



Creating a Circle of Forever Friends

By Nan Zastrow

Ten years ago, I wrote an article for my journal about our 40th wedding anniversary. And here it is, another 10 years later—and we are celebrating another milestone. I wrote then that the article wasn't about grief, but rather about the outstanding people who helped us survive before and after grief. It was a tribute to the friends, family, and amazing people we've been privileged to know in our lives. It demonstrated a remarkable lesson of looking back and realizing you are who you are today because of your experiences and because of those people in your life that stuck by you and shared them with you.

On June 17, Gary and I celebrated our 50th wedding anniversary. And I'm so blessed to still be here and still have my amazing family and friends in my life. The past 10 years have carried with them many ups and downs, joy and sorrow, sickness and health just as the decades before. But the one outstanding thing that I'm grateful for—is the opportunities Gary and I have had to appreciate our relationships with old friends and gain new friends through all the phases of our lives.

As I was reviewing my address book from 10 years ago, I was startled at the number of friends who were no longer in our lives on a regular basis. Many had died, and when it happens a little at a time, you don't realize how many it has been. Initially, I felt like our world got so much smaller. In addition, there are quite a few that moved away (to warmer climates, I'm sure) or are not actively involved in our lives as they were before.

At first, the realization seemed scary. Then I began to recreate my list adding a whole new circle of friends that shared our current thoughts, experiences, and future dreams. It was a picture of life going forward.

I accept that our friendships are often based on our “stage of life.” The accumulation of friends over the years from jobs, activities, and community involvement changes. Not all of our friends will remain from one stage to another (i.e., college to young adult to retirement). Keeping in touch as the pool of friendship grows becomes a challenging experience, because all of us are affected by life changes and responsibilities that take us down different roads.

So again, I can connect my observation to grief. In grief, our “address book” often changes. Friends know about our loss. Some know how to handle it and others don't. The friends you make after loss only know you the way you are at the present time. They probably don't know what you were like before your loss and before they met you. They don't even consider that you have a new identity as you emerge from a life-changing experience. They see you as you speak, interact, and live now. They don't know your grief story until you choose to tell them. You are living in a new chapter of “life goes on.”

As I looked at our list, I realized that we don't have “fair-weather” friends. We have friends who know our story, know our pain, and appreciate our passions about grief. Fair-weather friends are those who can be depended upon only when everything is going well. I realized our list of friends are “forever” friends! They know our losses, our disappointments, and our life experiences which may be very different from theirs, but they value our association nevertheless. Wow! How much more blessed can we be?

Good grief is about looking back and recognizing who sticks beside you when you've been faced with life's hardest blow. Good grief is about recognizing that even though years pass and lives change, good friends will always be there. Good grief is about memories that never fade, but become the glue of relationships that last for an eternity.

Celebrating 50 years of marriage puts a new perspective on our meaning and purpose. Things happen for unknown reasons. People we meet are part of the plan of life and are meant to be in our story for however long is appropriate. We appreciate the time we spent together. We value what they have taught us and hope that we have shared something purposeful for them. We know that each has a story in our memory book, and we will forever consider them friends.

Find *hope & healing* during your **GRIEF**

with one of these books by Nan

***Blessed Are They That Mourn* \$7.95**

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

***How a Fortune Cookie can Heal Grief* \$7.95**

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 weaves a modern parable of life and teaches the value of attitude and choice in grief work. Discover what you might be missing. Read personal stories with results by people who used the Twelve Gifts of Hope-a project in grief work.

***Ask Me. 30 Things I Want You to Know* \$5.95**

All grievers want to be heard, but many suffer in silence. This book speaks to "30 Things" you will want to know about surviving grief (not just suicide grief). ASK ME teaches you what to expect and how to plan your response to uncomfortable situations. "When I am most vulnerable, here is what I want you to know," says Nan.

***Hitch Your Hope to a Star* \$7.95**

Here is a collection of stories about HOPE. Each shares its perspective through analogies and lessons learned during the journey through grief. Give this as a gift book to someone who is hurting, someone who has lost a special loved one, or to someone who could use reassurance that we are resilient individuals who survive the roller coaster experiences of life and grow from telling our stories.

***When the Holidays Hurt* \$7.95**

For nearly two decades, Nan, and her husband, Gary, have inspired the bereaved through community holiday programs for those who grieve. They offer ideas to preserve holiday sanity and sanctity based on their own experiences. Learn how to unwrap and add heart-warming, commemorative rituals into the holiday that honors and remembers your loved one who died. In this book is a collection of stories meant to inspire you and encourage you as you plan your first holidays after your loss.



Available at:

Wings
A Grief Education Ministry

P.O. Box 1051
Wausau, WI 54402-1051

Web: Wingsgrief.org
Email: nanwings1@gmail.com
www.centering.org
amazon.com

1-866-218-0101