



MID HUDSON NEW YORK CHAPTER

Newsletter

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

Kathy Corrigan Chapter Leader

www.mhbpusa.com

MAY/JUNE 2016



Please join us for our next meetings

Thursday, May 5th -- Topic: Signs, Dreams and Other Unusual Circumstances

Thursday, June 2nd -- Topic: Guest Speaker Pat Roza -- Lifting the Mask of Substance Abuse Disorder

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

Call Kathy (845) 462-2825 for information




A WARM WELCOME TO NEWCOMERS

We understand how difficult it is to attend your first meeting. Feelings can be overwhelming; we have all experienced them and know how important it is to take that first step. Our stories may be different but we are alike in that we all hurt deeply. We cannot take your pain away but we can offer friendship and support. Bring a friend or relative to lean on if you wish.

Mother's Day Manifesto

This is my path. It was not a path of my choice, but it is a path I must walk mindfully and with intention. It is a journey that takes time. Every cell in my body aches and I long to be with my beloved child. I may be impatient, distracted, frustrated, and unfocused. I may get angry more easily, or I may seem hopeless. I will shed many, many tears. I may not smile as often. Smiling hurts now. Most everything hurts some days, even breathing. Please just sit beside me. Say nothing. Don't offer a cure, or a pill, or a word, or a scripture. Witness my suffering, and don't turn away from me. Be gentle with me, and remind me to be gentle with myself. I won't ever "get over it" so please don't mistake a 'good day' for the absence of grief. The sadness is just beneath the surface of my skin. Remember that grief is as personal to each individual as a fingerprint. Don't tell me how I should or shouldn't be doing it or that I should or shouldn't "feel better by now." Don't tell me what's right or wrong. I'm doing it my way, in my time. If I am to survive this, I must do what is best for me, seeing life's meaning change and evolve gradually. What I knew to be true or fair about the world has been challenged so I'm finding my way, moment-to-moment in this new place. My priorities have shifted. I notice life's suffering more- hungry children, the homeless and the destitute, a mother's harsh voice toward a young child or an elderly person struggling with the door. Don't tell me that "God has a plan" for me. This, my friend, is between me and my God, should I choose to believe in one. Perhaps as time passes, I will discover new insights about what my child's death means to me. Perhaps, one day, when I am very, very old, I will say that time has truly helped to heal my broken heart. But always remember that not a second of any minute of any hour of any day passes when I am not aware of the presence of her absence, no matter how many years lurk over my shoulder. And because love never dies, neither does grief. So this year, on Mother's Day, don't forget that I have another one, another child, whose absence, like the sky, is spread over everything (Lewis). Don't forget to say, "How are you really feeling this Mother's Day?" Don't forget that I am still a mother, and even if I have living children, my heart still aches for the one who is absent—for I am never quite complete without my child- and because a mother's love is much, much bigger than death.



Lost love is still love...
It just takes a different form, that's all.
You can't hold their hand...
You can't tousle their hair...
But when those senses weaken
another one comes to life...
Memory...
Memory becomes your partner.
You hold it... you dance with it...
Life has to end... Love doesn't.
— Mitch Albom

Thinking about all the dads who are remembering a child on Father's Day
From all of us at RowanTreeFoundation.org

DO NOT SIT IN THE DARKNESS FOR TOO LONG By Christina Wiggins

I could feel the darkness inching toward me. The heaviness was becoming too much to bear. I did not want to cry in front of my entire faith family, not again. So instead, I shoved the tears back and allowed anger to consume me. I didn't want to hear about a baby who sacrificed everything, not after losing my own baby. It wasn't fair that my daughter had to live a life full of medical challenges that ended after 18 short months. Many of my dreams died when Audrey did. I couldn't even extend my hands out to receive the customary blessing before pushing up from my seat and gathering my remaining two children for home.

I hung my head in an attempt to hide the tears threatening to pour out and was almost out the door when she reached out to hug me. She looked me straight in the eyes and asked how I was doing. I couldn't lie. "Shitty," I choked out quickly before darting out the door. Now I could add guilt to the already complicated emotions of grief I was drowning in. I could not believe I had just lost it not only in church, but in front of a friend who had been helping to guide me

through this dark journey of child loss she had walked before. She had told me when my grief wound was fresh that it was normal to feel every emotion I experienced, "but do not sit in the darkness for too long." She was right. I had to find my way back to light. I had to figure out how to live again.

At first, I had to force it. Get out of bed. Feed my boys. Take care of our home. Take a breath. It's okay to cry. Cook dinner. Answer the phone. I had to mentally walk myself through the simplest activities. I was alive but not really living. The darkness sat at arm's-length just waiting for an opportunity to rush over me. Questions and guilt about my daughter's death ate away at me. I reached out to our medical family, her medical team. Each one assured me that I could not have done anything differently to help her. I was her mother. My job was to protect her, and I felt I had failed.

Do not sit in the darkness for too long.

The words echoed in my mind as I showered letting the water and my tears wash over me. This was my safe place. I could let it all out here. This is also when I decided I had to listen to my friend and take a step toward the light. No matter what I chose to do with my life, my daughter would always be dead. Sitting in the

darkness did not honor her. Realizing this allowed the first ray of light to crack through the darkness.

I began to wonder how I could honor Audrey. How could I spread her legacy of love and life? How could I feel close to her when she was no longer with me in a physical sense? That's when my mom suggested that we help other children facing battles similar to Audrey's. Our family turned Audrey's Army, what was originally an informational Facebook page to communicate with friends and family on how Audrey was doing, into a nonprofit charity that supports these children by sending care packages full of soft blankets, IV friendly hospital gowns, pajamas and other comfort items. Making these gift bags helped me feel close to my daughter. Knowing that this gift was supportive to these families warmed my heart. Yet the darkness lingered not too far away and continued to inch toward me.

Do not sit in the darkness for too long.

One afternoon, a friend sent me a message about tryouts for a community theater play. She knew I had always wanted to try out for a play but had not for fear of rejection or criticism. She asked me to take a look at the script, *The Miracle Worker* and gave me the audition times. I pulled up a video of *The Miracle Worker* online and knew right away. It was time for me to be brave like my little girl was every time she was taken to the operating room. I auditioned for the role of Kate Keller, the mother of a child with medical challenges. The directors were hesitant to assign the role to me, questioning my ability to push through the real, raw emotion of my grief. I begged and promised that I would do the role justice. This was the start of my bravery bucket list.

Do not sit in the darkness for too long.

I now have a list of dreams that I had previously cast aside due to fear. These dreams have been renewed. I have made a promise to my daughter and myself that if Audrey could live her short life so bravely, then I would honor her by living bravely and experiencing life fully. I'm working on the next item of my bravery bucket list, becoming a published author.

Do not sit in the darkness for too long.

By this time, I found myself welcomed into a community of other bereaved moms. I began building friendships and sharing my pain with them. This became my new safe place. We hold each other up and pull one another out of the dark during our worst moments. This community shares a bond that none of us wish for others to experience. Yet it is a bond that is so strong without most of us having ever met in person.

These women have become my support. Whenever the darkness sneaks up on me I can count on them to help me find my way back to light.

My grief is always present. Some days it is a mere cloud that passes in front of the sun briefly reminding me of treasured moments with Audrey and of a future not meant to be. Still other days I find the storm clouds rolling in and know the darkness is threatening a visit. And that is okay, as long as I do not sit in the darkness for too long.

Christina Wiggins is the mother of two boys on earth and one beautiful daughter in heaven. She is the cofounder and president of Audrey's Army Inc. (Facebook and Instagram). You can find her behind a sewing machine or writing when she is not spending time with her children. Follow her Bravery Bucket List on Facebook and on Instagram.



SEVEN (UNEXPECTED) PLACES WHERE OUR PAIN HIDES By Dani Shapiro

1. In Our Bones (Literally)

Once, at the end of a yoga class, I was resting in the final relaxation pose when a guy doing a headstand fell over and his feet hit me in the chest. I wasn't physically hurt. So, no big deal, right? But I couldn't stop crying. A hidden sorrow had been touched. Pain lurks within all of our bodies. The yogis call this *samskara*, which loosely translates to scar tissue. When we really tune into our bodies, when we stretch and soften and pay full attention to them, we can sense where this pain is hiding: our hearts, hips, jaws, lower backs, bellies. Wherever it is, it does us good to seek it out. To know it. After all, our pain is a part of who we authentically are.

2. In That Roll-Down-the-Window Song

Sometimes, I'm driving along in my car and a song from my high-school years comes on the radio: Springsteen's "Thunder Road." Just the opening few chords make me want to roll down the window and let the wind blow back my hair. It makes me able to touch my 16-year-old self, and with that collapsing of time *also comes* an exquisite feeling—piercing, bittersweet. I want to reach back to that girl and give her a hug. She was so clueless. She was in for a *world* of heartache. I am powerless to change the sorrows she went through; but still, my midlife self wants to fix her. To make it better. In that gulf between who I was then, and who I became, there is a deep and mature ache. "You have to go through all this," I want to tell her. "So that you can grow up and live a life full of wonder." All of those feelings ride the crest of Springsteen's lyrics.

3. On the Blank Page

When I sit down with my notebook, when I start scribbling words across the page, I find out what I'm feeling. What are the patterns of my obsessions? What do I want? I honestly don't know until I start writing and something starts to take shape. Sentence follows into sentence like a trail of bread crumbs through the forest. I look back at what I've written. *Oh, I think to myself. So that's what's happening. That's what's wrong.*

4. In the Place Where We Feel Closest to Those We've Lost

My dad died when I was 23. His death was sudden and shocking—the result of a car crash—and I never got to say goodbye. I was a mess when he died, and I knew he was worried about me. It is my single greatest sorrow, but sometimes, missing him is dulled by the time passed and the demands of ordinary life. If I want to feel my dad's presence and the wild, irreparable loss of him—if I want to cry my eyes out—all I have to do is sit quietly in a synagogue (though, depending on the tradition in which you were raised, you might choose a church, a mosque, a zendo or even a hike in the wilderness). I was raised in an observant Jewish household, so for me, Hebrew prayers—the sounds, the sunlight streaming in from the stained-glass windows of a synagogue—bring my father back to me as surely as if he were sitting next to me, my head pressed against his shoulder. I can see his grin. His clear, hazel-green eyes. The way he said my name. I want to keep this pain close to me. It's my way of honoring him, of remembering. Of continuing to be his daughter.

5. Behind Our Perfectionism

We try so hard. We race from appointment to appointment, frazzled, running late, always feeling just a little bit behind the eight ball. We secretly believe that if only we achieve some elusive goal—fitting into a pair of skinny jeans, or redoing our kitchen or getting that promotion—that it will make us happy. But the pain of our insecurity is hidden in all that racing around. If we stop, we will feel it. It will catch up with us. And when it does, we can let it wash over us like a great, cleansing wave.

6. Between Our Fluttering, Jumping Thoughts

When I started meditating, I was sure that I was going to be the world's worst meditator. I couldn't sit still for five seconds. My mind jumped like a puppy from one thought to another to another. Mostly mundane stuff: Had I remembered to take the garbage out? Was my son due for his dental checkup? Why hadn't my husband scheduled his colonoscopy? You know, fun stuff. But I kept at it, because I'd begun to understand that *all of our minds do this*. It's the human condition. Our pain hides beneath these fluttering, random thoughts that run through our heads in an endless loop. But there's so much freedom in getting to know what's under there, the bedrock. We can shake hands with our pain. *So pleased to meet you.* We can invite it in, like a guest who we make welcome. We can recognize it as our greatest teacher.

7. In That Thing We Reach For...But Wish We Didn't

Maybe it's a massive bowl of spaghetti carbonara (my personal favorite). Maybe it's a snuck cigarette. A second martini. A sleeping pill. Trolling Internet shopping sites searching for...yearning for...longing for... what? When we reach reflexively for something to dull an ache inside of us, in that very moment of reaching, we are hiding from our pain. We're storing it away. Tamping it down. Saving it for a rainy day. And even though sometimes we just give in and do this, our pain patiently waits for us. Not because it wants to punish us. Not because it wants to hurt us. It wants only to serve us. To help us grow. For us to move through it—and leave it behind. As crazy as this may sound, our pain wants us to be happy.

Dani Shapiro is the author of *Devotion: A Memoir and Still Writing: The Pleasures and Perils of a Creative Life*.

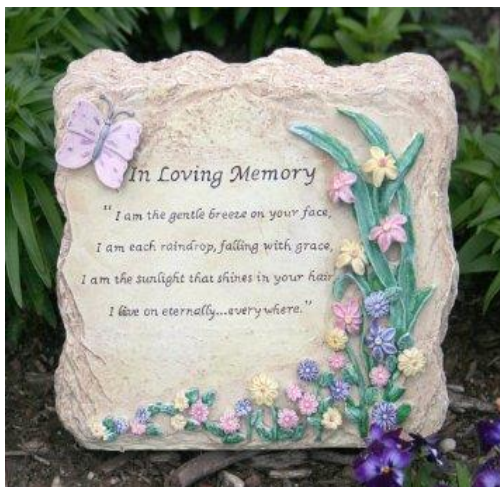
*The bereaved mother has lost more than most people will lose in a lifetime.
Consider her pain, speak gently to her, and know that grief changes you for a lifetime.*

Franchesca Cox

MEMORIALIZING YOUR CHILD

www.3hopefulhearts.com

There are many special ways you can memorialize your baby or child. What may feel comfortable to one parent, may not feel comfortable to the other. You may choose to include family and friends or you may want to keep it personal. Just honor what feels right. Here are some suggestions...



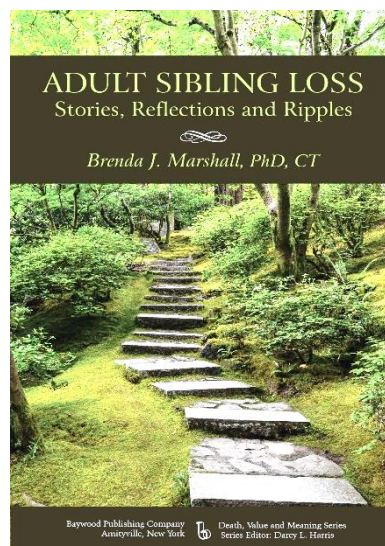
- ♥ Buy a special piece of jewelry with your child's birthstone.
- ♥ Decorate the grave with balloons, flowers, toys, a wreath, small windsock, or a pinwheel on his/her birthday.
- ♥ Submit an article or poem about your baby to a pregnancy loss newsletter.
- ♥ Say your child's name every single day.
- ♥ Keep a photo of your child in your purse or wallet.
- ♥ Make an angel-food cake on his/her birthday.
- ♥ Purchase a special candle to be lit every year on your child's birthday and/or anniversary
- ♥ Send family and friends packets of flower seeds (Forget-me-nots are especially meaningful) on your loved one's birthday.
- ♥ Start a collection (angels, teddy bears, hearts, stars, etc.)
- ♥ Talk to your child or write to him/her. Describe how you feel and how much you miss him/her.
- ♥ Write a "love note" to your child, tie it onto a helium-filled balloon and release the balloon to heaven.
- ♥ Write music or poetry to or about your child.
- ♥ Create art to honor your loss.
- ♥ At Christmas, hang a stocking or a special personalized ornament in honor of your child.
- ♥ Create a memory book or box to hold his/her mementos.
- ♥ Create a website about your loved one or leave a tribute to your loved one on a memorial website.
- ♥ Create a memory garden filled with meaningful flowers like Bleeding Hearts and Baby's Breath. Choose flowers in shades of his/her favorite color. Add a water feature, statuary and wind chimes.

Maybe I can't
stop the downpour,
but I will always
join you for a walk
in the rain.

You are never alone...

Please join us at our next meeting.
We meet the first Thursday of every month.

SIBLING CORNER



"He was my best friend." "I feel like I've lost that one person I could always count on." Siblings know each other in ways friends and other blood relatives do not. They have shared bedrooms, bathrooms, holidays, family milestones, meals and a way of growing up that those outside the family can never fully understand. The

bond is intense, complicated, sometimes difficult, often wonderful and absolutely irreplaceable. When death interrupts what might have been a lovely, life-long connection, the impact is tremendous. And yet, this loss is rarely the focus of research and not well understood or recognized within society leaving many siblings searching for appropriate support and validation.

This book gives readers the opportunity to experience the intensity of this relationship through the eyes of three bereaved siblings. Their experiences both pre and post loss are powerfully presented using a narrative style which allows the complexity and depth

of their individual relationships to shine brightly. The author, a bereaved sibling herself, artfully weaves her story throughout, adding to the richness of the text. Through their collective stories, readers are invited to explore their own reactions and reflect on the many ways siblings are impacted over the long term. Bereaved siblings, clinicians, medical professionals, therapists, social workers, funeral directors, religious leaders, bereavement groups and anyone who supports or knows a bereaved sibling will find benefit in this book. A highly readable text that will both touch and inform readers.

In praise of **Adult Sibling Loss** by Brenda Marshall:
"Brenda Marshall has given a much-needed voice to the experience of sibling death, one of the most important yet least understood losses today. The death of a sibling is all too often minimized, overlooked, and unacknowledged. This book does a beautiful job of weaving together interviews and research. It is a must read for bereaved siblings, professionals, or anyone who wants to gain a better understanding of the sibling experience."

As a bereaved sibling myself, I found every page resonated with my experience. Writing as the most important kind of expert, someone who's been there, Dr. Marshall candidly discusses her own struggle to find hope again after the death of her beloved younger brother, Brent. Her recounting of interviews with other bereaved siblings is powerfully delivered and speaks to the resilience of the human spirit with messages of support, hope, and guidance. This book is a testament to that resilience and serves as a reminder that although our brothers and sisters are gone, the bond remains strong and the memories last a lifetime."

Heidi Horsley, PsyD, LMSW, Executive Director, Open to Hope Foundation, Adjunct Professor, Columbia University



*The ones who put gentle footprints
on our hearts leave a story
worth telling.*

*Unknown
Author*



VACATIONS AFTER LOSS

By Carol Ruth Blackman

Vacations bring to mind time spent together as a family. After losing a child or children, vacations -- especially the first ones after loss -- remind us of their absence.

Some bereaved parents place a higher expectation on the vacation than can be fulfilled. Maybe Mom may assume that getting away from home and the stress of work will enable dad and other family members to talk about their loss, reliving memories together and resolving issues of their grief. Dad might be thinking "If we can just get away from all these memories and stress, we can relax and forget our pain." Someone else in the family might think the vacation will give some relief from the grief work. Because each person has definite goals with high expectations, they may discover their spouse and/or children's goals to be painfully opposite their own. It's not uncommon to discover one spouse may not be ready to talk yet.

If vacations usually include trips to relatives or family camps, seeing everyone after your loss can be bittersweet. Memories as well as remembrances of what you'd planned for your child to do with others flood your mind. Some people will want to talk about your child. If your trip occurs shortly after the funeral, you may find that talking about your child is like dragging the funeral out for days. When several months have elapsed, others often feel uncomfortable and will not mention your child's name until you do. If you want to talk about your child, don't wait for others to bring up his/her name they're uncertain if you're comfortable talking about them so are waiting for you to make the first move.

Many find the enthusiasm to plan vacations and the concentration to make detailed arrangements are gone the first year, especially.

Others feel too stressed out to go anywhere or fear coming home would be too painful. In that case, day outings might be more suited to your energy and enthusiasm levels. Try to choose a variety of things so that each member of the family can do something they enjoy.

Some bereaved parents experience fear of getting too far from home or fear of being too far away from the mementos that remind them of their precious child. Various fears, some irrational may make thoughts of a vacation too painful to consider. In such a case, it would be good to try to define these fears. Just realizing what the fear pertains to helps you deal with it. If fear seems to be a problem with any member of the family, it would be good to make a list of what things they are fearful of happening, then calmly discuss these fears with someone. If it's too stressful to discuss them within the immediate family, as a trusted friend or pastor to discuss them with you. Just getting them out in the open and identified will help immeasurably.

Many recently bereaved people find that too much free time allows more time for painful remembrances than they welcome, so it's important to be flexible and willing to change plans midway through the vacation if it's agreeable with the majority of the family.

Discuss the pros and cons of visiting a familiar place or new experience to decide what each family member feels most comfortable with.

Remember grief depletes your energy levels so you'll tire more quickly. Take this into consideration when planning reasonable distances to be driven daily. Bereaved people need exercise but if you're planning to hike or do other strenuous exercise, don't forget your energy levels are not the same as they were before your child's death. Exhaustion and disappointment with your capabilities (thus frustration) will come much sooner than it previously did.

Whether you leave town or stay home, remember working through grief is the hardest work you'll ever do. Be kind to yourself as it's physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausting. Allow time to re-energize your own depleted reserves.

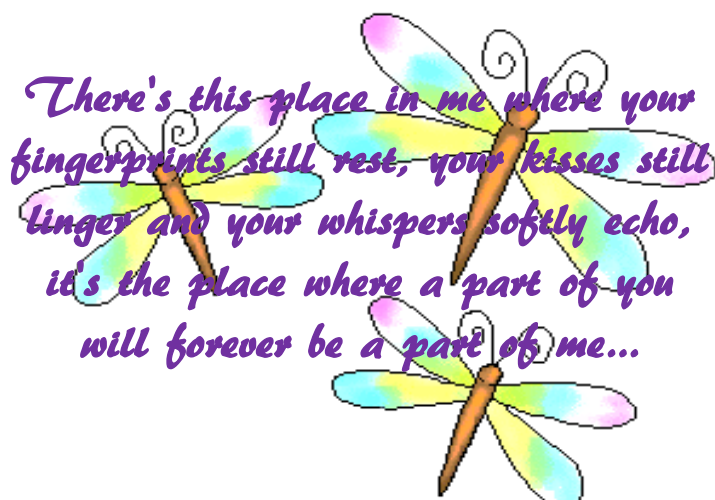
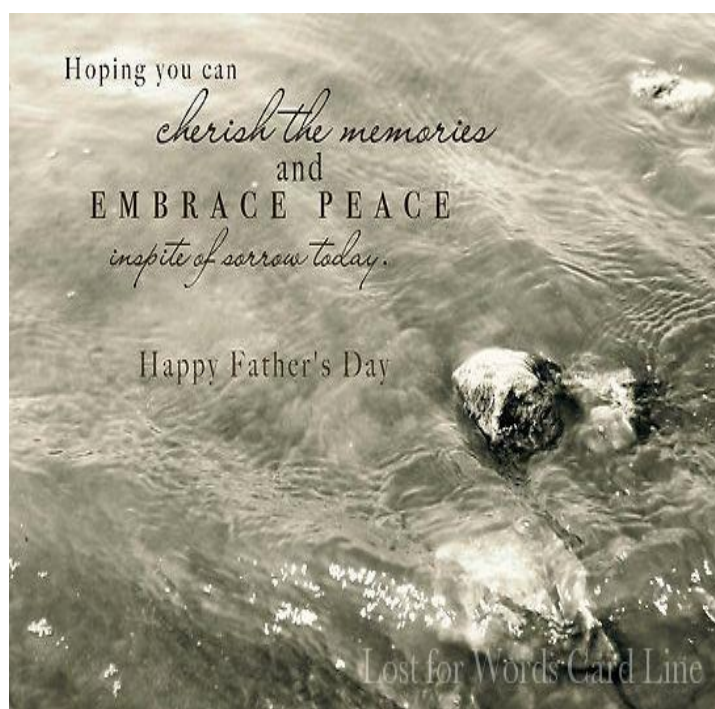
It would be good to sit down as individuals or as a family to jot down your expectations or goals for your vacation, your fears and other factors so that as parents you can have an idea of what others are expecting before you take off. If dad and the teenagers know Mom is expecting everyone to want to spend some time reminiscing and working through grief it will be less frustrating for everyone if they know the time will not ALL be devoted to one person's expectations. Knowing that some time may be set aside for grief work, but also some for total relaxation for dad and mom, and some for other individual family members' enjoyment will make it less stressful for everyone.

As in other family matters, communication is Very Important. No one else can read your mind and be able to fulfill your unexpressed expectations. For a vacation

to be refreshing for everyone, good communication will be one of the most important factors.

You may have been planning a very special vacation and are wondering if you should take it so soon after your loss. You might want to consider waiting another year so you can enjoy it more than with the excess "grief baggage" you'll be carrying along this year. Or you may feel that since you have been anticipating it for so *long*, to put it off would just be another loss added to your child's death. **Only you can decide.** If you can't decide peaceably, that's an indication you won't enjoy it as much now as you most likely would a year from now.

As with everything else after loss, the first vacation will be the most challenging. It's all new with that huge absence ever present. It would be nice if a vacation were an opportunity for you to escape your pain or leave it behind at home, but the fact *is*, everywhere that love goes, grief goes too! We grieve because we love. As time passes, vacations won't be edged with as much pain. Someday you'll find one enjoyable.



Your legacy
Will be one of love
I will help the world
REMEMBER
Your smile
Your laughter
Your thoughtfulness
Your **LOVE**
Your life is not
defined by your death

**WHY ATTEND THE NATIONAL GATHERING FOR
BEREAVED PARENTS?**

Our gatherings provide an opportunity to hear some of the best speakers in the nation who are experts on many topics related to grief. They will inspire you with their messages of **HOPE**. They will offer you the tools you need to continue to **HEAL** as you transition from mourning to living again after the loss of your child.

You will also get to know many parents and siblings from different parts of the United States who have experienced losses such as yours. You will come to understand that you are not alone on this journey.

Please join us for 3 days of remembering, honoring and celebrating our children, brothers and sisters. Let this be the year that **Hope & Healing** will fill your ❤️

**REGISTER NOW AT
WWW.BEREAVEDPARENTSUSA.ORG**

