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## Whatever happened to "community" and face-to-face GRIEF?

by Ben Wolfe, GSS Program Manager/Grief Therapist

Families and community once upon a time buried their own. Neighbors and community were not only part of the living aspects of one's life, but also supporting the family after a death. After a death the "neighborhood" would stop their day and spend time acknowledging a person's life had come to an end. Neighbors often helped by digging the grave, making a casket and lowering it into the ground... shoveling the dirt. Families, neighbors and communities buried their own before funeral homes and cremation societies existed, before we "gave away" hands-on and face-to-face grief.

In "those days" community was defined as those individuals we could see and spend time with within a day's walk. Then the community expanded as man used horses. Then it expanded again with the invention of the car, then the airplane, and now we live in a "world community" with the internet and technology that brings events and people right into our "space" in real time.

Whatever happened to "community" and face-to-face grief? In California due to people being so busy they utilized "drive by visitations" where you can stay in your car and "order-up a deceased person to visit" as you drive through the back/side of the funeral home. Rather like a

"McDonald's drive through without the fries!" We are busy after all and cannot waste any of our precious time parking the car, going in to share our condolences with the family of the deceased (even the euphemism "deceased" is used versus THEY HAVE DIED!), and then getting back into the car and caring on with our life.

Many persons are now starting to tell their family members, "I do not want a funeral or memorial service after I die." My comment to those family members... "I'm sorry about your loved one's death, but they are dead and as a result, they lose their rights. What do YOU need?" Death hurts and acknowledging it helps us not only confront its reality, but also publicly allows OUR community to share their stories and in turn, to grieve themselves. Through some type of ritual(s) we acknowledge life has changed, that life is different.

I truly do acknowledge we ARE busy with work and other commitments, and as a result what we would like to do doesn't always work...and this is one area where "community" has changed. The tech revolution has changed the face of supporting the bereaved. We no longer stop by and visit prior to death, nor often even after, but rather use technology to "share our condolences." Some use

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## Whatever happened . . . from page 1

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Facebook as a way to share their memories and thoughts, pictures, and connect with other persons who are also grieving. For those who see the world through technology this works, this does help “share stories” and is appreciated by griever... but what happens after the stories are shared? Where has the “community” gone? We joke about the “Jellobrigade,” those who stop by right after a crisis and bring casseroles, jello and everything else under the sun...and then two weeks later they are GONE. They (I am included at times) are gone onto the rest of their busy lives.

How do we stay connected long after the “Jellobrigade” leaves? How do we as a community continue to support bereaved persons who after three, six, nine, twelve months later finally come to terms that “the person is NOT coming back!” That grief does get easier, but lasts a lifetime, not just two weeks after one dies or “just the first year.” Where do we as community fit into one’s world as they “relearn their world” and those of us who were or become a part of it.

I-Phones, Facebook, blogs and blogging, e-mails, Intranet, Twitter, Google, YouTube, video-cams...for many a new world of social connecting. For others this is ALL they know. They are growing up with technology at their fingertips and use it to enhance their lives and their relationships. According to

AARP, The Magazine (Nov./Dec., 2010), “Kids used to sleep with teddy bears. Now 78 percent of 12 and 13-year olds who own cell phones have gone nighty-night with them at their sides. That figure rises to 86 percent among teens 14 and older. And young women take things even further: 21 percent of those 18 through 34 check Facebook in the middle of the night.” On-line grief support for many has also become important as it provides support often NOT found face-to-face with those who “once upon a time were my support system.” Technology and social networking is opening up people’s lives like never before...but what about the bereaved and their network after a death...whatever happened to actual face-to-face visits?

With today’s technology we can choose to never leave our homes. We can pay our bills, order our food, meet and have relationships with others, choose our clothes, and never have to spend “time” with the bereaved. All the best with your social networking... but I hope it will not stop the day to day phone calls, visits, dinners out, cups of coffee, and walks with the bereaved. I hope the keyboard will not take the place of supporting others face-to-face.

*Ben Wolfe is our Guest Speaker at the Spring Seminar on April 11-12, 2013. See the flyer at the end of this issue.*

### Share your grief

Sharing your story is a proven way to cope with loss, tragedy, or a major life change. You might not feel like telling others, but when you share your feelings, you are reaching for support. This will help you accept and adjust to your changed life. It’s part of the healing process that leads to acceptance, both intellectually and

emotionally. When you suppress your feelings, it can lead to major depression and other problems. Tell the world what has happened to you, what you are missing, your regrets, and your thoughts. Find people who will listen.

*(Louis LaGrand, Ph.D., Love Lives On)*

Be Good to You  
Be Good to Yourself — A Care Tip 



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

## EDITOR'S JOURNAL

# *Why Grief Never Ends*

## *A message from a seasoned griever*

Someone recently asked me, "How can you relate to grief and the newly bereaved when your loss occurred so long ago?"

I wondered if there was an expectation, that at some point, a griever just "quits" grieving. In my mind, a blizzard of activity and plausible explanations shouted loudly desiring to be expressed. But, I wanted to respond with a simple answer that would satisfy all doubts to my sincerity without being impolite. There is only one absolute answer. "Grief never goes away, completely; you just learn to live with it." Most grievers know instinctively that this is true, but any comforting alternative that gives a ray of hope is highly anticipated. This may not be true for everyone, but this is my story.

"Time" has little relevance on recovery, resolution, or peace—whatever term you wish to identify with that describes what you are seeking. Every griever (of a significant loss), at some point in their grief, will think or ask this age-old question. In a bereaved person's mind, there is an almost frantic search for something that

will lessen the pain and hurry the process. If a griever could count down the number of days until "it's over!"...this might offer consolation for grieving so long. However, an open-ended period of bereavement and adjustment is often just too overwhelming to grasp and too difficult to imagine.

Unfortunately, there are no timelines..no magic moments. No revelations to solve the mystery. There is no such thing as turning back time and regaining something so significantly lost. But there are some things that are certain.

This year, Wings™, celebrates its 20th anniversary. In April 1993, our beloved son, Chad E. Zastrow, died at the age of 21 as a result of suicide. His fiancé, Jenny, took her life 10 weeks later. My husband Gary and I consider ourselves "seasoned grievers" now, but not without feeling and not without knowing that at any moment, either of us can be right back there "in the moment" of our significant loss.

Grief is not an event that occurs and ends. The death of a loved one typically plays out its victory dance in grief bursts (subtle reminders that some things can never be forgotten), memories, loss of dreams, and anniversary dates for many years to come. But I am absolutely certain when I say, that most of those who grieve deeply will never

forget what occurred, or what's missing. Therefore, there is no question, and no doubt that I can remember what grief felt like... even though it occurred eons ago (possibly in your thoughts), but moments ago in my recollection.

### **How could I forget?**

Loss remains as a dull ache in one's heart even when one has made the commitment to move on to find new purpose, new relationships, and renewed passion. Moving on becomes the only way to fully exist. Forgetting or wiping your memory-bank clear of this person's life is an unlikely option.

How could I ever forget the darkest moment of my life on that early spring day in April when we received the horrific telephone call that gave us the news?

How could I forget when my dreams for Chad's future were suddenly aborted and crashed? Memories in a scrapbook ended at a prime time in life.

How could I forget that the assumptions of life like "Children should not die before their parents" aren't always true?

How can I forget when I see Chad's friends grow older, more mature...and remind me that I never got to see Chad reach his full potential?

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How can I ignore the fact that many personal relationships changed just because Chad died?

How can I forget when family and friends dote on grandchildren that I will never have?

Why does the family circle feel incomplete and why did it stop with him?

How could I forget when honored family traditions are no longer meaningful or appropriate because someone who lived and was a part of them is missing?

How could I forget to count the number of years since his birth on his birthday or the passing of time on the anniversary of his death? This is "lost time" that I don't get to celebrate and make new memories.

How can I forget when my meaning and purpose in life shifted from "mother" to something far more serious than I ever imagined?

This list could go on and on... but I'm sure you get the idea. The thoughts of what caused my grief and the dreams of what would never be really don't cease. I choose not to dwell on what might have been. I don't allow the reflection of unrealized moments cloud the vision of what my husband and I have accomplished in Chad's memory.

**What repairs the broken memories:**

Though it's impossible to forget our loss ( because so many

things trigger memories), the visions of the experience aren't as tragic and consuming as they were in the early days of grief. Pain softens; fears subside; unpleasant memories fade; faith grows; and lives are rebuilt with new goals and brighter futures. Our personal lives evolved and were redesigned into lives that are every bit as significant and worthy as the lives we once thought we might have lived before Chad died. Though our dreams took an abnormal culture shift from children/family to "others"—we were able to take pride in unexpected blessings and positive outcomes.

**So how can I still help other bereaved...even though I am a seasoned griever?**

No matter how long a time since Chad's death, I am defined by the event. I don't live in the dark shadow of his death nor have I allowed it to stifle my world view in a negative way. It has been a personal journey that not only put me in touch with the Greater Good, but in all things that make a human spiritual, compassionate, and whole. I choose to remember, because for me, it is the path to helping others. This is what is important about the journey from grief to healing. I can now answer the question, "Who am I now?"

I am and always will be a bereaved parent. On the inside, I've been redesigned with unique survivor traits. I am a seasoned griever who is still capable of

bringing hope to someone new to the journey. These are the things that turn the wheels and keep me active with the ministry of Wings.

• *Compassion*

I know instinctively how you feel, how it hurts; how you struggle; and though I can't take away your pain, I can be your companion through it.

• *Understanding*

I'm interested in listening to your grief talk. You are not crazy; you are in transition. Though the path seems lonely and scary right now, I can assure you, there will come a time of peace.

• *Time*

Time can be your adversary or your friend. Use your time to honor and pay tribute to your loved one, not to forever mourn his or her loss.

• *Stories*

Sharing your stories is like sharing your love. Initially your stories may be filled with woe, but I promise you...as time passes your stories will celebrate his or her life with dignity.

• *Education and support*

I've lived the experience and I choose to share what I've learned. I wish to be there to support you when you doubt that you can survive.

*Continued on page 5*

## Editor's Journal ...

*Continued from page 4*

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- *Confirmation*

I can confirm that there are no right or wrong ways to grieve. That your grief is YOUUnique and you deserve the right to express it, feel it, and heal it in your own way.

- *Belief in the mysteries of life and death*

I will encourage you to be open to the mysteries of life and death. There is so much to learn about the world beyond, but I am positive that love lives on; and I will see my loved ones again.

- *Spirit, Faith*

Even when it seems there is reason to blame or doubt, you will be amazed at how patient God is and how comforting to put your trust and hope in a Loving God.

- *Prepare those who grieve for hope*

I believe that there is a strategy for finding hope. Every person who is willing to put grief work into action has the ability to see hope and feel it redesign their life.

- *Re-emphasize what you have*

I will encourage you to focus on what you have (family, friends, health, jobs, skills, etc) rather than on what you have lost. Count your blessings every day for even the small things.

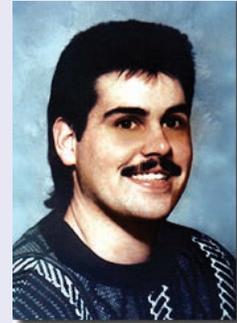
- *Peace*

I will demonstrate, through example, that good grief work promotes peace

- *Rejoice*

I'll remind you that accepting death is a part of life, and our lives here are "borrowed" as we work towards our heavenly home.

Our grief isn't "old" or out of date. It's seasoned by time and it's enriched by all those who have shared their journeys with Gary and me. You've encouraged me to write, and I've turned that into a word chronicle of ideas and hope. We call you friends because you have allowed us to feel your pain, share your struggles. We've prayed for your well-being and peace. We remember you—maybe not all by name—but you are a part of us, too. We've learned from your experiences because you've filled in the blank spots of things we didn't experience, so we could help others who have. We share a "forever" bond. When you thought we were helping you, you were helping us. Grief wasn't meant to be carried alone; it was meant to be an experience that involves others and reminds us to value life. Wings—and our ministry is our legacy, and the lessons continue.



*Chad. E. Zastrow*  
*December 4, 1971 - April 16, 1993*

Chad has been our inspiration. God has been our guide. Both have been the Wind beneath our Wings™.

We trust that our experience will continue to benefit you.

## *Bless my Friends*

(In today's social media world, we sometime forget how important our friends are to helping us face our tragedies and triumphs, day-to-day. Here is a special prayer for them.)

Every single evening  
As I'm lying here in bed,  
This tiny little Prayer  
Keeps running through my head:

God bless all my family  
Wherever they may be,  
Keep them warm  
And safe from harm  
For they're so close to me.

And God, there is one more thing  
I wish that you could do;  
Hope you don't mind me asking,  
Please bless my computer too.

Now I know that it's unusual  
To Bless a motherboard,  
But listen just a second  
While I explain it to you, Lord.

You see, that little metal box  
Holds more than odds and ends;  
Inside those small compartments  
Rest so many of my friends.

I know so much about them  
By the kindness that they give,  
And this little scrap of metal  
Takes me in to where they live.

By faith is how I know them  
Much the same as you.  
We share in what life brings us  
And from that our friendships grew.

Please take an extra minute  
From your duties up above,  
To bless those in my address book  
That's filled with so much love.

Wherever else this prayer may reach  
To each and every friend,  
Bless each e-mail inbox  
And each person who hits 'send'.

When you update your Heavenly list  
On your own Great CD-ROM,  
Bless everyone who says this prayer  
Sent up to GOD.Com

Wings invites you to become a friend on Facebook!

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Wings-a-Grief-Education-Ministry/172129829474003>

# From the Archives

*Stories worth repeating*



## What Do You Think?

by Nan Zastrow

### *Our readers share their thoughts on Healing Grief in 2013*

In our 2013 summer issue of the online Wings ELetter, we'd like to hear from you regarding your thoughts. Please feel free to reply to wings1@charter.net or nanwings1@gmail.com

**What special trait did your loved one have that you appreciated and would like incorporate into your life to add to who you are today (after your loss)?**

In the Winter edition of the ELetter, we asked...

### **What are you willing to commit to in 2013 to help you heal your grief?**

*Here are some of the replies that we received. (Edited for length and clarity).*

- I'm planning on doing something fun or uplifting. I also want to care for someone who might be having difficult days! ~ Beth Ann
- Continue to send CARE packages to our troops in Afghanistan (as a tribute to my son Darrien who was murdered in China)
- Continue to do pet therapy with my red labradoodle, Dara, at the Naval Hospital in San Diego
- Continue to reach out to every Senator and every Representative to sponsor a Bill so other families have assistance when relatives are murdered or die by mysterious circumstances while abroad. ~ Maxine
- Feel better about myself by losing some more weight. Joined a health club. Make some new girlfriends that I can do things with, go places, and confide in and laugh with. Since my husband died, I realize I need to make a new life. ~ Mary M.
- I have committed to discussing my loss, as I have bottled it up for too long ~ Mary E.
- Just living and doing things...not dwelling on my loss. Sometimes events bring back the bad memories (and I have to get past that.) ~ Michelle
- In January, I traveled alone to St. Petersburg via airplane, which I never did before. I've enrolled in a local tech school for continued education. ~ Tara
- Every time our family gets together we talk about my Dad, Russell. The stories and memories are what keeps the family going ~ Peggy
- Sort and clean through my husband's things, feeling the pain and cherishing the memories. ~ Sue

### **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.

## *Wings 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Trivia*

Most of our readers may be new to the Wings ELetter, but we have a long list of sponsors, supporters, and interested community friends that may not do any better than the “newbies” to Wings when trying to answer these trivia questions.

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### *~ How much do you know? ~*

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#### **When was Wings incorporated and what was its original intent?**

Incorporated in September 1993. Originally, the intent was to mail a newsletter to family and friends—mostly those who knew Chad, personally—regarding family thoughts and feelings about grief.

#### **What is the origination of the name Wings?**

Originally, the organization was called Roots and Wings, Ltd and the magazine was called Wings. The name came from a verse on a plaque that hung in our home: “ Two things I give my children. One is roots and the other is Wings.” The abbreviated name “Wings” became so familiar that it was adopted. About 12 years ago, the organization name was changed to Wings-a Grief Education Ministry to better describe the changed mission of Wings.

#### **Was the first edition of Wings a Memorial Edition?**

Basically, yes. Our son, Chad Eric Zastrow, died on April 16, 1993 as a result of suicide. In the Premier issue, I poured out my heart, shared his story, and defined what I wanted the newsletter to become.

#### **How did the newsletter evolve?**

The response to the initial Wings newsletter was so outstanding that people wanted to know more about healing grief, in general. The second newsletter went out a few months later and shared real stories about real people going through grief experiences. It also contained poems and inspirational stories. One column encouraged people to write their brief response to a “What do you think?” question. Every issue had a column, The Editor’s Journal, written by Nan Zastrow about her journey in grief.

#### **How was the Wings magazine used initially?**

In 1993, Nan & Gary presented the printed newsletter to funeral directors in the Wausau area. Several decided to send the printed newsletter to their families. Three of these funeral homes are still strong supporters of Wings today: Brainard Funeral Home, Helke Funeral Home, and Peterson/Kraemer Funeral Home from Wausau, WI. We also acquired funeral home in other part of Wisconsin and Minnesota.

#### **Why was the printed Wings magazine retired? (1993-2013)**

About 4 years after the initial newsletter, Wings reformatted and officially became a book-size magazine with more pages. That continued until 2003, when Nan received an offer to write as a regular columnist for Grief Digest magazine (from Centering Corporation). For one year she overlapped the Wings magazine and Grief Digest. Publishing the Wings magazine and writing for GD became too overwhelming. At the end of the year, the Wings magazine was retired. Since then a similar, smaller version is available by ELetter subscription at no charge.

#### **What is the most memorable story about the Wings magazine?**

Last spring, Wings received a coupon for a FREE issue from a woman in Minnesota. The coupon came from a 2001 issue and she wanted to know if she could get another copy of that specific issue. She received it from a funeral home in Minnesota when her son died and cherished it all these years. She recently gave it to a friend whose son died because she felt she needed it more than her. But, she really

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## **Wings 20th Anniversary Trivia - How Much Do You Know?**

wanted to see if she could replace the issue. Surprisingly, I still had back issues, and mailed her one.

### **What prompted Nan & Gary to advance their non-profit to become more than just a magazine?**

Nan and Gary attended the Center for Loss and Life Transition (beginning in 1997), under the direction of Dr. Alan Wolfelt, in Fort Collins, Colorado. After many classes, they became certified in grief education. They used these skills to hold workshops, support groups, and for public presentations. Nan and Gary continue their education yearly. In 2014, they will be going back to the Center for Loss for a graduate class.

### **What are the services of Wings:**

Today, Wings provides education/support groups series three times a year.

Wings also hold a “When the Holidays Hurt” workshop open to the general public with invited guests from the local funeral homes. This theme-based program will host its 17th annual program on December 3, 2013. The focus of each program is about coping with grief during the holidays. It offers tips and stories in an entertaining, informative format. Each Spring, Wings hosts an Understanding Grief Seminar with a well-known, speaker in the field of grief. There are two seminars with different subjects: one for the evening and another the following morning. Additionally, Nan and Gary do some public speaker and workshops at conferences.

### **How does Wings secure funds to present this variety of programs?**

Wings is a non-profit organization. It has no paid

staff. Wings has been gifted with individuals, funeral homes, businesses and a local hospital who endorse the ministry of Wings and provide some funding for its Events. Charitable donations allows Wings to manage with its limited funding. Our Volunteers often support Wings with “gifts” out of their own pockets. We feel very fortunate for our success for this many years and hope to continue.

### **What’s next for Wings?**

The Board and Volunteers are always considering new ideas for Wings. We will continue to provide outstanding Seminar speakers for as long as we can. We’ve recently adopted a presence with an updated website and Facebook. Who knows what lies ahead?

### **How To Connect With Wings:**

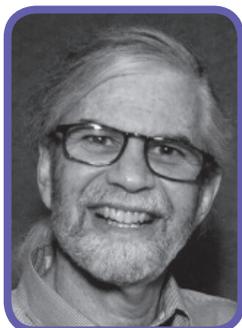
- Email: [wings1@charter.net](mailto:wings1@charter.net)
- Postal: P.O. Box 1051, Wausau, WI 54401
- Phone: 715-845-4159
- Follow the EVENTS calendar posted at the website
- Subscribe to the free online ELetter sent quarterly.
- Visit our website: [www.wingsgrief.org](http://www.wingsgrief.org)
- Order a Free copy of Grief Digest at [www.centeringcorp.com](http://www.centeringcorp.com)
- Visit Wings on **Facebook**



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.

# Understanding Grief Spring 2013 Seminar

*Presented by Wings - a Grief Education Ministry*



## Ben Wolfe

**Ben Wolfe** served as the founder, program manager and grief counselor of the St Mary's Medical Center Grief Support Services in Duluth, Minnesota for 28 years. He is a Fellow in Thanatology and has provided life-threatening illness and bereavement counseling for ages ranging from pre-school to senior citizens through individual and family counseling, and support groups. He has given over 2000 presentations at the regional, state, national and international levels, taught university graduates courses for over 25 years, and a course on life-threatening illness at the University of Minnesota, Duluth School of Medicine for 23 years.

Both seminars will be held at

### **Holiday Inn & Suites Cedar Creek**

1000 Imperial Avenue  
Rothschild, WI



*For information or a  
program brochure contact:*

**Nan Zastrow**  
715.845.4159

or

**Amy Kitsemel**  
715.847.2703



**CEU's applied for both programs  
from the WI Department of  
Licensing and Regulation.**

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Presented by

  
*A Grief Education Ministry*

*A community seminar for grieving families*

## How Death Changes a Family Through Grief, Loss and New Beginnings

Thursday, April 11, 2013  7:00 - 9:00 p.m.

Free of charge and open to the public

The death of a family member, significant other, relative or friend changes who we are. It provides us with a new "window" to look through which we have never seen before. It reshapes us. This program will examine: transitions and what brings them about; the wisdom that comes from exploring our "dark emotions;" relearning our world; and, strategies to help families and friends cope with the opportunities and struggles in the "journeys of transition."

*A Seminar for Clergy, Hospice, and Others Who Care for the Bereaved*

## Iceberg Theory: Counseling WAY BELOW the Surface

Friday, April 12, 2013  9:00 am – 12:00 noon

Cost: \$40.00

Death and crisis are a fact of life. Life changing events challenge our coping skills and force us to reassess our priorities. Working with people prior to or after an expected or sudden death of a loved one is challenging and can transform us. As individuals, and "work families," how are we changed by the work we do? In this interactive workshop, we will explore clinical interventions dealing with loss in its broadest sense, factors that influence grief, family make-up and communication styles, and what it means to "live in the second circle."

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