



*Honoring the Past and
Rebuilding the Future*

www.wingsgrief.org

Published by Nan Zastrow

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EMPATHY AND BRAIN PAIN RELIEF

Bob Baugher, Ph.D.

One of the many lessons we can learn from a death is to reserve our opinions until we have walked in another person's shoes. Despite this, many people react almost instinctively to reduce their own pain caused by the empathy they feel as they listen to the story of the tragic death of a child, sibling, partner or other beloved person.

Reading this, you might be saying, "I don't judge anymore. The death of my loved one has taught me to accept others and not judge." This article is written with caring and concern to shed some light on an area that few people talk about. Let me begin by telling a story.

I have worked with hundreds of bereaved parents for more than two decades. For five years I was a clinician with the University School of Nursing Parent Bereavement project in which we worked with more than 100 parents in small groups for a 10-week period in the early months following the death of their child by accident, suicide, or homicide. By the end of the project I had heard what seemed to be every imaginable story of horrendous death.

I wasn't prepared for my reaction to the following story which I have modified

to protect the confidentiality of those involved.

Sitting with a group of seven parents I listened to a father describe the death of his son in a freeway auto accident. I sat, as did the parents, empathetically listening to a story of monumental tragic proportions watching this man struggling to express the details of his son's final moments. It was a scene not unlike many I had experienced over the past 20 years, but the pain was no less excruciating. Then I heard this father say, "...and he had alcohol problems."

At that instant I remember feeling a shift in my response to his story – almost a relief. And I caught myself saying in my head something like, "Oh, I see." And then catching myself and saying, "I see? What am I doing? This father is describing the death of his son and I'm feeling somewhat relieved?" It was as if a part of my brain was trying to ease my pain by saying, "He had alcohol problems – that's it. That explains how this senseless tragedy could have taken place." For a moment the senseless seemed to make some sense.

If our brain could speak to us during the exact moment that a fellow human being is crying, telling the story of the death of a

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NAN ZASTROW

Co-Founder,
Wings - A Grief Education Ministry

A few years ago, in early spring I wrote about an analogy of grief and a personal experience. The awakening of a butterfly. I haven't forgotten the story and decided to present the idea again.

My husband, Gary, was working in his unheated workshop and turned on a propane heater to warm the room slightly. A butterfly—half frozen—responded to the warmth and crawled out from under somewhere it sought shelter. Gary brought the butterfly into the house and in moments, much to my surprise, it began to spread its wings in an attempt to move about. I picked it up and put it in a container, anxious to see what would happen. I placed it in a sunny window. It did very little, and I began to think that movement and life were hopeless. Later I put a few drops of water in the dish and saw the butterfly move towards it, gently lapping at the liquid. Then later yet, he began to climb up the side of the jar, obviously longing to be free.

I remember thinking how the butterfly reminds me of the initial stages of grief when we behave similarly. We are immobile, unresponsive, and lacking the nourishment that could set us free from the bondage of sadness and grief. We are disabled and helpless in a world we don't control.

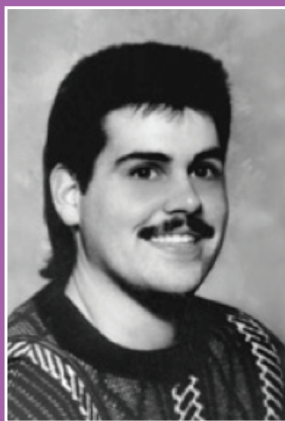
SPRING IS AN AWAKENING.

Every year, I look for the signs of spring—even though I've passed those crucial painful years after the death of my son, Chad. I am eager to see the awakening of nature that is a renewal of hope. Chad's hibiscus plant, over twenty years old now is one of the earliest signs for me. It sits in a sunny window facing east and begins to blossom long before I am able to set it outdoors. Today, it bloomed as though saying, "Hello, Mom!"

that even after the harshness of winter, the drabness of dark and cloudy days, and the uncertainty and ambivalence of life—some things always prove true. The buds will open. The sun will shine. The rivers will run, and the butterfly will fly. This is the miracle of hope fulfilled during your journey with grief.

This year, our family remembers Chad who died on a spring day that was marked by a relentless blizzard. The weather spoke maliciously, but appropriately, of the event that took us to our journey. We are grateful for all those who supported us and all those who have been loyal friends of Wings during the decades since our loss. Our Wings magazine, ELetter, and friends helped us find spring again. We are able to rejoice in the message it holds. We remember Chad for who he was, not how he died.

P.S. As I was writing about this memory, a similar thing happened to Gary this weekend....only to my surprise, it wasn't a butterfly. It was a cricket! (I think the butterfly is more desirable so I used that analogy instead!)



Chad Eric Zastrow
12-4-1971 to 4-16-1993

Because he lived,
I remember.
Because I remember,
He will never die!

*You are the wind
beneath our Wings™*

Spring is a reminder of the metamorphosis of plants, animals, and human creatures, after loss. What once seemed cold, bitter, and lifeless responds. We are encouraged

EMPATHY AND BRAIN PAIN RELIEF

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loved one, and describing the intense pain of grief, it might say something like, "My God, this is terrible. I can't take all this pain. Do something to make it not hurt so much." I believe our response to this plea of our wounded brain is to make a desperate attempt to reduce the pain and try to make some sense of this. I call this Brain Pain Relief.

Let me continue with my example. Here was my brain saying, "Oh, I see, it was alcohol that contributed to the death." Perhaps at a deeper level my brain was saying, "And since your own children don't drink and drive (something, of course, that I could never prove, but wanted to believe), this tragedy won't happen to them." However I was in for a surprise, and I believe that this is why I was able to catch myself during these short-lived, brain-soothing thoughts. What this father said next took away my brief feeling of relief. His words were, "Alcohol was not involved in this accident. They found none in this bloodstream." I remember the immediate shift I felt. But this time I was back into the pain, back into the depths of the senseless tragedy of the death of this young man and back into the grief of this devastated father sitting no more than three feet from me. Yet there was a part of me that still wanted, in some small way, to link the alcohol problems with the accident. That's how insistent my brain was. I then remember saying to myself, "Don't forget what just happened to you." And this is why I am sharing with you today what I hope is some insight for you into the working of the human mind.

Perhaps your own life tragedies have modified the tendency toward Brain Pain

Relief. If so, then you have moved beyond the reaction of most people. But for the rest of humanity, whose brains continue to attempt to protect them, it is important to be aware of how subtle and automatic this reaction can be. Another facet of this mode of thinking occurs when people say to themselves, "Yes, this story is tragic; but it's not as bad as..." To judge by comparison is, I believe, another way for our brain to minimize the pain of loss. A final example of this tendency is shown when people who listen to your story of loss fall into the trap of beginning a sentence with the deadly words, "At least..." Again, the brain is begging to reduce the pain.

What can we do about this natural tendency? I have three suggestions. First, realize that it is more likely to occur when we are listening to information regarding a tragedy. When you know that you are about to listen to the story of a death (in many cases you won't see it coming, except perhaps at a grief support meeting), you might say to yourself, "I need to watch my tendency to try to make sense of this tragedy and try not to compare it with other tragedies." Second, as the person tells you their story, try to counter the minimization process by saying to yourself phrases such as: "Let the pain be. Accept it."

"Don't try to look for reasons."

"Just be there for this person."

Third, forgive yourself if you catch yourself judging. Remember, it is a natural human quality to try to reduce the pain in our lives. The important fact is that you are now more aware of what you have been doing and you can focus more on providing what we all need: a caring

listener who is going to be there and not judge. This is the greatest gift you can give.

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Des Moines, Washington

Empathy and Brain Pain Relief originally published in The Compassionate Friends Magazine We Need Not Walk Alone, Summer, 1999, p.12-13.



Dr. Baugher is our guest speaker at our Spring Seminar in Wausau, April 23-24, 2015. See the flyers on the last page of this newsletter.

STRONGEST DAD IN THE WORLD

RICK AND DICK HOYT: TEAM HOYT

An Inspirational Story

The inspiring story of Rick and Dick Hoyt (Team Hoyt) was originally published in Sports Illustrated. It's about overcoming diversity in our lives and finding something greater than our fears. May we all find inspiration both within and outside of ourselves every day to be the very best we can be.

I try to be a good father. Give my kids mulligans. Work nights to pay for their text messaging. Take them to swimsuit shoots.

But compared with Dick Hoyt, I suck.

Eighty-five times he's pushed his disabled son, Rick, 26.2 miles in marathons. Eight times he's not only pushed him 26.2 miles in a wheelchair but also towed him 2.4 miles in a dinghy while swimming and pedaled him 112 miles in a seat on the handlebars – all in the same day.

Dick's also pulled him cross-country skiing, taken him on his back mountain climbing and once hauled him across the U.S. on a bike. Makes taking your son bowling look a little lame, right?

And what has Rick done for his father? Not much – except save his life.

This love story began in Winchester, Mass., 43 years ago, when Rick was strangled by the umbilical cord during birth, leaving him brain-damaged and unable to control his limbs.

"He'll be a vegetable the rest of his life," Dick says doctors told him and his wife, Judy, when Rick was nine months old. "Put him in an institution."



But the Hoyts weren't buying it. They noticed the way Rick's eyes followed them around the room. When Rick was 11 they took him to the engineering department at Tufts University and asked if there was anything to help the boy communicate. "No way," Dick says he was told. "There's nothing going on in his brain."

"Tell him a joke," Dick countered. They did. Rick laughed. Turns out a lot was going on in his brain.

Rigged up with a computer that allowed him to control the cursor by touching a switch with the side of his head, Rick was finally able to communicate. First words? "Go Bruins!" And after a high school classmate was paralyzed in an accident and the school organized a charity run for him, Rick pecked out, "Dad, I want to do that."

Yeah, right. How was Dick, a self-described "porker" who never ran more

than a mile at a time, going to push his son five miles? Still, he tried. "Then it was me who was handicapped," Dick says. "I was sore for two weeks."

That day changed Rick's life. "Dad," he typed, "when we were running, it felt like I wasn't disabled anymore!"

And that sentence changed Dick's life. He became obsessed with giving Rick that feeling as often as he could. He got into such hard-belly shape that he and Rick were ready to try the 1979 Boston Marathon.

"No way," Dick was told by a race official. The Hoyts weren't quite a single runner, and they weren't quite a wheelchair competitor. For a few years Dick and Rick just joined the massive field and ran anyway. Then they found a way to get into the race officially: In 1983 they ran another marathon so fast they

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made the qualifying time for Boston the following year.

Then somebody said, “Hey, Dick, why not a triathlon?”

How’s a guy who never learned to swim and hadn’t ridden a bike since he was six going to haul his 110-pound kid through a triathlon? Still, Dick tried.

Now they’ve done 212 triathlons, including four grueling 15-hour Ironmans in Hawaii. It must be a buzzkill to be a 25-year-old stud getting passed by an old guy towing a grown man in a dinghy, don’t you think?

Hey, Dick, why not see how you’d do on your own? “No way,” he says. Dick does it purely for “the awesome feeling” he gets seeing Rick with a cantaloupe smile as they run, swim and ride together.

This year, at ages 65 and 43, Dick and Rick finished their 24th Boston Marathon, in 5,083rd place out of more than 20,000 starters. Their best time? Two hours, 40 minutes in 1992 – only 35 minutes off the world record, which, in case you don’t keep track of these things, happens to be held by a guy who was not pushing another man in a wheelchair at the time.

“No question about it,” Rick types. “My dad is the Father of the Century.”

And Dick got something else out of all this too. Two years ago he had a mild heart attack during a race. Doctors found that one of his arteries was 95% clogged. “If you hadn’t been in such great shape,” one doctor told him, “you probably would’ve died 15 years ago.”

So, in a way, Dick and Rick saved each other’s life.

Rick, who has his own apartment (he gets home care) and works in Boston, and Dick, retired from the military and living in Holland, Mass., always find ways to be together. They give speeches around the country and compete in some backbreaking race every weekend, including this Father’s Day.

That night, Rick will buy his dad dinner, but the thing he really wants to give him is a gift he can never buy. “The thing I’d most like,” Rick types, “is that my dad sit in the chair and I push him once.”

– **Rick Reilly for Sports Illustrated**

*Sports Illustrated Issue date:
June 20, 2005, p. 88*

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:

Parent Child Bonds

When a parent dies, forgive yourself for being human. In your relationship, you may have spoken harsh words, experienced differences, or missed the chance to express your love or thanks. Be confident that your parent understood and loved you unconditionally. Either of you may have reacted to the moment inappropriately, but it doesn’t change the fact that your parent was able to forgive. The bond between parent and child overrides all difficult moments in life and smiles at our child-like need to be accepted for who we are under any circumstances.



On the Lighter Side...

Good News! Bad News!

An artist asked the gallery owner if there had been any interest in his paintings on display at the time.

"I have good news and bad news," the owner of the gallery replied. "The good news is that a gentlemen inquired about your work and wondered if it would appreciate in value after your death. I told him it most likely would. He bought all 15 of your paintings."

"That's wonderful!" the artist exclaimed. "What's the bad news?"

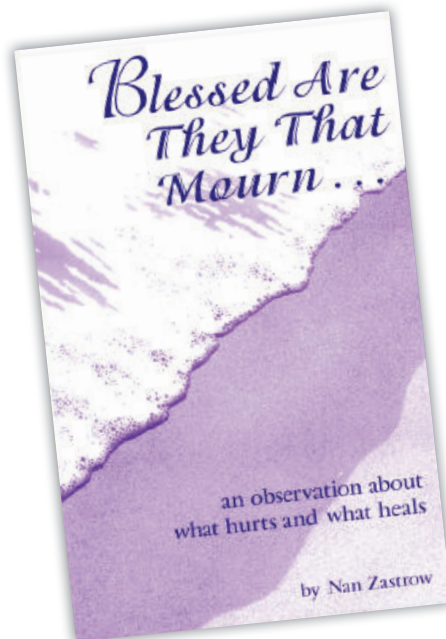
"The buyer was your doctor."

*"There is a sacredness in tears.
They are not the mark of
weakness, but of power.
They speak more eloquently
than ten thousand tongues.
They are the messengers of
overwhelming grief and deep
conviction of unspeakable love."*

– Washington Irving

*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.



How does one survive through those first months and years of grief?

Comforting doesn't come easy. When someone has died, we step forward to comfort the bereaved. We do exactly what we are expected to do. We act like others act. We say what we've been taught to say. Then, we consider our commitment to the survivor fulfilled. For the grieving person, the journey has just begun. Others cannot understand the depth of pain or the lingering task of grieving. In these pages observe moments in the author's journey that were painful, as well as those sprinkled with joy. Listen to the things she wanted her comforters to know that hurt her. Rejoice in the awakening of her spirit and her discovery of new-found hope.

A great book that shows you how to be a comforter to someone who mourns...or for the griever to understand the experience of grief and not be surprised by other's reactions to your loss. A beautiful book for the griever or comforter to understand loss. (Retail: \$8.95)

**For special offer, go to the book store
at www.wingsgrief.org**

Limited Time Special Price: \$5.00 plus shipping \$1.50.
Offer good until 6-30-2015.

Reader Feedback



WHAT DO YOU THINK?

WHEN GRIEF OVERWHELMS US, WE ARE OFTEN SURPRISED BY THOSE WHO STEP UP TO SUPPORT US. SOMETIMES IT'S A FAMILY MEMBER, NEIGHBOR, OR FRIEND. AND SOMETIMES IT IS SOMEONE YOU LEAST EXPECT WHO STEPS OUT OF THE SHADOWS AND MANAGES TO CONNECT WITH YOU AND YOUR PAIN. SHARE A FEW WORDS WITH US ABOUT THAT SPECIAL PERSON WHO HELPED YOU MOST.

I lost my husband to cancer after 28 years of marriage. He was diagnosed as terminal with little time left right from the first doctor visit. We knew we had hard unknown territory before us. We knew we wanted to be the very best people we could possibly be during that period of stress and sorrow. We asked the cancer center to recommend a counseling service to us and they did. We both enjoyed and benefited from our weekly sessions with Dr. Steve Benson. We came away with more love, more understanding and lighter hearts each time. Sure, it's easy to say love will get you through it all, but sometimes stress trumps love. We learned how to manage our stress.

– Donna
Surprise, Arizona

When my son Darren was murdered teaching in China, I received so many letters and cards from all over the world. One of my son's former professors at SDSU told me to contact another professor who was an outstanding photographer. He had just lost his father recently. He offered to do a memory book about Darren. It was a labor of love, working together for about a year. It was not only a beautiful tribute to my son that has been given out to hundreds of people,

but he said it also helped him deal with his own grief and mourning regarding the unexpected death of his dad. After our project, he had the strength to do a video of his dad's life.

– Maxine
No. Hollywood, CA

I could never pick just one person. So many people helped me and my family in so many unexpected ways after the death of my son and then, four years later, his father. I am forever grateful for the people who helped with the big tasks I couldn't have done alone, like cleaning out an entire house or hauling a boat somewhere. I was surprised, however, by how the seemingly little things made such a big difference in those difficult times after the losses: Getting my jury duty postponed; buying my son dress pants for the funeral; receiving a thoughtful note; and so many other things. I think that sometimes when we see someone experiencing grief and we know we can't really take their pain away, we think there is nothing we can do or that what we have to offer isn't enough. But, it is. Of course a few people stand out as being particularly helpful, but I cherish every thoughtful act and gesture because they all left me feeling cared for and were part of the support system that helped me

move on with life after loss.

– Stephanie
Wausau, WI

When I was 16 years old, my 17 year old brother took his own life. I turned to any friend that would listen. In the late 1970's, suicide was not something that anyone would talk about. Later in life when I was in my 30's, my older brother took his life and his wife's life. It was still difficult to talk with others, but I had a wonderful husband that stood by me through all the grief and trauma. Even though I am a psychiatric nurse and know all the signs of suicide and depression, these were very traumatic events and it is something that I will never forget. I have learned to help others through a support group I have started several years ago. Now that my late husband is gone, God has blessed me with another wonderful husband that is always there for me during any good and bad days that I may have.

– Michelle
Neosho, WI

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WHAT DO YOU THINK...

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I expected support and love from my family and I received it tenfold. My sister has continued to support me and our ministry with Wings all these years. Of course, my husband was my rock and continues to be today. If I had to pick an individual outside of our family, it would be someone who became a dear friend after Chad's death. Her special intuitiveness calmed my fears and helped me accept my loss over time.

– Nan
Wausau

My person is Kevin. Since the unsolved murder of my son, Tommy, Kevin has been a steadfast, unmovable support during this struggle. He has been here for me when my own family have not. Kevin and I have known each other for twenty years and became a couple ten years now. Kevin is there for meetings with law enforcement, news media, cemetery decorating and memorials. I am so grateful for what he has done while I walk this journey.

– Marsha



The person that's helped me most is Brian Donovan he was the best man at our wedding in 1993 and has been my "brother" ever since. He is always there when I need to talk and the only person I will take advice from.

– Lisa
Wausau

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

Have you or someone you know turned their tragedy or sorrow into a positive experience or a life passion? One of our class participants once told us she never drove the car anywhere except locally. After the death of her husband, she was determined to abolish her fear of driving. She drove to Milwaukee, WI all alone and was surprised that she could do it! Sometimes grief motivates us to do something we thought we would never be able to do. We'd like to hear your stories so we can pass "hope" on to other who might need it.

We'd love to hear from you for our Summer ELetter. Please include name/city/state. (We will only print your first name). Send your response to nanwings1@gmail.com. Please limit your feedback to about 250-300 words.

Understanding Grief

Spring Seminar 2015

Bob Baugher, PhD. *(Seminar Presenter)*

For many of our seminar attendees, Dr. Baugher needs no introduction. In the past he has educated and intrigued our audiences with his wisdom, humor, and a wealth of hands-on good ideas and advice. The last time he spoke in Wausau was in 2009, and is returning by popular request with all new seminars and information.

Bob Baugher, Ph.D. is a Psychology Instructor at Highline College in Des Moines, Washington where he teaches courses in Psychology and Death Education. He has earned certification as a Fellow in Thanatology and as a trainer for LivingWorks, training more than 1,000 people in suicide intervention. He has given more than 700 workshops on grief and loss. Dr. Baugher has been invited to speak at 20 of The Compassionate Friends national conferences. The most recent of his eight books is entitled *In the Midst of Caregiving*, co-authored with Dr. Darcie Sims.



SEMINAR ONE

Don't Worry, Be Happy?

A seminar on healthy and unhealthy grief and healthy and unhealthy worrying.

Thursday, April 23, 2015 | 7:00 - 9:00 pm
Free of charge and open to the public

The craziness of grief encompasses a vast array of reactions. But at what point does our grief become unhealthy? Join us as we examine the boundaries of healthy grief. Then, we will look at a common grief reaction: Worry. The death of a loved one brings a whole new level of worries such as: How can I go on? What's going to happen next? How are my family members coping? In this workshop you will NOT be told not to worry. Instead come ready to discover some strategies for sorting out what is healthy and what might not be healthy grief.

Both seminars will be held at:

Holiday Inn & Suites - Cedar Creek
1000 Imperial Avenue, Rothschild, WI

For more information or a program brochure contact:

Wings—a Grief Education Ministry
Nan or Gary Zastrow 715.845.4159

Or Aspirus Comfort Care and Hospice Services
Amy Kitsemel 715.847.2703

CEU approval is in process for continued education units. If you want to verify confirmation, feel free to check prior to the seminar.

SEMINAR TWO

Traumatic Death – A World Turned Upside Down

A seminar for clergy, hospice, caregivers and those who grieve.

Friday, April 24, 2015 | 9:00 am - Noon
Fee: \$50

Traumatic death deals with sudden, accidental, unexpected death and may include suicide, or homicide. Some degree of trauma often accompanies sudden death, which can be overwhelming and present special problems for the bereaved that complicates the grief process. Death of this nature makes us feel shaken, uncertain, and vulnerable and can lead to complex issues. Join us as we examine the following topics in bereavement following trauma:

- What factors constitute a traumatic death?
- What psychological and physical reactions may be anticipated in trauma?
- What other cumulative factors may complicate traumatic grief?
- Learn about recent findings on resilience to trauma.
- Learn what recent research on post-traumatic growth teaches us

Our seminar will provide attendees with a number of suggestions for helping family and clients cope with the intensity of traumatic death.

Presented by:

Partner sponsor:

Wings
A Grief Education Ministry


ASPIRUS™
Passion for excellence.
Compassion for people.