to grief, it's wise to beware

of your learned resilience. Why? Because it may tell you to "suck it up," "let go," and put your loss behind you. It may suggest that you need to be strong and in control. Yet what all grievers actually need is to embrace their normal and necessary thoughts and feelings and give them the time and attention they deserve. What grievers need to do is relinquish control of their grief.

Allowing yourself to be vulnerable is just as important as cultivating resilience. Think of them as the two sides of a seesaw. You want the seesaw to balance sometimes, yes, but you also want it to go up and down. On some days you will need to open yourself to your naturally painful grief. The vulnerable side of the seesaw will tilt down. On other days you will marshal your resilience to help you navigate





new challenges and approach life openly as it moves toward you. The resilient side of the seesaw will tilt down.

Both vulnerability and resilience are required for you to mourn. Mourning is the work of grief. It is expressing your inner grief outside yourself. Mourning is talking about your grief and the person who died. It's crying. It's participating in a support group. It's journaling. It's volunteering and walking alongside other grievers. It's actively participating in whatever means of expression feel right to you in the moment and suit you best. It is through mourning that you will continue to heal and find renewed meaning in life and living.

Mourning requires you to be vulnerable to your deepest pain and your most challenging thoughts and feelings. It asks you to encounter them fully and express whatever they bring up for you. It asks you not to suppress or deny or distract but instead to immerse. This immersion is necessary because it is the truth.

But here comes resilience! And resilience asks you to dose yourself with your grief and mourning. It says, "Yes, encounter your necessary grief for a while, then let's go engage in life for a while. We'll keep going like that, back and forth, back and forth."

It's this back-and-forth of grief, in fact, that provides momentum for the journey. I call it "evade-encounter." Your loss always lives inside you, but it's healthy to take part in non-grief-focused activities part of the time. It's healthy to evade your grief sometimes. Then it's also healthy, and necessary, to return to encounter your grief sometimes.

Earlier I asked you to picture a seesaw representing resilience and vulnerability. Now I want you to imagine one of those old-fashioned handcars that railroad workers used in the 17th and 18th centuries to traverse train tracks. Two people would stand on either side

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**Mourning requires you to be vulnerable to your deepest pain and your most challenging thoughts and feelings. It asks you to encounter them fully and express whatever they bring up for you.**

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of the handcar's small platform, and by taking turns pumping the seesaw-like lever back and forth, they could quickly convey themselves down the track with their own muscle power.

The handcar metaphor captures the reciprocating power of evade-encounter as well as vulnerability and resilience do. When you consciously activate and rely on both as you journey through grief, and you work to keep them in healthy balance, you create divine momentum toward healing. If, however, you neglect one side or the other, you get stuck and go nowhere.

The Wikipedia entry on handcars says, "While depictions on TV and in movies might suggest that being a member of a handcar crew was a joyride, in fact pumping a traditional handcar... could be very hard work." Likewise, the back-and-forth of resilience and vulnerability in grief is very hard work. Remind yourself

that there are no rewards for speed. If your handcar moves at a snail's pace, so be it. If it goes backward sometimes, so be it. As long as it's moving, you're on the right track.

And don't forget to take good care of yourself every day. You won't have the energy to muster the back-and-forth of vulnerability and resilience if you're not getting ample rest, nutrition, hydration, exercise, and health care. You will also need help pumping the handcar sometimes. Healing in grief is not a solo activity. Vulnerability and resilience in grief require seeking out and accepting the support of friends, family members, neighbors, and others along the way.

I've been a grief counselor for four decades now, and I've been privileged to bear witness to the power and momentum created by vulnerability and resilience hundreds of times. So I wish you vulnerability and resilience both. Godspeed. ★

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A longtime TAPS supporter and advisory board member, Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D., serves as director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition and has written many books that help people mourn, including *Healing Your Grieving Heart After a Military Death* (co-authored with TAPS President Bonnie Carroll). To learn more about grief and to order Dr. Wolfelt's books, visit [centerforloss.com](http://centerforloss.com).

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\*Printed with Permission from Dr. Alan D. Wolfelt

PHOTOS: LEFT, MICHELLE SHOCKEY; RIGHT: LENZY RUFFIN

# WHAT IS YOUR LEGACY? PROBABLY NOT A BOX OF "STUFF"

*Based on the topic we selected for our "What do you think?" column, I was reminded of this article I wrote some time ago. It's very appropriate and I decided to share it again. It was published in Grief Digest magazine and is also available at our website.*

By Nan Zatrow

Grandma had a knack of making me feel uncomfortable. Perhaps it came from growing up with a bunch of brothers who picked on her, and she was forever looking for a way to get even. Many of the stories repeated about Grandma tell about her unique way of saying or doing something that would leave me speechless in public or cause me to shake my head in total dismay. She could lead me into a conversation, like a politician, and I would find myself defending my point of view with no satisfactory resolution. She exhilarated in taking normal conversation to the brink of frustration, irritation and bewilderment. It was the "gotcha" reaction in the end that always made me wonder how I had gotten to that point.

To her, it seemed like a game, and it didn't come about with her advancing age; it was a gift she had for the forty-some years that I knew her. In her eyes, I would see the twinkle following the evolution of the situation that tickled her pink. So it wasn't without expectation that one of the things we would remember most about her were the stories

that became the legacy of who she was and how she skillfully maneuvered us into her plan.

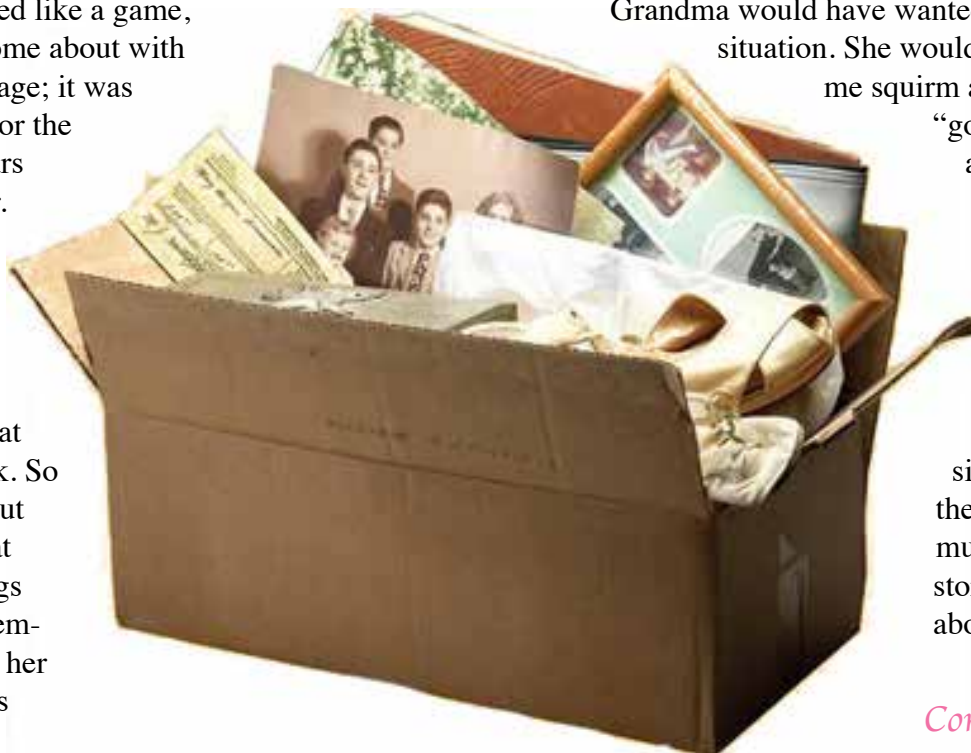
One such situation followed about three months after her death. We received one of her bills in the mail that amounted to \$12, but the interest charged was 64 cents. Minor, right? I paid the bill and asked the biller to waive the interest since she had died and the bill was not forwarded to our address. Next month the bill came again...for 64 cents plus more interest and a boldly marked statement that additional interest would be added until it was paid.

This really irritated me. I wanted to take 64 pennies, tape them to a piece of paper, and purposefully deliver them to the billing office. I quickly recognized my over-reaction and realized I was acting just the way

Grandma would have wanted me to react to this situation. She would have loved to see me squirm as though saying,

"gotcha!" This was just another story to add to Grandma's treasured legacy!

Some people leave the world with meager personal possessions or worth, but they leave something much richer. They leave stories and memories about themselves that



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## WHAT IS YOUR LEGACY...

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we will repeat long after the boxes of personal belongings are distributed.

Closing-up grandma's home after her recent death made me think about the process of leaving our "precious belongings" to someone else. "Worth" and "Value" are very fluid words that can only be determined by the receiver. Legacies aren't always about personal wealth or fame. Legacies aren't found in the boxes of items left by the deceased. True legacies prove to be much more intimate and revealing. They speak to who this person was and what was important to him or her.

Among the dozens of boxes of items we packed up and loaded away for redistribution, there was nothing I valued as much as Grandma did. The worn cookbooks held some interest as she was an excellent cook, and I truly wanted to find some of her secret recipes. Her "valuables" were costume jewelry, family pictures, five-and-dime knick knacks, and lots of paper stuff. Her personal home accessories or belongings weren't items I could use. I was grateful for a few wonderful things she had gifted us with years before. As we packed, we reminded ourselves this wasn't about us. All these boxes of things held treasured memories about her.

At the same time as all this was happening, we were updating our own wills. The attorney offered an addendum page for distribution of personal items. It read, "Describe in detail and list who should receive each item." As I started to write down my wishes, I found it difficult to name a person who would appreciate any one of the things I felt was valuable to me. I wondered if Grandma had felt the same.

Did I want to leave a box of stuff as my material legacy or would I rather leave something even richer? How could I resolve this dilemma knowing the emotion of removing Grandma's possessions? I concluded it isn't about the boxes of stuff we've packed and moved a dozen times. It isn't about family jewels, or

antique items with precious markings. Scrapbooks and pictures will hold interest for a period-of-time, but this fantasy too will pass. All the boxes of "stuff" I leave behind will be a reflection of me and my time here on earth. I am incapable of deciding who would value it.

It is rare when a group of young people have real interest in family artifacts, genealogy or grandma's trunk. Pictures, unless well documented, stare back with unfamiliar faces of ancestors long departed, and often without names. A gift of money would be more appreciated than boxes of "stuff." Today, leaving a legacy of family heirlooms is a lost art. A generation or more ago when we were poorer and greedier for family treasures, it would have been an honor to receive boxes of personal things. We would pick and choose items that held a memory for us and cherish them. Today, most of us are "spoiled" and interested only in the treasures we've accumulated on our own journey in life.

I felt determined to plan for a way to forego the futile task of deciding what box of stuff should go to who as part of the legacy I leave. Instead, I decided, I would selfishly leave that dilemma for some family member or designated person who reconciles my estate. I plan to let them give away, destroy, sort or sell all the un-meaningful items and spend hours doing it. I don't plan to throw away anything that I might regret disposing of too soon, because, whether or not someone else finds happiness in the item, I enjoyed it for a time. And my plethora of items will tell everyone that I had much, much more than I ever needed. There are file cabinets loaded to maximum. There are boxes with time-honored memorabilia of happy days. Enough linens and dishes for two households, and enough clothes and shoes for a small tribe in Africa. Unless I live long enough to downsize again and again, I may still have all of it when the final curtain falls. The overwhelming task might bring a moment of disgust and frustration

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## WHAT IS YOUR LEGACY...

*Continued from page 7*

for some poor soul, but hopefully, a chuckle or two, also.

For a period of time, I expect there will be jokes and stories, like those about Grandma with all the stuff she had. I expect there will be some puzzled concerns about why someone would possibly keep this or that, because to the heir it's a piece of junk. I can only hope they get sore muscles from lifting all the books and calluses from patching all the nail holes. I hope they grow bored downloading all my computer files and discarding out-of-date canned goods in the pantry. The legacy I plan to leave will be something for someone to talk about.

No matter how much I unstuff, redistribute or downsize, I'm never going to have a immaculate, compact, orderly residence that takes little decluttering at some point in my life or death. After all, that stuff is all

about me. This stuff represents years of finding myself, primping myself, promoting myself and living up to such an image. Finally, it's about trying to create one or two stories that describe me and that someone will remember. All this stuff, box or no box, is just a symbol of who I am and what was important to me at some point in time. The making and telling of the stories that come from all the boxes of stuff is worth a whole lot more than anything I could intentionally leave to someone.

Legacies are grander than "stuff." They are timeless stories that bring a chuckle, a tear to the eye or a tinge of pride. They foster a forgotten memory. You might even hear the whisper of discreet voices from the people I love telling about all the things I did or didn't do. And out of all the boxes will come the stories of who I really was. This is the legacy I plan to leave.



### **It's okay to have feelings, so stop saying, "I'm fine" when you are not.**

People walk around each day masking their true feelings because they consider they need to be "strong", upbeat or bubbly. There is freedom in letting people know today you aren't okay.

Some people will disagree and say you always must answer with a "positive" response as though you aren't depressed, sad, or unable to hold it together right now. What that person might not know is how hard it is for you to struggle with your grief somedays...and not that you are asking for a pity party.

When people ask, "How are you doing?" are you open to giving them an honest response...or just responding, "I'm fine." (kind of a "leave me alone". Don't ask attitude.)

A psychotherapist, Barton Goldsmith wrote: "When you open your mouth, you are also opening your heart. And knowing that someone truly hears what you are feeling and understands you is soothing to the soul." If you aren't accustomed to opening your heart to people, start small. Say a word or two that reflects your true feelings. It might even give someone the space to share a piece of themselves and be honest with you. The first step to being honest to others, is being honest to yourself.





### **Wings-a Grief Education Ministry has a presence on Facebook.**

Here is a place to find Hope and Inspiration! Become a Friend. What you will find posted on our Facebook page:

- Inspirational quotes
- News about Events such as Support Groups, Community Seminars, Holiday programs, Grief Tips, and other educational experiences
- Shared posts that make the heart feel good

## Signs

Author Unknown

Submitted by Beth Anne Rekowski  
(In memory of son, Kyle and brother Mike)

As I sit in heaven  
And watch you everyday  
I try to let you know with signs  
I never went away.  
I hear you when you're laughing  
And watch you as you sleep.  
I even place my arms around you  
To calm you as you weep.  
I see you wish the days away  
Begging to have me home.  
So, I try to send you signs  
So, you know you are not alone.  
Don't feel guilty that you have  
Life that was denied to me.  
Heaven is truly beautiful.  
Just you wait and see.  
So, live your life, laugh again,  
Enjoy yourself, be free.  
Then I know with every breath you take  
You'll be taking one for me.

## THE WORLD IS MINE

Author Unknown

Today, upon a bus, I saw a very beautiful woman and wished I were as beautiful.  
When suddenly she rose to leave, I saw her hobble down the aisle.  
She had one leg and used a crutch. But as she passed, she passed a smile.  
Oh, God, forgive me when I whine. I have two legs; the world is mine.  
I stopped to buy some candy. The lad who sold it had such charm. I talked with him, he seemed so glad.  
If I were late, it'd do no harm. And as I left, he said to me,  
"I thank you, you've been so kind. It's nice to talk with folks like you. You see," he said, "I'm blind."  
Oh, God, forgive me when I whine. I have two eyes; the world is mine.

# WHAT DO YOU THINK?

## FEEDBACK FROM READERS ON OUR JANUARY NEWSLETTER...

Hi Nan - What a terrific ELetter!  
I especially valued your own story, and this bullet point is especially meaningful to me because it was my biggest challenge in getting through the most intense grief process.

Accepting that this death was something we could not control. We struggled with shoulda, woulda, coulda feelings of guilt until we realized that some things in life are not to be understood, but rather accepted.

It helps to know that others struggled with guilt too and found a way to deal with it over the years. I still have regrets though.

Betty, WI

As always, I'm amazed at you. Just read the Newsletter and it is wonderful, marvelous, informative, fantastic - as USUAL.

Thanks, dear, for reminding me what our work is all about. Congratulations to your featured volunteers. They deserve to be recognized.

Bunny, FL

I am absolutely passing your newsletter on and sharing it. It is always beautifully written with such important information.

Maxine, CA

Beautiful, inspiring and heart touching articles once again Nan

Gale, WI



## In Loving Memory of our son, Chad E. Zastrow

December 4, 1971 to April 16, 1993

Because he lived, I will always remember,  
Because I remember, he will never die.

# Reader Feedback



## WHAT DO YOU THINK? APRIL, 2019

IN EACH ISSUE, WE ASK OUR READERS TO SHARE THEIR RESPONSE TO A QUESTION THAT RELATES TO THEIR EXPERIENCES OR THOUGHTS ON A SPECIFIC SUBJECT. THERE ARE NO RIGHT OR WRONG ANSWERS...JUST THOUGHTS. HOWEVER, SHARING YOUR EXPERIENCE CAN HELP OTHERS FIND HOPE AND KNOW THAT THEY ARE NOT ALONE.

**ONE OF THE MOST DIFFICULT TASKS OF MOURNING IS "LETTING GO" OF YOUR LOVED ONE'S PERSONAL BELONGINGS. IT CAN BE EMOTIONALLY DRAINING AND UNCOVER MANY HIDDEN MEMORIES. WE MAY EVEN FEEL GUILT OF PARTING WITH SOMETHING THAT BELONGED TO OUR LOVED ONE. HOWEVER, PUTTING IT IN THE HANDS OF SOMEONE WHO APPRECIATES IT IS A VIABLE WAY TO HONOR YOUR LOVED ONE.**

WE'D LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU. HOW DID YOU DETERMINE WHAT ITEMS WERE SO IMPORTANT THAT YOU HAD TO KEEP THEM? OR HOW DID YOU DISTRIBUTE YOUR LOVED ONE'S ITEMS TO OTHERS

I can still recall how difficult it was to part with my daughter, Marilyn's "stuff". I had to dispose of the clothing in a hurry as a housekeeper was coming in immediately to take over her son's (Jason) care when I wasn't able to be there. Even though it's been a long time, I can still see some of the clothing and remember times and places that she wore these items. These were permanent memories and a part of me. It was her jewelry that I couldn't part with. I kept the locket that she wore which was given to her when Jason was born. I still wear her gold watch to this day. My mother gave it to her for her 16th birthday. Marilyn would be 60 years old, this coming May. That makes the watch 46 years old. I wear it very, very often and think of her every time I put it on.

I gave a bracelet or a necklace or another piece to each of her very close girlfriends and they still wear them all these years later. Another daughter, Pamela, took her gold bracelet and necklace and still wears them as well.

Bunny, FL

I gave some of my youngest daughter's belongings to her cousins and friends that I knew would also cherish them. Shannon

had just turned 16 years old when she passed away from encephalitis. I still have the sheets from her bed and a frog that was in her bed as well in the night stand beside my bed. There are some nights I take that frog out and hug it/pet it because I can picture her sitting in her bed talking to me and holding that silly frog. I kept some t-shirts from softball teams she played on, a special t-shirt she had gotten the Christmas before she passed away on March 1st, 2010 that said "I'm not short, I'm fun sized" that she loved. My pastor's wife took these special shirts and made a quilt for me to wrap around myself whenever I need to. It was a wonderful gift that I will cherish the rest of my life.

My daughter, Ashley, has been gone for 2-1/2 years. She was 29 years old when we lost her to drugs. Some of her items were given to her boyfriend, some items to a friend's daughter who was moving into her first apartment and needed all household items (I knew my daughter would be happy to help someone start their life who had just become drug free and was moving forward with her life). My granddaughters wanted a lot of her clothes, so we have hung onto a lot of them. I have kept the clothes they cut off of her when they worked to save her, the shoes she had

and her purse. The most precious gift of all that we kept from Ashley is her two daughters whom my husband and I are raising.

Thank you for the newsletter.  
Debbie, Tennessee

I am in the process of moving out-of-state permanently and truly need to pare down items belonging to my husband and son who died. It's been a multi-year process and most of what is left now isn't appropriate for donating. I am taking pictures of the larger items (like the large poster board my son's friends decorated for him) and making final distributions of other small personal items, like giving my husband's twin sister something he made for their Dad when he was a kid.

I am going to have a ceremonial burning of the basket of sympathy cards and the clothes that my son was wearing when he died by suicide before I leave town. I haven't decided what to do with his note yet. I want to burn it, too - leave that part of my life behind and let it go, but I'm not sure yet. It seems like you have to keep some stuff, like the flag across my husband's

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## WHAT DO YOU THINK...

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coffin just because. What I will keep is a small figurine I gave my husband when he started medical school. It's Bugs Bunny as a doctor, painting the Tazmanian Devil's tongue. It makes me smile and reminds me of happier, more hopeful times.

I've pared down items to about three totes between the two of them. If I think about it too much, it feels awfully sad that a person's life is reduced to a few things in a tote.

Stephanie, Wausau

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Bill died 9 years ago last week and last week I finally took the last of his clothes to a place that actually uses donations to help people. I carefully packed them and sometimes tearfully as I relived memories of weddings, ours included, funerals and fancy dinners where he wore these good clothes. When I arrived at the donation site, a man came to the car, lifted each box out and literally dumped the contents of carefully packed clean clothes into a huge dumpster like container. I was sick. Said nothing. Drove out crying.

And yes, I did keep his favorite shirt, jacket and hat and they have been and will hang on the back of our bedroom door. A bit of the Bill who loved to look nice... present to me. I kept his rock collection, ancient drums, three of his many antique clocks, his Bibles, small treasures and gifts he gave me including the hundreds of poems he wrote, cards he gave me as we celebrated our anniversary on the 22nd of every month...for more than 25 years.

It took 9 years to give those clothes away and as I packed them, I talked (out loud) to him about the memories they evoked and reminded myself he has no need for them and would be happy to see someone needy wearing them. We all do these things in our own perfect time.

Mary, Madison, WI

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When we purchased my parent's home, it was my job to clean things out. I was amazed that I found several large cardboard boxes of greeting cards. My Mother had kept every card we had ever sent her. Because I am a major card person, I decided to look at every one. There were many from my sisters and me, and I found that it was as much fun to look at them and remember the occasion we had sent them for, as it had been fun to spend time in the card department looking for the exact card to send. A very special card was waiting to be found, that I had never seen. It was from my Father, to my Mom and me, from the first Christmas of my life. He was in the service overseas at the time and their marriage was relatively new, too. The handwritten penciled message of love from my Father, to my Mom and I was so sweet, and I will treasure it forever. I finally did get rid of most of the ones from my siblings, but at least I had looked through all of them and honored my Mom's joy by keeping them.

Nancy, Woodruff, WI

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I lost my wonderful, best husband a woman could have asked for, Ron, five years ago on April 30, 2014. Monday, April 1, 2019 with the encouragement and help of another widow woman, Julie, we hauled our husband's clothes (I had three 50 gallon totes and Julie had 3 big square boxes of John's clothes) to the King Veterans Home in Waupaca County. We wanted our husband's to give and do good for those who gave. Also, we didn't want to see the clothes on someone else around by us. On the way home I did want to go back and get them. Julie told me as I had thought before, if John and Ron come back, which they won't, we will give them new clothes. I took out Harley T-shirts of places we went together and T-shirts that meant a lot to Ron for myself. I took out

big sweatshirts (wear outside) and long sleeve shirts (nighty shirts) for myself. I also took out Harley-Davidson nice dress shirts and nice T-shirts for my son-in-law. I will give a Jean Jacket that Ron wore a lot to my son-in-law. I gathered Ron's clothes in the 50 gallon totes a couple weeks after Ron's passing. I just did it.

Sandy, WI

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My husband, Steve, was a bike commuter and triathlete. When he died, I gave one of his bikes to our son-in-law and one to our nephew. They each were thrilled to have and use something that was such a vital part of who Steve was. I was so happy that his bikes were appreciated. When Steve graduated with his PhD, I gave him a pocket watch. I passed the watch on to our daughter who finished her degree three years after he died. It was especially emotional because he encouraged her studies.

Peggy, Verona, WI

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Giving things away: I gave clothes to men within a month or 2 who could use them. I gave 6 pair of shoes to NCHCC (they were very pleased). I let the kids pick whatever they wanted. I made them each a pillow covered with one of Dan's shirts. I still have a shirt, one of his favorite ties and the cufflinks from our wedding. The rest of the clothes, I gave to charities. I let the kids pick tools that I knew I'd never use. I combined my wedding ring and engagement ring into one ring----I still have it; but quit wearing it after more than 6 years. I had a new family picture taken to help accept change, for all of us.

Ann, Wausau, WI

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# May – December 2019 Program Schedule

## *Wings—a Grief Education Ministry*

### **Finding The Other Side Of Sadness - Transitions from Grief to Life after Loss**

Establishing a path to a future with meaning and purpose requires welcoming your emerging life through this transition. In this series, we challenge you to assess and re-build your foundation which includes: questioning old beliefs, discovering "Who am I now?", validating your core values, discovering your authentic self, trying something new, and accepting a "new normal". This 4-week series is designed for participants who are ready to discuss and challenge their path to healing.

**Tuesdays, May 21, 28, & June 4, 11, 2019  
6:00 - 8:00 p.m.**

Aspirus Wausau Hospital,  
Conference Room 0-850 (Quality Services)

Cost: No charge. Group size is limited.  
Please register to save your spot.

Call 715.845.4159 to register.

### **Give Sorrow Words - Finding Hope For Your Journey**

*(Education/Support Group)*

This group is NEW. Grief is something we consider private and personal, as though only we can own it. However, understanding grief and the impact it has on your life allows you to process your grief, accept the loss, express your feelings, and integrate this experience into your changed life. Understand the five ways we grieve and the shoulda, woulda, and coulda responses. This is a journey you need not walk alone.

**Tuesdays, Sept. 24, Oct 1, 8, 15, 22, 29  
6:00 - 7:30 p.m.**

Aspirus Wausau Hospital,  
Conference Room 0-850 (Quality Services)

Cost: No charge. Group size is limited.  
Please register to save your spot.

Call 715.845.4159 to register.

### **Living River Concert - "You've Got a Friend"**

*Celebrating healing and peace through  
the gift of music*

**Saturday, December 7, 2019  
4:00 - 6:00 p.m.**

The Plaza Hotel & Suites, 201 N. 17th Ave,  
Wausau

### **24th Annual When the Holidays Hurt**

A workshop sharing ideas for dealing with  
loss during the holidays.

**Monday, December 9, 2019  
6:00-7:30 p.m.**

Aspirus Wausau Hospital, Medallion Room

**Most programs are free and open to the public.**  
Programs facilitated by Nan & Gary Zastrow,  
Certified Grief Educators, nanwings1@gmail.com

**Wings—a Grief Education Ministry –**  
providing grief education and support since 1993.  
[www.wingsgrief.org](http://www.wingsgrief.org) 715.845.4159



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