

The ministry of Wings is: *Honoring the Past and Rebuilding the Future.*

## Contents of this ELetter

- Feature: Feature:  
Learning to Live
- Editor's Journal:  
Finding Hope May  
Come Unexpectedly
- Inspirational Story:  
What You Treasure  
Most
- Care Tip: Accept the  
Inevitable
- Twelve Gifts of Hope:  
Honor a Grief Burst
- Poem: It Wouldn't be  
Ours
- New Book Release

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and pass it on!

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Classic Feature Article from the Wings magazine

## LEARNING TO LIVE

By: Julie Fiumano, MBA, BSN, RN

*Death.* No one wants to talk about it and yet none of us will escape it. When it happens to someone we know, most people don't know how to handle it. And, it's because people are uncomfortable about it and it's so final that people fear it the most. In fact, there's only one thing that tops death on the list of things people fear most and that's public speaking. As a comedian once noted, most people would rather be in the coffin than give the eulogy!

The death of someone you love makes you aware of the fragility of life. It wakes you up and makes you question how well you are living. After all, no one wants to die feeling like they haven't yet lived.

You can choose how you live; you can worry about the future and what might happen to you, you can complain about how things aren't the way you want them to be, or you can live your best life right now, in this moment. By choosing to live life to the fullest and by protecting yourself and your assets for when the inevitable happens, the fear of death will lessen.

It was only a few months ago when I lost my dear friend to a sudden heart attack at 43 years old. It happened the way we all wish to go; my friend went to bed one night and never woke up.

And it's because I loved that I grieve. Without love and a strong connection to others, we wouldn't experience pain when they are gone. So in my sadness and grief, I am grateful, for I know that I loved and was loved.

From my experience, I've learned several important lessons about death...and life that I'd like to share with you. My hope is that you will choose to live your best life and, as a leader, you will share these tips with others both in your work and your personal life.

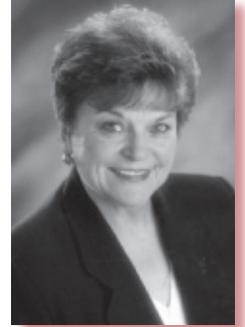
**Life is happening right now.** Experience the present moment. People who try to bargain with death often are people who have not truly lived. They've just been existing, and they beg for more time in order to do what they could have been doing all along.

If there is love, then there will be pain when it ends. And it's okay. It lets you know that you loved and there is nothing more joyful than love. Love anyway; it's worth the pain.

**Experience all of your feelings**—even the ones that you consider unpleasant. Feelings aren't really negative or bad; they just are. They are your inner messengers; they let you know you're alive. It's what you do with your feelings that can be bad. When you feel a strong emotion, resist the temptation to explain

*Continued on page 7*

## *Finding Hope May Come Unexpectedly*



Recently, a wonderful woman came into our lives and gave us the privilege of seeing hope dawn during her frightening journey with grief. She rekindled my curiosity about what it is that allows a person to move forward from devastating grief to living again. We know that people do it (move forward in grief), but what is it that gives them the courage and the power to do so?

Let me begin with her story. Ruth\* lost her beloved spouse due to a sudden death. Together, they were the inseparable pair—successful, happy, and career driven. He played an important role in her daily attitude and enthusiasm as she managed a volatile sales career that was demanding and tedious. She liberally gave him credit for keeping her on track; helping her excel; managing her highs and lows; and pampering her with much affection and love.

His sudden death created an ultimate crisis in her life and broke the rhythmic momentum and precision that helped her keep up with her crazy pace. Ruth was helpless and inconsolable in her grief. Desperately, she punished herself for her reactions as she struggled to maintain business composure and meet the demands of her customers.

Feeling as though she was losing ground, she contacted Gary and me. For several weeks, we gave her support and encouragement in the ways we knew best, from our own experience. We listened. We talked. We invited her to attend our support groups. We shared her memories. We talked some more. Weeks went by and her desperation didn't seem much lighter. And then after one particular evening and visit, she surprised us. She found hope.

There is that magic moment in grief, when God intervenes, and we trust that we can make it through this. Is it something someone said? Was it something someone did? Was it the spirit of our loved one patting us on the shoulder and saying, "I'll be okay." Most times we don't know where the turning point came from. But we experience the glimmer of hope that begins the path to healing. Ruth had that moment and thanked us for being present to her pain.

In the next weeks, we could visibly see how Ruth moved along the journey from grief to mourning and made a difference in her life. Ruth began her grief work.

She began reaching out by accepting the reality of her changed life. Her energy spiked and she began a series of tedious tasks in her home that she put off for years. She salvaged her weed-ridden gardens and allowed them to glow again—reminding herself that this was something they once shared together. Her business got attention and she was able to greet her customers with revived enthusiasm.

It's not an end to Ruth's grief, but it was a beginning to developing the new self identity she needed to exist in her changed world. It didn't mean there was an end to her sadness and she could put her sadness behind. But it did mean, she could remember more of the good times and less of the pain.

In the January 2010 issue of Grief Digest, you will be able to read my article "You've Got the Power." It's an article based on recognizing the value of grief work and knowing when you are fully engaged. It will help you recognize the work you may have done and sometimes you don't remember it at all. It's part of swimming through the abyss of time when life makes no sense and all you can see is the depth of your grief and the murky likes of another day, alone. And then one day, the motion of moving your arms and legs forward through the pain reveals a rainbow—a bright spot that gives you hope. How you got there, you aren't quite sure, but it happened.. For that, you are grateful. This subject is the content of my book, *How a Fortune Cookie Heals Grief...* and the article, "You've Got the Power", is an excerpt of some of its rich, inspiring content. I encourage you to read and share the power that comes with hope.

*\*Ruth is not the real name of the person who inspired this story. Her story is slightly changed to emphasize the message in this article.*

## What you treasure most

It had been some time since Jack had seen the old man. College, girls, career, and life itself got in the way. In fact, Jack moved clear across the country in pursuit of his dreams. There, in the rush of his busy life, Jack had little time to think about the past and often no time to spend with his wife and son. He was working on his future, and nothing could stop him.

Over the phone, his mother told him, "Mr. Belser died last night. The funeral is Wednesday." Memories flashed through his mind like an old newsreel as he sat quietly remembering his childhood days.

"Jack, did you hear me?"

"Oh, sorry, Mom. Yes, I heard you. It's been so long since I thought of him. I'm sorry, but I honestly thought he died years ago," Jack said.

"Well, he didn't forget you. Every time I saw him he'd ask how you were doing. He'd reminisce about the many days you spent over 'his side of the fence' as he put it," Mom told him.

"I loved that old house he lived in," Jack said.

"You know, Jack, after your father died, Mr. Belser stepped in to make sure you had a man's influence in your life," she said

"He's the one who taught me carpentry," he said. "I wouldn't be in this business if it weren't for him. He spent a lot of time teaching me things he thought were important...Mom, I'll be there for the funeral," Jack said.

As busy as he was, he kept his word. Jack caught the next flight to his hometown. Mr. Belser's funeral was small and uneventful. He had no children of his own, and most of his relatives had passed away.

The night before he had to return home, Jack and his Mom stopped by to see the old house next door one more time.

Standing in the doorway, Jack paused for a moment. It was like crossing over into another dimension, a leap through space and time. The house was exactly as he remembered. Every step held memories. Every picture, every piece of furniture...Jack stopped suddenly.

"What's wrong, Jack?" his Mom asked.

"The box is gone," he said

"What box?" Mom asked.

"There was a small gold box that he kept locked on top of his desk. I must have asked him a thousand times what was inside.

All he'd ever tell me was 'the thing I value most,'" Jack said.

It was gone.. Everything about the house was exactly how Jack remembered it, except for the box. He figured someone from the Belser family had taken it.

"Now I'll never know what was so valuable to him," Jack said. "I better get some sleep. I have an early flight home, Mom."

It had been about two weeks since Mr. Belser died, when returning home from work one day, Jack discovered a note in his mailbox.

"Signature required on a package. No one at home. Please stop by the main post office within the next three days," the note read.

Early the next day Jack retrieved the package. The small box was old and looked like it had been mailed a hundred years ago. The handwriting was difficult to read, but the return address caught his attention. "Mr. Harold Belser" it read. Jack took the box out to his car and ripped open the package.

*Continued on page 4*



## What you treasure most ...

*Continued from page 3*

"Upon my death, please forward this box and its contents to Jack Bennett. It's the thing I valued most in my life." A small key was taped to the letter. His heart racing, as tears filling his eyes, Jack carefully unlocked the box. There inside he found a beautiful gold pocket watch.

Running his fingers slowly over the finely etched casing, he unlatched the cover. Inside he found these words engraved:

"Jack, Thanks for your time! -Harold Belsler."

"The thing he valued most was....my time"

Jack held the watch for a few minutes, then called his office and cleared his appointments for the next two days. "Why?" Janet, his assistant asked.

"I need some time to spend with my son," he said.

"Oh, by the way, Janet, thanks for your time!"

## A Shortcut through the Cemetery

*Walking home after a Halloween party, two young men decided to take a shortcut through the cemetery for a thrill. They both stopped abruptly when they heard a mysterious tap-tap-tapping noise in the shadows. Their eyes grew large until the mist cleared and they saw an old man with a hammer and chisel, chipping at one of the headstones.*



## Be Good to Yourself A Care Tip

### **Accept the Inevitable**

We've all heard that there are two things in life that are certain: death and taxes.

Taxes, we accept; but sometimes accepting the death of a loved one is the most difficult thing we have ever had to do.

Grief will make itself known. It will demand your attention and get it, one way or the other. Denial about one's loss leads to anxiety and continues to wear on your spirit and your energy until you give into it. Try not to avoid the inevitable. Allow your grief to be heard and experienced. Make peace with your feelings by expressing them to someone who will listen. Or you can express feelings through writing, singing, shouting, crying, or praying. Each of these outlets will allow you to be true to yourself. This begins the path of intentional grief work.

*In the words of alla Bozarth-Campbell:*

**"Pain becomes bearable when we are able to trust that it won't last forever, not when we pretend that it doesn't exist."**

*"Geez, mister!" one of them exclaimed. "You scared us half to death! We thought you were a ghost! What are you doing working here so late at night?"*

*The old man replied angrily, "Those darn fools misspelled my name!"*

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## TWELVE GIFTS OF HOPE—A CONTINUING TRADITION

In this column, for a period of time, we will continue to share stories of the 12 Gifts of Hope. These stories are taken from my newest book: *How A Fortune Cookie Can Heal Grief*—a project in grief work. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing “hope.” Sometimes we are so consumed by our grief, that we fail to recognize the things in our lives that lead to hope.

This story is one of the ideas received from someone who took part in our project. There are dozens and dozens of inspiring examples. For more information about the project, visit our website: [www.wingsgrief.org](http://www.wingsgrief.org). For a complete story of “finding hope”, order our book “*How a Fortune Cookie Heals Grief*.”



### Gift of HOPE #3

**THE GIFT OF HOPE IS...TO HONOR A GRIEF BURST—  
A HAPPY MEMORY OF THE WAY IT USED TO BE.**

*What this means: Grief bursts are sudden bursts of emotion, usually happy reminders. A bereaved person may be embarrassed by his or her grief burst especially if it happens in a public place. But grief bursts are natural expressions of love and should be shared and honored. Share this memory with someone else as part of your loved one's story.*

**To appreciate how someone has helped you: THINK:** *How has someone shared a happy memory of my loved one with me? When I told someone about a special grief burst that I had, were they happy with me? Has someone else told me about a positive grief burst that they had in regards to my loved one? Think, how did that make me feel?*

About 4-6 weeks after my son's funeral, a cousin sent a beautiful spring flower as a reminder that they were still thinking of us and our loss. When all the other flowers had died, and just when you are thinking everyone has forgotten about the tragedy you went through, getting a spring bouquet was a wonderful feeling.

**I went to the garage to find a hammer to hang up a picture. On the workbench I found my husband's lucky coin that he always kept in his pocket, lying next to his golf glove. It reminded me of all the times he “swore” that his best scores were always received when he carried the coin with him. At first I cried, but then I smiled at the happiness this gave him.**

### ***The Gift Of Hope Is...***

To Find A New Place To Go Or  
Someone To Go With

### ***The Gift Of Hope Is...***

To Honor My Wish List On A Special  
Day Or Holiday

### ***The Gift Of Hope Is...***

To Honor A Grief Burst—A Happy  
Memory Of The Way It Used To Be

### ***The Gift Of Hope Is...***

To Have A Take Care Of “Me” Day—  
Treat Myself To Something That Feels  
Good

### ***The Gift Of Hope Is...***

To Recall A Cherished Memory That  
Makes Me Smile Or Laugh

### ***The Gift Of Hope Is...***

To Take Time-Out To Enjoy A Hobby,  
Sporting Event, Or Something My Loved  
One Liked To Do

### ***The Gift Of Hope Is...***

To give and receive Love and Support in  
unexpected ways

### ***The Gift Of Hope Is...***

To Heal My Pain Through Laughter,  
Music, Or Spirituality

### ***The Gift Of Hope Is...***

To Find A New Friend, A New Support  
Group Or Social Activity To Expand My  
Circle Of Life

### ***The Gift Of Hope Is...***

To Learn More About Grief Through  
Books, People, Classes Or Groups

### ***The Gift Of Hope Is...***

To Count My Blessings and Focus on  
What I Still Have, Not What I Have Lost

### ***The Gift Of Hope Is...***

To Give The Gift Of Hope To Someone  
Else In Need

# It Wouldn't be Ours

Sally Harmon

Our life may have been different, had  
we taken more turns

If we made different choices, if we  
had held back some words

If we didn't believe in wishing on stars

Our life may have been different

But it wouldn't be ours.

Our life may have been different had  
we not walked in the rain

If we always agreed and were always  
the same

Would we feel what we felt to make  
it this far?

Our life may have been different

But it wouldn't be ours.

Our life may have been different if  
we loved maybe less

If we didn't hang on tight; if we didn't  
feel blessed

If we didn't keep pushing and raising  
the bar

Our life may have been different

But it wouldn't be ours.

Our life may have been different if  
we stopped trying so much

We would not see the chips were face  
down and not up

If we weren't a couple in our finest hours

Life may have been different

But it wouldn't be ours.

Our life may have been different if  
we never met

But then all the memories would not  
have been kept

Memories together, these memories  
they are

What made our life different

They made our life ours.

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Sally lost her husband of 22 years when he  
accidentally fell from a ladder on an ordinary  
Saturday morning. In her collection of poems from  
*I Was Not Ready Yet-Poems of Love, Grief and  
Hope*, Sally expresses her feelings. You may reach  
her at [sallyharmon@rocketmail.com](mailto:sallyharmon@rocketmail.com)

## Learning to Live ...

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*Continued from page 1*

your feelings or rationalize them away. Just pay attention and be with them. Accept your feelings as you experience them and try to understand what they are communicating to you. Don't hang onto them or hide from them; they will drain you if not addressed. People have trouble talking about death because of how they feel about their own life or death, or because they cannot handle negative feelings. When my friend died, people weren't quite sure how to handle their own feelings, and they didn't know how to deal with mine, so they avoided the subject or avoided me. But I needed to talk about it. I needed to fully experience my sad feelings and I needed to be given the space to explore how I felt about losing this person, about what this person meant to me, and about the void that now exists in my life. After any loss, people need the space to explore their new reality and you can support them by just giving them this space.

***There are people who don't fear death; they fear life.*** Your life is a gift, an opportunity for you to experience this world and to make a difference while you're here. Learn to enjoy yourself. Take responsibility for living your life well. Don't get comfortable with mediocrity; challenge yourself to be more, to experience more. If you don't know how, hire a coach. You don't need to do life alone.

***Leave nothing left unsaid.*** The moment you experience the truth, share it. Tell people you love them...often. My grandmother used to say, "Never go to bed angry." That was her secret recipe for nearly 50 years of marital bliss. If you have something to say, say it now. About six months before my friend's death, I called and thanked this person for their love, kindness, and support over the years. This person had made a huge impact in who I'd become and I needed my friend to know how grateful I was for the part they played in my personal development. When my friend died, I was so glad I hadn't waited to share that.

***Create a Will.*** By having a Will, you clearly specify who gets what and it frees you from worry. You can relax knowing that when you're gone, your belongings and all you've worked for will pass on the way you intend.

***Create a Living Will.*** This lets others know how to care for you if something should happen that renders you unable to decide for yourself.

***Protect yourself with adequate life, health, disability, and long-term care insurance.*** With adequate protection, you leave nothing to chance, and you can relax knowing that you and your family are taken care of. It just makes sense.

***Do what you love.*** On most days, if you find yourself miserable when you roll out of bed in the morning, choose to do something about it. Life is too short to be unhappy for long. Identify the source of your angst and take action to change it. Choose to use up every ounce of potential that you were given. And discover, de-velop, and share your gifts with the world. Each one of us has a special gift. Do you know yours?

***No regrets.*** Don't approach your death bed wishing you had or being sorrowful for not doing things that would have brought you joy. The elderly often speak about what they would do differently: take more risks, spend more time with loved ones, worry less, stress less, laugh more, love more. If there is something you want to do, go for it. Don't wait. Tomorrow is not guaranteed.

So grab on with both hands and enjoy the ride. This is not a practice run. Do what you want to be doing. Be good to yourself. Stress less and remember that in the end, it doesn't really matter. What matters is how you live today!

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# How a **FORTUNE** **COOKIE** *can* **HEAL GRIEF**

## *How to Find Twelve Gifts of Hope*

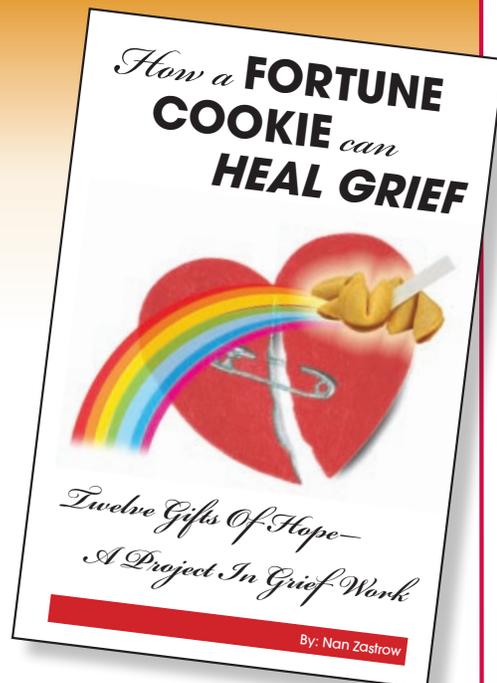
**“In a world of sadness and grief, hope is the spark of sanity that allows us to look at something differently and imagine the bright spot.”**

Did you ever think that a fortune cookie could offer a profound message of comfort, happiness, and peace in a life stressed by grief? Nan uses the simple fortune cookie to weave a modern parable of life and teach the value of attitude and choice in grief work. The fortune cookie demonstrates the concept of HOPE.

Sometimes we are so consumed by our grief that we fail to recognize hope happening in our lives and waiting to be discovered. This book teaches us not to dismiss the small acts of kindness that help us accept that though life may not be the same, it can be good again. Discover what you might be missing!

Nan challenged individuals to participate in a project using the fortune cookie as the “tool.” The project offered **Twelve Gifts of Hope** that the bereaved can either receive from others or give to themselves. This book documents the proven results. Each of the Twelve Gifts of Hope is outlined in detail with suggestions that will appeal to everyone as they discover the power to heal their own grief.

You will also find alternate suggestions for creating a similar project or you can just experience the peace and joy that others received from their discovery. You do not need to create a project to use the **Twelve Gifts of Hope** checklist to create personal enthusiasm. You will embrace countless possibilities for finding hope in the suggestions and personal stories; and you will be inspired to always look for the bright spot.



by Nan Zastrow

\$9.95

*Wings*  
A Grief Education Ministry

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