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Emotional Reactions to Sudden Death

by Bob Baugher

"The process of getting better can be compared to an involuntary ride on a runaway roller coaster."

The following article is based on excerpts from Bob's book, "A Guide for the Bereaved Survivor" and are the basis for this article on coping with sudden death. Bob's books are available through Centering Corporation (www.centering.org)

These excerpts may be one of the ways to help you begin the sometimes long and painful road of working through your grief. Keep in mind that while you may experience some of the listed reactions and may benefit from the suggestions, not all may apply to you. As authors, we have discovered that people like you, who are thrust into a painful situation, may not be fully aware of the effects of such a devastating event. It is our belief that information may help. In short, we can't take away the hurt, but maybe we can tell you something about it.

Shock

Shock is a natural response to crisis. Because your mind is reacting to an explosion of new information, shock is the brain's natural way of insulating against the full impact of the loss. Months and even years after a loss, many people look back at the first weeks and months following the death and realize that they had been in some degree of shock. And, as it wore off, they began to feel more of the raw pain of their loss.

Hyperactivity

Upon hearing the news and seeing the body, you may experience a heightened need to move around and get fresh air. This reeling of hyperactivity can also result in dizziness or light-headedness, a need to "sigh", a feeling of being trapped, and periods of disorientation. It's OK to ask for help. You deserve it. In most cases, people will want to help you. So ask, and ask again until you get all the help you need.

Denial

Understand why denial is normal. Most experts feel that during the early periods of grief, it is impossible for the human mind to grasp the full reality of the death and loss of a loved one because your brain has thousands of cells loaded with memories of the person alive and well. In short, your brain cannot "get it". One of the critical tasks of grief work is to confront and experience the reminders that a loss has occurred. Confronting the reminders may sound harsh, but the alternative is to avoid them at the expense of staying at the higher end of the Denial Scale. Realize that, while at times you want to talk about the deceased person, other people in your life may want to avoid such a discussion altogether. They may feel the silence is less painful for you, and for them. Find someone who wants to listen.

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EDITOR'S JOURNAL



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

The Ripple Effect

Gary and I often joke about the "Ripple Effect". In fact, I even documented how Wings-a Grief Education Ministry sustained the proof that there is such a thing as the Ripple Effect. And, it's amazing how many times it comes back to prove it's true!

How wonderful to connect with friends during various phases of your journey throughout your life! Facebook, for all the gossip and the trouble it can bring, it can also be a harbor for forgotten friends, cherished memories, and links to valuable information and contacts for your future. It's in integral part of that crazy Ripple Effect.

In April 2012, I received a letter (yes, a real handwritten letter) from a woman from Minnesota. In 1997, she received a copy of the Wings magazine from a Funeral home who distributed them. It happened to be an issue "Death of a Child at Any Age". Having lost her adult son, she hung onto the issue. She wrote me to ask me if I happened to have another copy since it meant so much to her, and she was passing her issue on to someone else who needed it now. Who could believe that an article that old was not tucked away and forgotten! I was amazed.

Wings survives by its "pass it on" theory since its origination in 1993. But the even crazier benefit of the whole theory is how much it gratifies Gary and me with its boomerang spirit. Sometimes there is mystery involved. Sometimes confirmation of our intimate thoughts. Sometimes approval of our outspoken utterings. Sometimes just an amazing story from a reader!



One of these kinds of mysteries continues. Each spring, when we take the flowers to the cemetery, someone beats us there. Next to Chad's headstone is beautiful metal butterfly. In May this year, a new one appeared again...silver and black, glistening and new. I still don't know who places it there, but wow!—how that make my heart soar! I know it's not family; and suspect that it is a friend from Chad's life, who so silently continues to visit him like we do.

I'm grateful for the Ripple Effect! Read this issue and "pass it on!" thank you!

So what is the Ripple Effect? It's the curious phenomenon of "pass it on." One person tells another person and the ripples widen and sends forth greater joy. One story multiplies and the message reaches the ears of hundreds. One emotional, loving picture sends a chill and ignites the spirit of others who feared they couldn't feel emotion anymore. One word of encouragement, one smile, one thought promises hope and brightens a life for another day, another year, a lifetime.

Thank you, God, for giving me those people that broaden my ripple effect. I am blessed by their golden hearts and passion. In a world of sadness and daily challenge, allow me to find ways to continue to reach out and offer Hope. Allow the vast ripple to ever-widen it's potential grasp!

Recently, I posted a link to my latest article from the Grief Digest magazine (Chasing the Shadow of Grief) on my Wings Facebook page and my personal page. I received a wonderful response from a person we met in 2009 at the National Bereaved Parents Conference in New York. We met her and her husband at a workshop that we presented on Suicide-Stop the Silence. I couldn't remember her name, but by her comment, I was convinced she was the woman who attended our presentation.

She commented: "After (my son) died, I thought I was the only one. We searched for answers. Attended many workshops on suicide and was told over and over that suicide only happened if you had a mental disorder. After 3 years of searching, we met Nan and Gary Zastrow. We attended their workshop. Before they even started talking, I was crying. Finally--another family whose son died by suicide with no signs . . . the boy next door. I cried through the entire workshop. The Zastrows were my lifesavers. What Nan has written here (in the article mentioned above), is our life right now. This is why we do what we do. Friends/ Family please read this article and you will understand us. Thank you, Nan."

Tale of Six Boys

An Inspirational Story

Each year I am hired to go to Washington, DC, with the eighth grade class from Clinton, WI. where I grew up, to videotape their trip. I greatly enjoy visiting our nation's capitol, and each year I take some special memories back with me. This fall's trip was especially memorable.

On the last night of our trip, we stopped at the Iwo Jima memorial. This memorial is the largest bronze statue in the world and depicts one of the most famous photographs in history -- that of the six brave soldiers raising the American Flag at the top of a rocky hill on the island of Iwo Jima, Japan, during WW II. Over one hundred students and chaperones piled off the buses and headed towards the memorial. I noticed a solitary figure at the base of the statue, and as I got closer he asked, "Where are you guys from?"

I told him that we were from Wisconsin. "Hey, I'm a cheese head, too! Come gather around, Cheese heads, and I will tell you a story."

James Bradley just happened to be in Washington, DC, to speak at the memorial the following day. He was there that night to say good night to



his dad, who has since passed away. He was just about to leave when he saw the buses pull up. I videotaped him as he spoke to us, and received his permission to share what he said from my videotape. It is one thing to tour the incredible monuments filled with history in Washington, D.C., but it is quite another to get the kind of insight we received that night.) When all had gathered around, he reverently began to speak. (Here are his words that night.)

"My name is James Bradley and I'm from Antigo, Wisconsin. My dad is on that statue, and I wrote a book called "Flags of Our Fathers" which is #5 on the New York Times Best Seller list right now. It is the story of

the six boys you see behind me.

"Six boys raised the flag. The first guy putting the pole in the ground is Harlon Block. Harlon was an all-state football player. He enlisted in the Marine Corps with all the senior members of his football team. They were off to play another type of game. A game called "War." But it didn't turn out to be a game. Harlon, at the age of 21. There are people who stand in front of this statue and talk about the glory of war. You guys need to know that most of the boys in Iwo Jima were 17, 18, and 19 years old.

(He pointed to the statue) "You see this next guy? That's Rene Gagnon from New Hampshire. If you took Rene's helmet off at the moment this photo was taken and looked in the webbing of that helmet, you would find a photograph...a photograph of his girlfriend. Rene put that in there for protection because he was scared. He was 18 years old. Boys won the battle of Iwo Jima. Boys. Not old men.

The next guy here, the third guy in this tableau, was Sergeant Mike Strank. Mike is my hero. He was the hero of all

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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.

Tale of Six Boys ...

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these guys. They called him the "old man" because he was so old. He was already 24. When Mike would motivate his boys in training camp, he didn't say, 'Let's go kill some Japanese' or 'Let's die for our country.' He knew he was talking to little boys. Instead he would say, 'You do what I say, and I'll get you home to your mothers.'

"The last guy on this side of the statue is Ira Hayes, a Pima Indian from Arizona. Ira Hayes walked off Iwo Jima. He went into the White House with my dad. President Truman told him, 'You're a hero.' He told reporters, 'How can I feel like a hero when 250 of my buddies hit the island with me and only 27 of us walked off alive?' So you take your class at school, 250 of you spending a year together having fun, doing everything together. Then all 250 of you hit the beach, but only 27 of your classmates walk off alive. That was Ira Hayes. He had images of horror in his mind. Ira Hayes died dead drunk, face down at the age of 32 ... ten years after this picture was taken.

"The next guy, going around the statue, is Franklin Sousley from Hilltop, Kentucky . A fun-lovin' hillbilly boy. His best friend, who is now 70, told me, 'Yeah, you know, we took two cows up on the porch of the Hilltop General Store. Then we strung wire across the stairs so the cows couldn't get down..Then we fed them Epsom salts. Those cows crapped all night. Yes, he was a fun-lovin' hillbilly boy. Franklin

died on Iwo Jima at the age of 19. When the telegram came to tell his mother that he was dead, it went to the Hilltop General Store. A barefoot boy ran that telegram up to his mother's farm. The neighbors could hear her scream all night and into the morning. The neighbors lived a quarter of a mile away.

"The next guy, as we continue to go around the statue, is my dad , John Bradley from Antigo, Wisconsin, where I was raised. My dad lived until 1994, but he would never give interviews. When Walter Cronkite's producers, or the New York Times would call, we were trained as little kids to say 'No, I'm sorry, sir, my dad's not here. He is in Canada fishing. No, there is no phone there, sir. No, we don't know when he is coming back. My dad never fished or even went to Canada . Usually, he was sitting there right at the table eating his Campbell's soup. But we had to tell the press that he was out fishing. He didn't want to talk to the press. "You see, my dad didn't see himself as a hero. Everyone thinks these guys are heroes, 'cause they are in a photo and on a monument. My dad knew better. He was a medic. John Bradley from Wisconsin was a caregiver. In Iwo Jima he probably held over 200 boys as they died.

"When I was a little boy, my third grade teacher told me that my dad was a hero. When I went home and told my dad that, he looked at me and said, 'I want you always to

remember that the heroes of Iwo Jima are the guys who did not come back. Did NOT come back.'"

"So that's the story about six nice young boys. Three died on Iwo Jima, and three came back as national heroes. Overall, 7,000 boys died on Iwo Jima in the worst battle in the history of the Marine Corps. My voice is giving out, so I will end here. Thank you for your time."

Suddenly, the monument wasn't just a big old piece of metal with a flag sticking out of the top. It came to life before our eyes with the heartfelt words of a son who did indeed have a father who was a hero. Maybe not a hero for the reasons most people would believe, but a hero nonetheless. We need to remember that God created this vast and glorious world for us to live in, freely, but also at great sacrifice. Let us never forget from the Revolutionary War to the current War on Terrorism and all the wars in-between that sacrifice was made for our freedom. Remember to pray praises for this great country of ours and also pray for those still in murderous unrest around the world. STOP and thank God for being alive and being free at someone else's sacrifice.

(source: Internet)

Sudden death ...

Continued from page 1

Emotional Numbness

When you are asked, "How do you feel?" you may experience an absence of emotional feeling and say, "I don't feel anything." You may be unable to cry. Emotional numbness bothers many people because of the absence of feelings or reactions. When you choose to talk about your feelings of grief, some people will seem to ignore how you feel. At other times they will listen intently. Take the risk to be honest and keep looking for opportunities to be heard.

The reactions of shock, denial, body numbness, and emotional numbness all work together to protect you from the incredible overload that would take place in your mind, body and spirit if you realized the full impact of the loss in your life. While these reactions are confusing, please remember that your brain's built-in tendency to protect itself from pain makes insulation and numbness to a significant loss the rule, rather than the exception.

Sadness and Depression

Realize sadness and depression are normal reactions to loss. One woman described her loss as follows: "It felt like a tree in my heart had been ripped out by the roots." It's OK to feel lousy. Some days will be worse than others. Do not suppress crying. It's a natural channel through which your mind and body can work through the pain. One way that some bereaved people derive comfort is by having a "conversation" with the person who died. While this may sound strange, it is not uncommon. However, it is unhealthy if the bereaved person denies the reality of the death or feels that they are being controlled by their loved one. Another way to cope is to write a letter to the person who died. Remember this is not a good-bye letter. Instead, it is a way to work out some unfinished business.

Guilt

Remember that whatever you were doing when the death occurred, you were doing what you felt was the right thing to do at the time. Now, looking back it is easy to say, "I should have done it another way." It's okay to feel guilty for a while, but then set a date and let go. This means you are willing to work on letting go of your guilt.

Self-Punishment

Some people engage in dangerous behaviors like inflicting physical pain on their body; not giving appropriate medical attention to an injury or wound; driving recklessly, or taking unnecessary risks. You may feel that you do not "deserve" to do pleasurable things like laughing, going to a movie, engaging in sexual behavior, going on a trip, or participating in a recreational or social activity. Another form of this may be described as "not caring for life."

Do not engage in dangerous behaviors despite the fact that you feel, "What's the use?" Your loved one would never have wanted to think that their death caused you to hurt yourself. Some bereaved people, especially parents who have lost children and men and women who have lost a spouse, think seriously about suicide for a time after the death.

Ask yourself this question: "Would I want to add another death to my family that is already overwhelmed with grief?" As much as you may not feel like it, do all you can to eliminate self-punishing behaviors. You may feel, as do many bereaved people, that somehow the death of your loved one is "proof" that you are a bad person or that there is a "curse" on your family tree. Even though this may seem true, it is critical that you understand that the death does not define who you are.

Anger

Anger may arise at any person or organization directly or indirectly associated with the death. It is important to identify the anger issues in your life so that you can begin to sort out your grief reactions. Ask yourself the following questions: (1) with whom am I upset regarding this death? (2) What are the reasons for my anger? (3) What are the triggers for my anger? (4) What can I do about my anger? (5) Have I been scapegoating incorrect parties? (6) Is there a way to channel my anger into something more positive?

It is common to feel anger toward someone you perceive as being "guilty" for the death, including

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Sudden death ...

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yourself. If there is an unknown guilty party, you may experience some non-directional anger, a feeling of helplessness, and perhaps fear for your own life. While it's okay to feel anger as the result of a death, what you do with the feeling is a critical issue. If you are experiencing bodily sensations that require a release, then using a safe means to do so is a healthy way of coping. Find someone you can talk to about your anger. Support groups are a helpful way to address these issues.

Reminders

It will seem everywhere you look there are reminders that suddenly bring back memories of your loved one. Some are painful and some bring a smile. Examples of these may be: birthdays, another death, certain people, clothing, food, songs, special places, and words or phrases. In the early part of the grief process, some of these reminders will feel overwhelming and the intensity of the reactions will not decrease without several more exposures to the reminders. Although confronting painful reminders is difficult, doing so appears to be one of the most constructive ways to work through grief. As the process goes by, you may begin to see some of the reminders as a way of telling you that you loved one lived a life, and though physically absent, this special person continues to exist in your memory and the memory of others.

At this time in your life, the world looks different. It may appear callous, cold, dull, frightening, indifferent, uncaring and unreal. You may find yourself surprised that, despite the fact that your life has totally changed, the rest of the world appears to

operate just as it always has. Even those people who know you well will not understand some of your grief reactions. After awhile, most people will want to see you as "over" your loss.

Recognize that your relationship with your loved one cannot totally be understood by anyone. There are, however, *some* people who can understand some of what you are going through. Because it is difficult for some people to watch your grief in all its intensity and duration, you may experience the departure of people who were once close to you. Continue to reach out despite setbacks

You might ask, "Isn't there a way to avoid the roller coaster ride altogether?" Most experts believe that avoiding the bereavement process leads to future emotional and physical problems. Despite all the pain you are feeling today as you read this article, there is an unyielding guarantee we can offer you: *At some point in your life, you will not feel this terrible.* And in fact, some day in the future you will look back at this time period and say, "How did I ever make it through this difficult time in my life?"

Bob Baugher is a psychology instructor at Highline Community College in Washington State. He has been teaching courses on death and life for over two decades. As a counselor and researcher, he has worked with bereaved parents and siblings, children and adults, widows and widowers and cancer patients to name a few. Twice he has been an invited speaker for the Wings Understand Grief Seminar in the spring. Look for him to come to our town again in the future.

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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.



From the Archives

Stories worth repeating...



The Ultimate Sacrifice

In America, we have long observed the funeral traditions and ceremonies as a way to remember an honor those who died. As a nation, we have some very formal rituals that grant the highest honors of members of our armed forces who have died in the service of their country—especially those who died in military duty. We show honor with honor guards, flag-draped coffins, salutes, and burials in cemeteries for veterans who made the ultimate sacrifice.

The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Arlington National Cemetery remembers servicemen who have died in combat but whose remains were not identifiable. This soldier gave up his life for his country, including his identity. He cannot be returned to his home, his friends or loved ones, or laid to rest in the site of their choosing. He stand for the purest ideals of courage, valor and sacrifice for our country. The first soldier, In Honored Glory An American Soldier Known But To God" was interred there with the remains of 2 others representing the foreign wars (World War I, World War II, and the Korean War). In 1984 the tomb included remains of a serviceman killed in the Vietnam War. However,

in 1998, thorough DNA the remains were identified and the remains were returned to the family. The Vietnam crypt has since remained empty.

This site is guarded around the clock, every day of the year, by specially trained members of the Third United States Infantry Regiment (also known as the "Old Guard"). The Sentinels who guard the Tomb must be exemplary in discipline, dress, and bearing, thoroughly knowledgeable, and able to execute a variety of ceremonial rites flawlessly and with precision.

It is important that we are routinely reminded of the ultimate sacrifice and respect our freedom as Americans. It is with pride, that we reiterate these important facts in this issue of Wings, about the Tomb of the Unknowns.

1. How many steps does the guard take during his walk across the tomb of the Unknowns and why?

Answer: 21 steps. It alludes to the twenty-one gun salute, which is the highest honor given any military or foreign dignitary.

2. How long does he hesitate after his about face to begin his return walk and why?

Answer: 21 seconds for the same reason as answer number 1.

3. Why are his gloves wet?

Answer: His gloves are moistened to prevent his losing his grip on the rifle.

4. Does he carry his rifle on the same shoulder all the time, and if not, why not?

Answer: He carries the rifle on the shoulder away from the tomb. After his march across the path, he executes an about face, and moves the rifle to the outside shoulder.

5. How often are the guards changed?

Answer: Guards are changed every thirty minutes, twenty-four hours a day, 365 days a year.

6. What are the physical traits of the guard limited to?

Answer: For a person to apply for guard duty at the tomb, he must be between 5'10" and 6' 2" tall and his waist size cannot exceed 30".

From the Archives ...

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Other requirements of the Guard: They must commit 2 years of life to guard the tomb, live in a barracks under the tomb, and cannot drink any alcohol on or off duty for the rest of their lives. They cannot swear in public for the rest of their lives and cannot disgrace the uniform {fighting} or the tomb in any way.

After two years, the guard is given a wreath pin that is worn on their lapel signifying they served as guard of the tomb. There are only 400 presently worn. The guard must obey these rules for the

rest of their lives or give up the wreath pin.

Their shoes are specially made with very thick soles to keep the heat and cold from their feet. There are metal heel plates that extend to the top of the shoe in order to make the loud click as they come to a halt. There are no wrinkles, folds or lint on the uniform. Guards dress for duty in front of a full-length mirror.

The first six months of duty a guard cannot talk to anyone, nor watch TV. All off duty time is

spent studying the 175 notable people laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery. A guard must memorize who they are and where they are interred. Among the notables are: President Taft, Joe E. Lewis {the boxer} and Medal of Honor winner Audie Murphy, (the most decorated soldier of WWII) of Hollywood fame. Every guard spends five hours a day getting his uniforms ready for guard duty.

I Wonder What She Thought

Remembering Sept 11, 2001

I wonder what she thought
As she stood there, strong and tall.
She couldn't turn away
She was forced to watch it all.

Did she long to offer comfort
As Her county bled?
With her arm forever frozen
High above her head?



She could not shield her eyes
She could not hide her face,
She just stared across the water
Keeping Freedom's place.

The smell of smoke and terror
Somehow reduced her size.
So small within the harbor
But still we recognized.

How dignified and beautiful
On a day so many died,
I wonder what she thought,
I know she must have cried.

unknown

Fall 2012 Getting Back to Life – After Loss

A Learning and Support Series
for Grief, Loss and Transition

“Pain becomes bearable when we are able to trust that it won’t last forever, not when we pretend it doesn’t exist.”

There is no easy way around the pain of losing a loved one. Grief has no rules and no timetables. Understanding the grieving process can soothe the doubts that linger. Learn about the “surprises” of grief and the emotions that affect you physically, mentally, and spiritually. In this six week series, you will learn about normal grief and hopefully gain a renewed sense of hope. Come and learn, share feelings, and ask questions to gather hints about picking up the pieces after loss.

This group is an education and support series. It is open to anyone who is grieving the loss of a loved one regardless of the circumstances of death. We do not advise or counsel. We listen, teach, and share grief experiences. Getting back to life is not about forgetting, but rather about finding a way to go on without your loved one who died.

Join us on Tuesday, September 18 and find information that can validate your thoughts and help you face one of life’s greatest challenges.

What you can expect:

This group is educational in design but provides plenty of time for personal stories, questions, and support. Expect to discover:

- What normal grief is and why you aren’t crazy
- Accept and take action in social grief situations
- How to accept and deal with guilt, anger, and the barriers of grief
- How to prepare yourself for life after grief

Presented by:

 **Wings**
A Grief Education Ministry

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Fall 2012 Session

Meets Tuesdays for 6 Weeks:

September 18, 25 and October 2, 9, 16, 23
6:30 – 8:00 p.m.

Aspirus Wausau Hospital, Quality Services
Conference Room A-1

No charge

Facilitators:

Nan & Gary Zastrow
Certified Grief Educators

For more information:

Call Nan Zastrow at 715-845-4159
Group size is limited
Pre-registration is appreciated