

# *Holding Onto Hope— Our Journey Continues*

By Nan Zastrow



“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. 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 crises 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's challenges, but can always use them for "lessons" going forward. Letting go of the life once planned isn't easy; but there are 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!