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Wings is a non-profit, charitable organization dedicated to grief awareness through education. We welcome your donations, in any amount, to support the ministry of Wings.

Classic Feature Article from the Wings magazine VICTORY OVER THE 30' POLE

by Nan Zastrow

The thirty-foot pole stretched straight up like a telephone pole, tall and intimidating; and we were told to climb it.

Why would I climb a pole if I didn't have to? The truth was—I didn't want to. But this pole stood in my way—representing a barrier between God and me, between the world and me; and perhaps, between me and the rest of my life.

I just completed a class that encouraged individuals to move from their comfort zone to their stretch zone. The lessons we learned in the classroom were now going to be applied experientially. The end-result was the concept that by taking part in such an exercise called "challenge by choice," we could create a model for life.

The thirty-foot pole occupied a notable spot on the challenge-learning course. The facilitator explained that we were to climb the pole—outfitted all the way up with heavy metal staples to create a "ladder"—mount the disk that was attached at the top, turn and face our group—and jump!

We would wear harnesses, and trained course technicians, who would manage the belay lines attached to the harnesses, would control our suspension. Our fellow team members operate the belay ropes that would lower us safely to the ground after our jump. And, our instructor reminded us; we could stop at any point. The purpose of the exercise was to challenge us to take just one step more than we normally felt comfortable taking.

For whatever reason, I was willing to give it a try knowing I could stop at any point.

For me, climbing the pole was the easy part; it took only seconds. But as I approached the top, I saw the disc mounted there was only the size of a pizza pan. Surely this was a mistake. My feet were bigger than that!

Just two more steps. My hands reached for the disk above me. Reality took on a new dimension. My leaden feet felt glued to the staples; I couldn't seem to lift them. My team members yelled encouragement. "You can do it!"

I cautiously tested the disk. My instinct urged me to kneel, and then rise to a standing position. But the platform was too small. My coach called to me, "Don't kneel. You have to stand."

Fear set in. How could I stand? There was nothing there to support me!

Minutes passed. My coach yelled out again, "You've got to let go in order to stand."

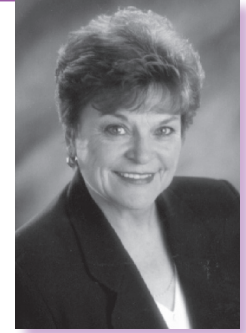
"Let go?" I yelled back. "You want me to let go!"

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EDITOR'S JOURNAL

HONORING THE PAST

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



Recently, my husband, a realtor, was asked if he had a child that died.

"Yes," he replied.

The woman who asked was also a realtor and she said one of her clients met him at an open house and connected his name to a phenomenon (as she described it) from years ago. She said her client lived near the cemetery and told her the story.

For several years, there was a parade of people coming and going from this one particular cemetery spot. She was amazed how many people visited the grave and how long this went on. Her curiosity got to her, so one day she walked over to the cemetery spot to see who was buried there. She read on the headstone. Chad Eric Zastrow. Dec. 4, 1971 to April 16, 1993. Also on the headstone were the names of his parents and sister, still living. It wasn't until she met Gary at the open house that she made the name connection. This was 17 years later.

Doesn't it make you marvel about how small this world really is and how many strange coincidences draw us together for unknown reasons. Why would this woman remember these names and connect them after so many years?

It's the ripple effect. There is nothing else that can explain it better than that. We are put into this world for a reason and a purpose and often that is to affect someone else's life in a positive way. Sometimes it takes adversity in life to be drawn into the situation of greater good.

Seventeen years ago, Gary and I would never have dreamed of doing the things we are doing today with our grief education ministry. It just happened. For us the only way to let go of our grief was to share it with others and help them find HOPE.

When our son, Chad, died at the age of 21 as the result of suicide, our world changed forever. We could easily have chosen to be bitter, angry and forever distraught. Through the grace of God and with the support of very many wonderful people, we chose differently.

One of the people who influenced our journey was Dr. Alan Wolfelt from the Center for Loss and Life Transition, Fort Collins, Colorado. He

encouraged us to do what our hearts taught us to do. We began our non-profit Wings organization in 1993. We began by publishing a newsletter that was mailed throughout the United States, but we struggling with the value of our idea. We met Dr. Wolfelt when we were encouraged by a local funeral director to seek him out. Dr. Wolfelt guided our instincts and gave us encouragement and support throughout the years. He was truly our healing gift. We published the magazine from 1993 until 2003. Many of the original articles are available at our website. In 2003, Nan began writing for Grief Digest magazine.

We recently held our 13th Annual Understanding Grief Spring Seminar 2010. We held our first seminar in 1997 when we invited Dr. Wolfelt to Wausau for the first time. Our Spring Seminars are a continuing tradition that has served our community well by offering grief education and bringing some very notable speakers, in the field of grief, to our area. Please review our list of Sponsor names in this issue. They deserve many thanks for their awesome support.

Just yesterday, I received an email from someone totally unknown to me. She received information about the 20th year class reunion for Chad's graduation class. Unknown to her, she read that Chad had died. She took time to send me an email and remarked "I knew your son....I remember him as smiling and full of life....I'm so sorry for your loss and I know it made me gasp when I learned of his passing. He was beautiful and his smile was as big as he was." Thank God, for those who remember and take time to tell you.

So, the world really is a small place, after all. Our vision of Wings is "Honoring the Past and Rebuilding the Future." When people we love die, and life hurts...we remember—and its good to know some people never forget.

In this issue, we honor the past...with a small glimpse of where we came from and where we are going.

OUR LEGACY OF SERVICE --- SINCE 1993

Honoring the Past and Rebuilding the Future

In the Beginning....

Nan and Gary Zastrow co-founders of ©Roots and Wings, Ltd. created a non-profit organization in 1993. They founded Wings as a way to heal their own grief and provide education and awareness for others going through the grief experience. In 1993, the death of their son, Chad, and his fiancée, ten weeks later (both as a result of suicide), inspired them to create this ministry of hope.

Our Roots....

Their roots were founded in a newsletter they published under the name of *Wings™*. This newsletter contained real stories about real people going through the experience of grief. It also contained articles by professional grief counselors, educators, authors, Nan's journal, inspirational verses, and helping tips for the bereaved. The newsletter evolved into a professionally printed magazine and was mailed throughout the United States and Canada from 1993—2003. The magazine was retired in 2003 when Nan began writing for Grief Digest magazine. Classic issues are still available.

Service to Others....

As the Wings magazine grew, so did the organization. By 1997, Nan and Gary were doing workshops, seminars, support groups, and presentations. They became certified as Death and Grief Educators through the Center for Loss and Life Transition by Dr. Alan Wolfelt, Director. They reached out to the community to support their programs and with support continue to do major programs annually. 100% of the donations to Wings are returned to the organization. The volunteer staff gives from the heart.

Recognition and Awards

While recognition is not the goal of their work, they have been noticed for their community service. In 2000, Wings received the Flame of Freedom award for community volunteerism. Nan was nominated for the Althenea Award in 2005 and the Hope of Wisconsin, hospice volunteer of the year award in 2008. They presented workshops at the World Gathering for the Bereaved in 2005 in Vancouver, B.C. In 2009; and were Keynote speakers for Bereaved Parents, USA in New York City.

The Wings Tradition

Nan and Gary continue the tradition of community service and dedication to grief education and grief awareness. Their vision statement: ***Honoring the Past...Rebuilding the Future*** is their pledge to continue their personal education and give of their time and energy to help others have healing grief experiences.

Nan has published several books and continues to write professionally for *Grief Digest*. Nan and Gary are hospice volunteers; and in addition to their volunteer work, they have careers in their community.

Annual Events

Annually, Wings facilitates and presents the following events:

- Spring and Fall: Healing Grief from the Inside Out, six-week, grief support and education series.
- Early summer: Live First, Grieve Second, grief support/grief work series for seasoned grievers.
- Spring Understanding Grief Seminars with a professional speaker
- When the Holidays Hurt workshop for the community (a holiday program with a theme for coping with the holidays)

Title of Groups are frequently changed as new material is introduced. Additionally, the facilitators often are guest speakers a grief education events both locally, and nationally.

Sponsorship and Funding

Funding for Wings events, classes, workshops, seminar, mailings, and other activities is through individual and business donation. Like other charitable groups such as TCF Compassionate Friends, Bereaved Parents,

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and Survivors of Suicide, Wings depends upon donations to manage their expenses and keep their programs available to the community. A few long-time sponsors have directly helped with financial support of some community events. To see a list of our sponsors for our Spring Seminar, visit our website at www.wingsgrief.org. There are no paid staff or administration fees taken from donations to Wings. All staff are volunteers who proudly give of their time and talents. Donations, memorial gifts, and sponsorship are greatly appreciated.

The Mission Statement of Wings

Wings is recognized as a international resource for grief education. We encourage a choice to heal through inspiration, compassion, and hope.

UNDER CONSTRUCTION:
...coming soon!

Our organization continues to change and evolve and with that are new opportunities to learn and new resources to inspire. Currently, on our list of new releases are the following:

Book: *How A Fortune Cookie Heals Grief-the Twelve Gifts of Hope*

The value of grief work was an idea and a concept that could be experienced and taught through a simple tool, the fortune cookie. Learn how the parable of the fortune cookie teaches us about the Twelve Gifts of Hope available to every bereaved person. Develop your own project to give and receive all Twelve Gifts of Hope or simply find hope and peace in reading the stories of countless others who discovered how to heal grief by looking for the bright spot.

Book: *Hitch your Hope to a Star: Stories about finding hope.*

Based on the journals and writing of Nan, this book is a collection of best loved verses and articles about finding hope.

Group: *Title to be determined*

A new support group helping the bereaved move from grief to mourning. A hands-on, grief work group.

My Creed for Grief

1995 Nan Zastrow

My heart aches with intense emotion,
 Allow me the dignity of grieving in my own way.
 Though my grief may be swift or lengthy,
 Give me time to accept that God has called him home.
 I must find comfort with my loss, on my own.
 When others leave me to my sorrow,
 Be there for me. Don't set limits on my grief.
 My profound pain must heal at my pace.
 What is right for you, may take longer for me.
 Respect this difference and give me space.
 Let me speak his name. Tell his story.
 Though my reflections are suspended in time
 They are the healing balm for my pain.
 I have reserved a special place in my heart
 To lock in the cherished memories of his spirit.
 Understand my sudden wash of tears,
 They are the raindrops of life's adversity
 And they create a rainbow of promise within me.
 I must remind myself of God's assurance
 That at our journeys end, we will meet again.
 Above all, be patient as I mend.
 Each celebration reminds me of other times.
 I may need four season or more, before I find peace.
 Each day brings me closer to triumph over death.
 Please let me grieve in my way.
 When inner acceptance comes, then I will know
 That I conquered! There is victory over the grave.
 No one can take away my treasured memories,
 Or my cherished keepsakes of the living soul
 Who once was a part of me. . . and still lives within me.

TIME AND THE RIVER

by Nan Zastrow

On April 14, 1971, Patrick, age 11, wrote a note and stuffed it in a bottle. He released the bottle in the river. And probably never gave it another thought.

It's something almost any boy might do. But what makes this story amazing is the fact that the bottle survived for 25 years-Intact! And that it was returned to Patrick's parents, just like he asked in his note.

When Patrick Brost, son of Myrna and Vernon Brost, died in 1979, he never knew that the message he placed in the bottle years earlier would mean so much to the family he left behind.

An interview with the Vernon and Myrna Brost Family, Medford, Wisconsin

This particular location on the river was familiar to Patrick. It was behind his grandmother's house and a favorite spot for all seasons. It was here he fished with his friends. And explored the river with his brothers and sisters.

Pat was the second of the Brost's eight children. They talk about him and reminisce about him as though he is still coming in and out of the door. That's what has kept him so special in their hearts.

I could feel the joy that Pat's parents felt. And how amazed they were about this wonderful event that happened to them. Nearly 24 years have passed since Patrick wrote this message on a fine spring morning. But it brought back the feelings of yesterday. In mid May, this year the bottle was retrieved by Bradley Kmosena of Medford. Bradley's parents, Dave

and Karen Kmosena, contacted the Brosts. The message dated April 14, 1971, asked the person who found the bottle to let him know where it was found, the date it was found, and the name of the finder. Pat listed his address so the "finder" knew how to contact him. At the bottom, he wrote: "Thank you for your kindness." The bottle was found about 2 weeks before Patrick's birth date of May. 22. He would have been 36 years old.

On a warm summer evening, we sat on the patio with Pat's parent, Myrna and Vernon, and their daughter Kathy Messman. Her is their heart-warming story.

Tell us about Patrick. What was he like?

"He was different than the others (sibling)," his mother said. "He was shy and quiet in school. He was sharp in car mechanics. His dad was a mechanic too. He was a good car-fixer." They described him as well-liked in school and a joy to be around. "He was a good kid!"

We're anxious to hear your story. Tell us what happened.

"Bradley Kmosena (a resident of Medford) was fishing on the river. When he was walking along the other side, he saw a bottle lying on the bank. He picked it up and saw a letter rolled up inside. He couldn't get the top off the bottle. It was a screw top, aluminum and rusted shut. So he broke the bottle," Kathy said.

Myrna showed me the thick piece from the green bottle that she has. It looked like a large quart bottle from soda pop.

"The bottle had washed up on the bank. Bradley said the bottle wasn't there the year before." Myrna told us. "It's an area that floods often in the spring. Bradley didn't think it was any big deal, at the time. Bradley took the message home and showed his parents. His parents recognized the Brost name. They knew another brother (of Pat's), Mike. Bradley's father called Mike and told him about the bottle. Then he took it over to Mike where he works."

"The message was rolled up with a rubber band around it. The band broke. It just disintegrated. But the note was bone-dry in that bottle. Mike brought the note to us."

I looked at the note that Pat's mother has in a frame. Next to the note was a picture of a bright-eyed, eleven-year-old boy. Pieces of the note had fallen away. But the scrawled date and the message itself were well preserved despite the number of years.

"We are glad the date is on it. I'm so pleased that he (Bradley) didn't just throw it away. He could have. We talked about it later and said the bottle could have been in the Mississippi River by now. The Little Black River joins the Mississippi in the southern part of the state. The bottle traveled about 20-25 'river' miles downstream."

"We never had a clue that Patrick put the note in a bottle. Even if we did, we would never have expected to find it after 24 years. We went to that spot near the river. Bradley showed us where he found the bottle and where he broke the bottle open to get the note. It felt good to be there."

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Time and the River... *Continued from page 5*

"How did you feel when you heard about the bottle and the message?" We asked.

"Oh!," Myrna sighed, " I can't actually tell you. It was just such a . . .we laughed! We cried. It was such mixed emotions. At first it didn't seem like a big deal. The Medford Star News printed a short write-up about it. And people started calling us. Kathy also contacted Channel 7 TV who aired the story."

"People asked me: 'Do you believe in guardian angels?' And I said, 'I sure do! I really do!' (pause) It's like a message from the past. The bottle was found not too far from his best friend's house."

What kind of message did you think this was? Does it have special meaning for you?

"Like Kathy said, he's here and he's still watching over us. It's a good omen, we thought. It's like he is telling us he's still around. Yes, it's a comforting feeling."

"You know how hopeless and lost you feel when someone dies. To just all of a sudden have something like this happen. . .It's like he's here! It's been 16 years . . . 16 years (since Pat died). But nothing's changed. You feel the same."

"That brings up something I wanted to ask you. Time goes quickly. How has your grief changed over the years?"

"It get easier, but not better. You learn to handle it better."

"It helps to talk about him," Kathy said. " We talk about him all the time. We include him like he's still alive. That helps a lot."

When we left the Brost family that evening, our hearts were a little lighter too. Their joy was contagious. Listening to them tell their story, we sensed their pride and love for Patrick. Myrna and I hugged and shared an unspoken thought from one mother to another who had lost their sons. Life was too short for our sons. But we are blessed by the time we had with them.

Life is unpredictable . . . and so is the river.

Be Good to Yourself A Care Tip

Want to be Inspired...? Try this:

- Read Grief Digest magazine from Centering Corporation
- Read the online Wings quarterly newsletter
- Visit the Wings website for articles and inspiration
- Google Nan Zastrow or Wings for articles posted at various websites all over the Internet
- Read inspiring stories from readers about the Twelve Gifts of Hope at the website
- Pick up a book written by Nan
 - o Blessed Are They That Mourn
 - o Ask Me—30 Things I Want You to Know
 - o Coming soon: Hitch your Hope to a Star
 - o Coming soon: How a Fortune Cookie Heals Grief—the Twelve Gifts of Hope
 - o Inspirational Holiday Grief Programs available at the website
 - The Legend of the Ebber
 - Taming the Holiday Blues
 - One Is Silver; the Other Gold
 - Something Old, Something New, Something Just to Get You Through

How To Connect With Wings:

- Email: wings1@charter.net
- Postal: P.O. Box 1051, Wausau, WI 54401
- Phone: 715-845-4159
- Follow the EVENTS calendar posted at the website
- Subscribe to the free online ELetter sent quarterly.
- Visit our website: www.wingsgrief.org
- Order a Free copy of Grief Digest at www.centeringcorp.com
- Visit Nan or Gary Zastrow on facebook

Victory Over the 30' Pole ...

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I suddenly realized that this moment in time was no longer about “challenge by choice.” It was something far greater—a chance to rise above my fears. If I could do this, then just maybe I could overcome the other obstacles in my life that were holding me back.

My mind raced thinking about those obstacles: insecurity, uncertainty, and the great unknown that lay in front of me after the recent death of my son, Chad. My faith was bruised. I wanted to cry out to God, “You’ve given me this mountain. Now teach me how to climb it! Show me what to do!”

I looked down. My support system was in place. My team members cheered, urging me to take the next step. The chorus of encouragement rang in my ears.

But I was afraid. Truly afraid. I could turn back now. I already went one step beyond what was comfortable for me. It was my choice.

In that moment of indecision, a sudden wash of supreme peace swept over me, surrounding me with a loving embrace. I felt as though my son reached out, hugged me, and said, “You know you can do it, Mom.” The feeling lasted only a moment, but it was long enough to give me the courage I needed.

Fearfully, awkwardly, I reached my arms out into empty space. I felt as though someone literally lifted me up. The pole swayed back and forth; and my breath caught in my throat. But in that moment I felt warmly secure. I let go and lifted my feet on the platform—and found that I could stand!

I stood as high as the treetops. I surveyed the golden colors of autumn around me, awe-struck by infinite beauty. My heart swelled with euphoria a wonderful sense of accomplishment. Surely God was there with me—and so was Chad!

The pole continued to wobble as I turned 180 degrees to position myself to jump. Oblivious to the echo of my team member’s cheers below, I was aware only of God, my son, myself—and my choice. I reached for the sky—and jumped. Y-E-S!

Words cannot describe my sense of elation in that brief moment of flight before my body was caught

in the security of the belay lines, and my teammates lowered me gently to the ground. I’ll never forget it. (In fact, I have it on video to remind me!)

Looking back, I realize now that the climb and jump were much easier than the challenge I’d been facing every day since Chad died. Climbing upward through my grief was much more grueling than climbing the thirty-foot pole. Some days, lifting my legs to walk forward was the biggest accomplishment of the day. Moving, just moving was an accomplishment! No plan. No destination. Oblivious to the world. Carrying out the tasks that we as survivors carry out because we have to, with very few people cheering us on.

Climbing the pole was nothing compared to what I knew now was my primary task: *finding the courage to live again*. My position on top of that pole paralleled the personal crisis in my life. To move forward, I needed to overcome my fears. I needed to face my predicament, make a decision, and let go of my fear. Let go of my grief.

Letting go doesn’t mean forgetting; it means cherishing the memories. It doesn’t mean ignoring the past; it means accepting the challenge of living in the present. Letting go is a choice that can lead to peace and purpose.

I made that choice on top of that pole one fall day. Victory over the pole! Victory over the sting of death!

Published 1994, *Wings™*

Published 2002, *The Hidden Hand of God, Turning Points*, A Guideposts book of True Stories, Carmel, New York, 10512.

Published 2007, Grief Digest Magazine, Centering Corporation, Omaha, NE. www.centering.org

Books by Nan Zastrow

Wings
A Grief Education Ministry

Blessed Are They That Mourn—an observation about what hurts, what helps, and what heals.

Nan tells her story about their real grief experience and how the sudden death of her 21 year old son impacted her future and her loss of dreams. She candidly shares an attempt to resurface from unbearable pain when community and friends couldn't understand why her grief should last so long.

Written from the heart, Nan's words will take you on a journey towards hope.

\$8.95 (plus \$1.50 S&H) or 2/\$16 (plus \$2.50 S&H)

**Ask Me-30 things I Want You to Know
How to be a Friend to a Survivor of Suicide**

Suicide is silent, not because there isn't always a cry for help, but because it becomes the unspeakable taboo. In 1993, Nan and Gary's son, Chad, suicided and ten weeks later his fiancée took her life, too. Nan admits she spent years hiding from their grief; absorbing every bit of damaging pain; swallowing hard-earned pride; admitting feelings of defeat; and finding excuses for what seemed "hard-to-believe". In time, she learned the silence had to stop and she had the power to "teach" society how to respond to this disabling loss. In this captivating book, Nan clearly describes the progression of survival and tells you 30 Things that every griever is likely to feel.

\$5.95 (plus \$1.25 S&H)

When the Holidays Hurt Program Guides

Each year, Nan creates a unique theme-based healing your grief holiday program for the community. Of the 13 programs, she has published a few popular programs. For detailed information of each, visit the website at www.wingsgrief.org. Use these programs for 10-200 people and provide suggestions for coping with holiday stress and hope for the coming year. Use the BUY NOW feature and download the program immediately. Price is \$15 per program. Some titles include:

- The Legend of the Ebber
- One is Silver and the Other Gold
- Something Old, Something New, and Something Just to Get You Through
- Taming the Holiday Blues

Fall 2010: How a Fortune Cookie Can Heal Grief – The Twelve Gifts of Hope

The value of grief work was an idea and a concept that could be experienced and taught through a simple tool, the fortune cookie. Learn how the parable of the fortune cookie teaches us about the Twelve Gifts of Hope available to every bereaved person. Develop your own project to give and receive all Twelve Gifts of Hope or simply find hope and peace in reading the stories of countless others who discovered how to heal their own grief by looking for the bright spot.



ORDERING INFORMATION:

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By email: wings1@charter.net

Website: wingsgrief.org (Pay Pal accepted)

Through Centering Corporation and Grief Digest www.centering.org

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