



MID HUDSON NEW YORK CHAPTER

Newsletter

together we remember... together we heal...

Kathy Corrigan Chapter Leader

www.bereavedparentsusa.org

MAY/JUNE 2015



SEASONS of HEALING

BPUSA National Gathering • July 24-26 • Hartford CT

Please join us for our next meetings

Thursday, May 7th -- Topic: Mother's Day/Father's Day: A Day of Mourning for Parents Who Have Lost a Child

Thursday, June 4th – Topic: Who Am I Now??

7:00 at The Children's Home of Poughkeepsie, 10 Children's Way, Poughkeepsie, NY

Call Kathy (845) 462-2825 for information

RE-POTTED PLANTS

By Connie Pike

The past several months I have bemoaned the condition of our potted plants. "Look at them all; they're dying," I whined to my husband. He was the one with the green thumb, spending hours pulling weeds, tending to the flower beds, changing out the perennials with the seasons. But the condition of the potted plants was no pressing matter to him, no matter how many times I broached the subject. Finally, Bob said that WE should tackle this project together. I was not impressed. However, I accompanied him to the Home Depot and selected an assortment of new, large containers and huge bags of potting soil. "We should just throw them out," I said. "They are practically dead anyway." His response was that we were to be responsible caregivers of Mother Earth and leave our carbon footprint. Besides, they just needed some pruning, new soil, new homes and some love and care. I begrudgingly agreed but what about just composting?

As I began to attack each plant with my shears, cutting back all the dead leaves in preparation for re-potting, I became lost in thought of what the plants really represented. One year ago, our 21 year old son, a junior at the University of South Florida, was leaving to go to San Francisco for a brief business trip before starting summer classes on May 15. He returned from his adventure and spent the weekend of Mother's Day here with us in our Apollo Beach home. We had a great Mother's Day. I made him do the shopping for me. We had a steak dinner. I

requested extra hugs. He, his sister and two friends spent the night and stayed up late playing music upstairs. At 2 a.m., Taylor decided to go for a spin on his motorcycle. He loved to drive fast and was just out for a spin around the block. Just a half mile from home, he "failed to navigate a curve" as the newspaper article penned it, hit a curb and was hurled from his bike into a railing. His friends heard the accident and woke up Bob and me. What followed was a 911 call and a rush to the scene. Taylor was already gone; a blunt trauma to the neck which severed his brain stem, aorta and heart. His helmet was cracked and of no protection for such an impact. We beat the paramedics and police to the scene. No parent should ever have to...

So, then there is the funeral to plan, followed by all these flowers and plants. THESE dying plants—they are all from his funeral. These plants were neglected. Grief is hard work. You get distracted. They were all dying, to be sure. So here we were at a cross-road—dump the dying plants or bring them back to life. Is there some symbolism here? What about my grief, my decisions of how to process it—continue living or die? These plants, my spirit, my life-force, my faith—they all have something in common.

Some say that our greatest spiritual growth comes to us in our greatest pain. I believe that. As with these plants, our spirit and our faith can die or thrive. It is a choice. For the plants, do we dump them or do we nurture them? For me, now a bereaved parent, do I die away or do I nurture my spirit and thrive despite the tragedy and loss? I'm glad we chose to revive our

plants. I learned a lot today even though I don't like to get dirt in my fingernails.

In assessing the plants, I noted that there was a lot of dead growth. It needed to be pruned away. I've learned to prune away a lot of unnecessary activity this year in order to heal. I've spent more time in nature, walking outdoors instead of going to a gym, doing yoga instead of shopping, letting go of anything in my life not serving my healing. In so pruning, I allow new growth through my journaling, prayer, attending my Bereaved Parents group, spending time with Bob and my daughter, Megan, fostering friendships with Taylor's friends; even my work has become more meaningful.

Many of the plants had been deprived of water or were in a pile of putrid, sour soil from over watering and no drainage. I've learned this past year about "watering" my soul. The balance is necessary. With regard to tears, they are an important part of grief. The tears must fall, yet too many tears can cause a break down or a spiral into a deep depression. The soul loses vitality either way. There is a time to weep and mourn, but also a time to dance, as the Bible so aptly advises.

As I clipped away half or more of each plant, I was amazed at how resilient these plants really were. All this new growth was there, waiting underneath just to be nurtured. They were all root-bound from spending too much time in their "homes". As we set them free into a bigger home and fresh soil, I could almost feel them beginning to breathe more deeply and settle into a healthier way of being. "And so can I," I thought, "so can I!" My heart can grow bigger. My son's death took a part of my heart away, but, if I do this grief thing well, I can become a better person for all the pain and suffering. My faith and my ability to love can grow.

Mother's Day is approaching. [Father's Day too] We've planned a trip to the beach. May 14 is the first anniversary of Taylor's death. We'll light some candles and talk about good memories. Will I survive it? You bet, just like all those plants we repotted today.

I AM STILL A FATHER: THE FATHERS DAY BIRDHOUSE by Glen Lord



Father's Day can never be the same.

Father's Day was just around the corner; this was going to be the fifth Father's day where I would both celebrate my father and my being a father. In the short time I had spent in this window of being both a father and a son I had learned so very much. My son had taught me that the world was so much bigger than me, he had made me a better man. Being a father had also offered me the perspective and appreciation for many of the things my father had done for me when I was little.

Noah had been preparing for Father's day and had painted and decorated a birdhouse in preparation of the day. He and I talked about it and we were going to give this birdhouse to my father for Father's day. I felt that this would be the perfect marrying of my being a son and my being a father. He and I were both happy about this choice.

There were so many things like the birdhouse that made me feel successful as a father. There was the Kiddie pool we had purchased, one of those that are about 18 inches deep and 6 feet across and set it up in the front yard. With a lot of coxing from a very persistent four year old I got into the pool with him and we splashed around in the front yard together and had a blast.

When we had purchased our home it was winter and there was a bare, ugly tree in the front yard, my wife and I had decided we were going to cut it down.

Noah overheard us say this and threw himself at the tree, begging us to not cut down his tree. I was so moved by the passion of our small tree hugger that I left the tree alone. As it turned out Noah knew best and in the spring this thirty-foot weeping cherry was the most beautiful tree in the neighborhood. I sometimes wonder what the neighbors would have thought of us if we had cut it down.

It was ten days before father's day when Noah has an adenoids and tonsils surgery. Three days following the surgery he hemorrhaged at home and died before the ambulances arrived.

I spent the next few days in a daze of paper work, decisions about a funeral, comforting friends and family. On the Saturday after his funeral I realized that the next day had been set aside to honor and celebrate fathers. I had done this with Noah for four



years and each year was proud of the things like the pool and the tree. But this particular year I was haunted by one thought... "Am I still a father?" I was not sure and this terrified me. I was so torn up inside, Noah was my only child, suddenly all the things that had reassured me that I was a good father were no more. It didn't matter that I played in a kiddie pool or saved his tree. When he needed me the most I was not able to save him. My tears were now of sorrow not fatherly pride. I felt strongly that I no longer deserved to be a part of a holiday set aside to praise fathers.

The next morning, Father's day I came across the birdhouse, the one that Noah and I had planned to give my father that father's day. I looked at the designs he had so carefully painted. The colors flowed together in a messy rainbow of brightness. I cried and as I held that birdhouse the answer to my question came crashing down. I AM A FATHER!! I actually screamed it over and over to the universe and to myself "I am a Father, I am a Father, I AM A FATHER."

I decided I was going to gift that birdhouse to me, It would be the last physical present I would ever get from my son, but I knew in that moment, I knew I am and always be Noah's Father.

This year will be the 14th Father's Day without my son and each year the pain of that first year is still there but now there is a joy. I continue to receive gifts from Noah on Father's day and every day. They are the gifts of memories, I see a weeping cherry and feel the pull to wrap my arms around it or when passing children in a kiddie pool I hear him urging me to get in. I now have two other boys that I can physically hold this father's day but I am a Father of three and always will be.

I Love you Noah thank you for 17 Wonderful Father's Days

Editor's Note: This next powerful article is for Bereaved Moms and Dads, both! KC

WHY YOU DIDN'T FAIL AS A MOTHER

By Angela Miller

I have to tell you this. You didn't fail. Not even a little.

You are not a horrible mother.

You didn't choose this. You didn't want this to happen. You didn't do anything wrong. It just happened. To you. Despite your begging, pleading, praying, hoping

against all hope that it would not. Even though everything within you was screaming, no no no no no.

God didn't do this to you to punish you, smite you, or to teach you a lesson. That is not God's way. You could not have prevented this if you tried harder, prayed harder, or if you were a "better" person. Nor if you ate better, loved harder, yoga-ed more, did x, y, z to the nth degree— fill in the blank with any other lie your mind devises. You could not have prevented this even if you could have predicted the future like no one can.

No, there is nothing more you could have done. You did everything you possibly could have. And you are the best mother there is because you would have done absolutely anything to keep your child alive. To breathe your last breath instead. To choose the pain all over again just to spend one more minute together. That is the ultimate kind of love. You are the ultimate kind of mother.

So wash your hands of any naysayers, betrayers, or those who sprinted in the other direction when you needed them most. Wash your hands of the people who may have falsely judged you, ostracized you, or stigmatized you because of what happened to you. Wash your hands of anyone who has made you feel less than by questioning everything you did or didn't do. Anyone whose words or looks have implied this was somehow your fault.

This was not your fault. This will never be your fault, no matter how many different ways someone tries to tell you it was.

Especially if that someone happens to be you. Sometimes it's not what others are saying that keeps us shackled in shame. Sometimes you adopt others' misguided opinions and assumptions. Sometimes it's your own inner voice that shoves you into the darkest corner of despair, like an abuser, telling you over and over and over again you failed as a mother. Convincing you if only this and what if that, it would never have happened. Saying you coulda, shoulda done this or that so your child would not have died.

That is a lie of the sickest kind. Do not believe it, not even for a second. Do not let it sink into your bones. Do not let it smother that beautiful, beautiful light of yours.

Instead, breathe in this truth with every part of yourself: You are the best damn mother in the entire world.

No one else could do what you do. No one else could ever mother your child as well as you can, as well as you are. No one else could let your child's love and light shine through the way you do. No one else could mother your dead child as well as bravely. No one else could carry this

unrelenting burden as courageously. It is the heaviest, most torturous burden there is.

There is no one, no one, no one who could ever, ever replace you. No one. You were chosen to be your child's mother. Yes—chosen. And no one could parent your child better in life or in death than you do. You have within you a sacred strength.

You are the mother of all mothers.

So breathe mama, keep breathing. Believe mama, keep believing. Fight mama, keep fighting, for this truth to uproot the lies in your heart— you didn't fail. Not even a little.

For whatever it's worth, I see you. I hear your guttural sobs. I feel your ache deep inside my bones. And it doesn't make me uncomfortable to put my fingers as a makeshift Band-Aid over the gaping hole in your heart until the scabs come, if and when they do.

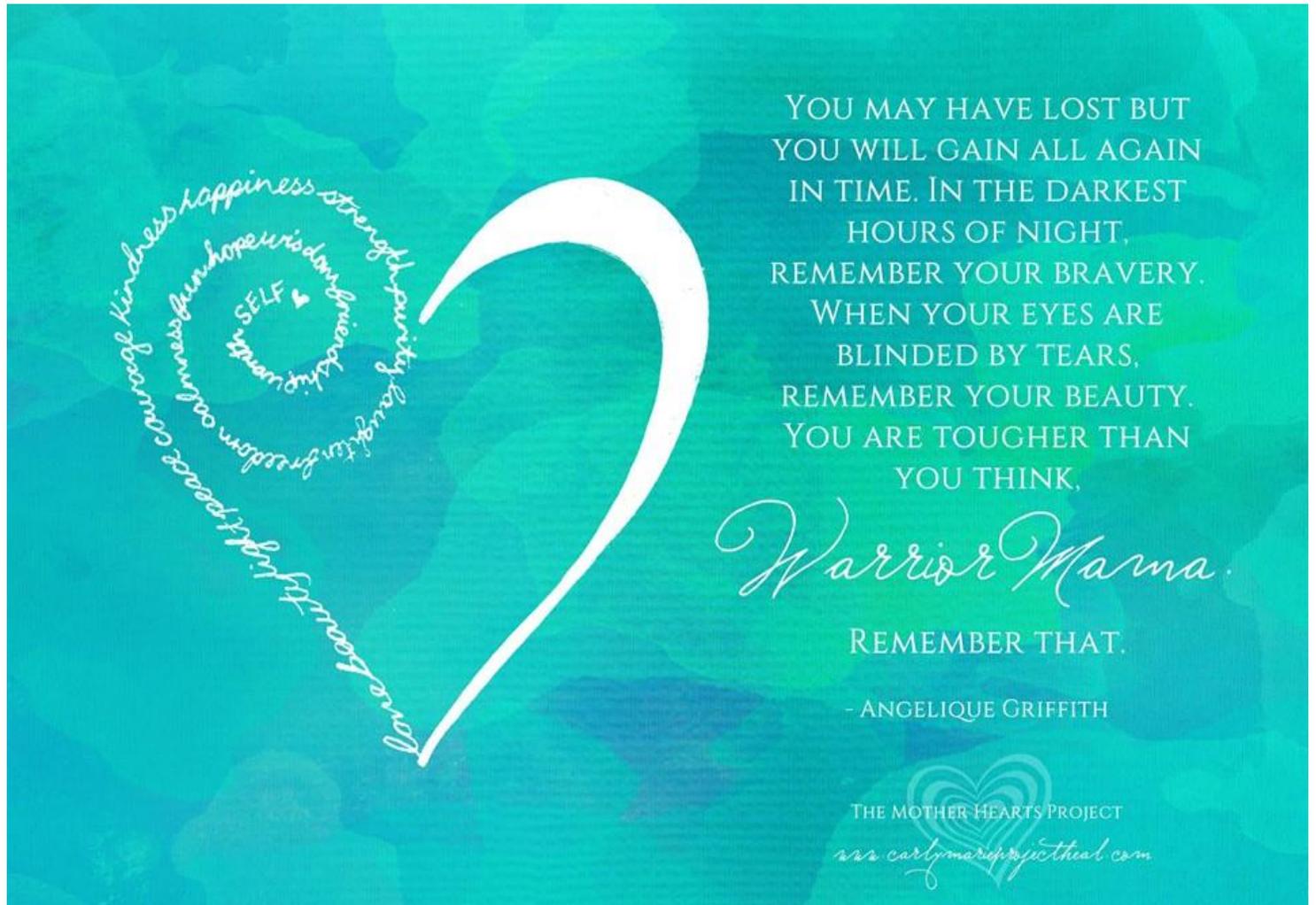
It takes invincible strength to mother a child you can no longer hold, see, touch or hear. You are a superhero mama. I see you fall down and get up, fall down and get up, over and over again. I notice the grit and guts it takes to pry yourself out of bed every single day and force your bloodied feet to stand up and keep walking. I see you walking this path of life you've been given where every breath and step apart from your child is a physical, emotional and spiritual battleground. A fight for your own survival. A fight to quiet the insidious lies.

But the truth is, you haven't failed at all. In fact, it's quite the opposite.

You are the mother of all mothers.

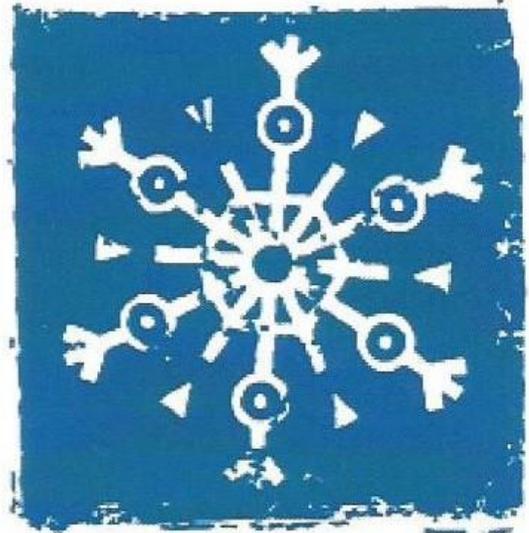
Truly the most inspiring, courageous, loving mother there is— a warrior mama through and through.

For even in death, you lovingly mother your precious child still.



SEE YOU THERE!!

**SEASONS
of**



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