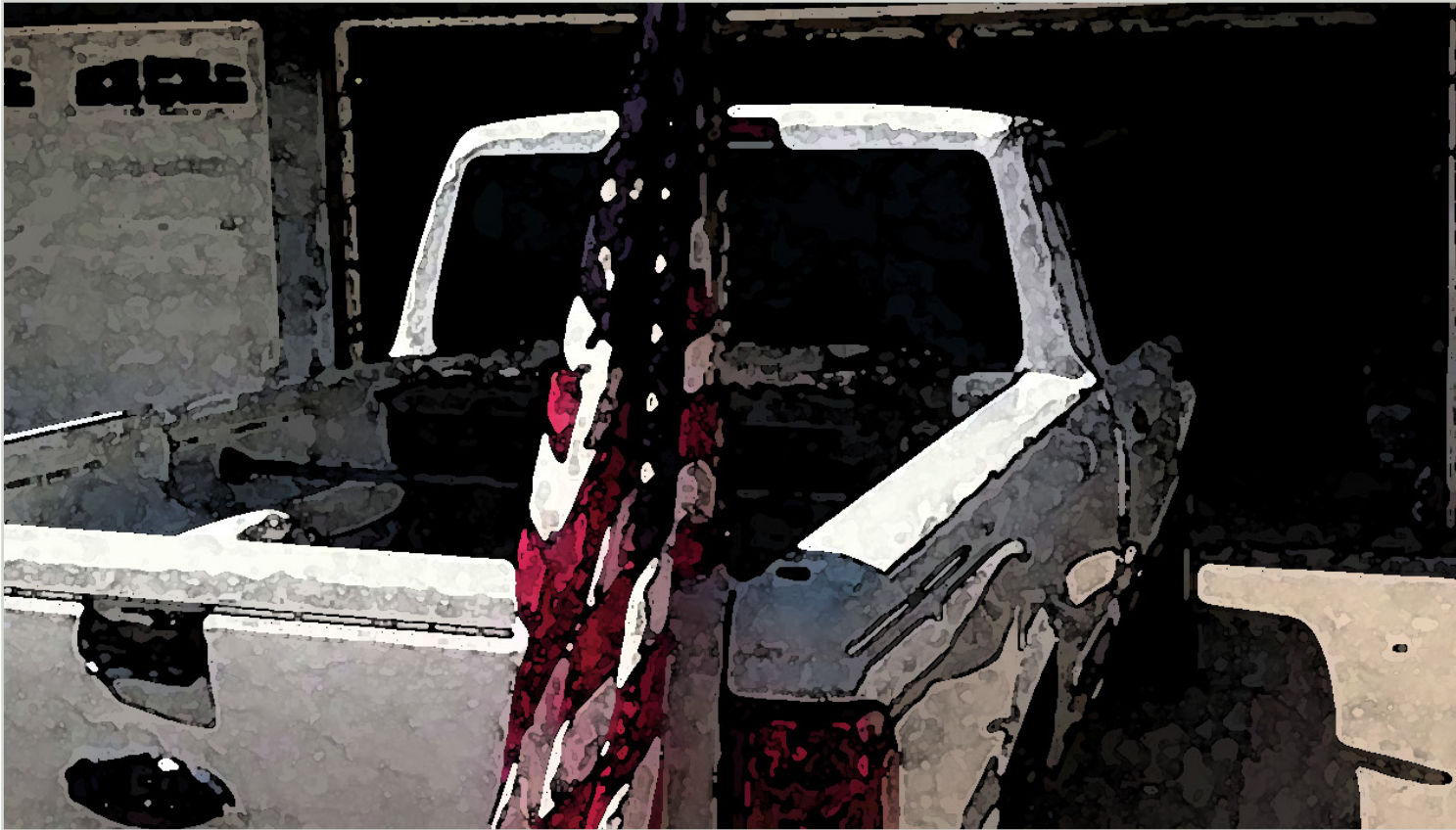


Pop-Up Memories are not Grief Bursts



By Nan Zastrow

Recently, 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 memory 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." 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 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. You feel like 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 our 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 these young men. 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

