



MID HUDSON NEW YORK CHAPTER

Newsletter

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

Kathy Corrigan Chapter Leader

www.mhbpusa.com

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2014



Please join us for our next meetings

Thursday, November 6th -- Topic: "Creating Rituals to Honor Your Child during the Holidays"

Thursday, December 4th -- Topic: Celebrating the Gift of Your Child

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

Call Kathy (845) 462-2825 for information



GRATEFUL AND GRIEVING

There are some who believe that positive thinking and gratitude are the answer to most of life's ailments. And perhaps it is the answer for *most* of them. But is it possible to be both grateful and grieving?

Sure a posture of gratitude can help many situations, but gratitude doesn't always feel possible when grieving the loss of a child. Maybe it's the quick fix, game changer for some things in life that aren't as permanent, but all the positive thoughts in the world aren't going to change the fact that my child is dead.

It will not change the empty chair at my table on Thanksgiving, the 3T clothes my son never grew into, or the hole exactly the size and shape of him that is permanently frayed into the fabric of every moment of my life now.

Gratitude is great— really, it is— but it can't fix child loss. Nothing can. The only fix for my pain would be to raise my child from the dead.

Bring to the table a cornucopia filled with my blessings and I'll bring you one filled with my infinite pain. Let's put them both on the empty chair next to me where my seven year old should be sitting, joyously stuffing his face with pumpkin pie.

Telling me to only focus on my blessings and not what's missing this holiday season is like telling me to forget if I had lost all my limbs. Yes, I'd still be thankful for what I had left and yes I'd also be deeply sad for what is missing.

Both are true. It's not one *or* the other. Yes I'm *still* grieving because I love and miss my son with every molecule in my body, but that doesn't mean I'm not also deeply thankful for my blessings.

As bereaved parents we are forced to learn the art of holding infinite space for both/and— because this new life we didn't ask for is now a heartbreaking juxtaposition of contradictions. Our hearts hold *both* the blessings and the trials, the joy and the pain, the white meat and the dark meat on the same blessed fork.

We are grateful *and* we are grieving.

The former can't cure the latter, and the latter doesn't negate the former. Nor were they meant to. Yes, grieving parents are incredibly thankful for every single blessing in their life, and that also doesn't negate the truth of the sorrow in their heart. If only the world could learn to hold the space for both too so bereaved parents could catch a break at the table of thanks every once in a while.

This Thanksgiving, be so very grateful if your table is as full as it should be, for that is truly the greatest blessing there is. And in your thanksgiving please remember those of us who come to the table with a grieving heart. Remember to hold space for us bereaved parents too. Leave room for the truth of how hard the holidays are for those who are missing our very hearts— and be thankful if you're lucky enough to have every single one of your children sitting at the table with you.

Not everyone is quite so lucky.

When you see me this holiday season, pull up a chair beside me, and open wide your heart and ears to the truth of my experience. At first glance it might appear that I seem ungrateful, but I beg you, look again. The depth of my gratitude runs deeper than you know, for I know more than most how quickly my greatest blessings can be taken in an instant; I know the immeasurable pain of being robbed of my greatest joy. I don't take a thing for granted, so please don't

patronizingly remind me to be thankful for my blessings when I share with you the truth of my sadness. I'm not sad because I'm *choosing* a negative frame of mind, I'm sad because I'm grieving the death of my precious child. Those are two very different things.

Trust me, I am thankful, grateful and blessed. And I am also still grieving, hurting and sometimes a mess.

Please don't assume because I'm sad that I'm not grateful, or because I seem grateful I'm not still sad that my child isn't here. And keep in mind once Thursday rolls around, I may decide to close my eyes tight and not move from my bed until Thanksgiving passes. I may not feel very grateful for much of anything at all. And that is perfectly ok too. It's more than ok— it's the reality and truth of surviving the holidays after child loss. Grief is not a straight line, and the grief landmines of the holidays only amplify a grieving parents' suffering.

Instead of assuming you know how I feel, simply ask me how I'm *really* doing this holiday season. Ask me what the holidays are like for me as a bereaved parent.

Ask me about the empty chair beside me and I'll gratefully tell you all about the beautiful boy who should be sitting next to me, the one who taught me how to stretch my love far and wide enough to span the gap between heaven and earth. Ask me about the one who taught me how to gracefully keep my balance while juggling impossible juxtapositions of life and death, joy and sorrow, mothering the living and the dead. Ask me about the one who showed me how to love beyond all time and space, how to survive the unimaginable, how to live for both of us.

Ask me about my greatest blessing and my deepest sorrow— *ask me about my child.*

Remember him with me. Invite him to the table this year too. I need to know that you remember he lived. Share his stories, his memory, his life, his love. And if you're open to blessing my aching heart even more, I invite you to say his name out loud with me. Often. And without hesitation. To hear his name is to hear the most beautiful sound there is. May it always be on the tip of your tongue like it is on mine. There is no greater gift.

Remember that for some of us the holidays can be very painful and lonely— not the season of Yuletide cheer they once were. Take a minute out of the hustle and bustle of ever-gratefulness to simply be *real* with me. Climb into my skin for a while. Feel uncomfortable with me as we wade in the waters of holiday grief. Embrace my grieving heart with

tenderness, with compassion, with love. My heart will forever be broken. Remember to treat me gently. It takes everything within me just to show up at the table.

Let me know you're thankful I did.

Sign up today at [AmazonSmile.com](https://www.amazon.com/AmazonSmile) – select Bereaved Parents of the USA Mid Hudson Chapter as your charity.

amazonsmile
You shop. Amazon gives.

Amazon will donate 0.5% of all your purchases to our group!
Be sure to tell all your friends and family!



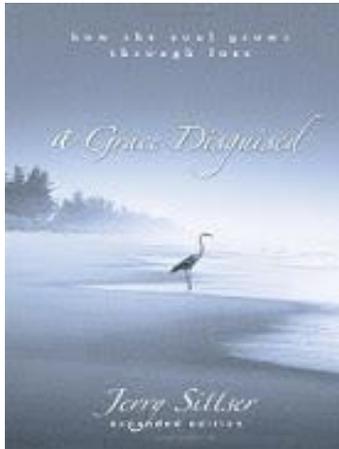
“yours is the light by
which my spirit's born:
- you are my sun,
my moon,
and all my stars.”
— e.e. cummings



Editor's note: Have you read a book recently that has helped you cope with your grief or brought you some comfort and peace?? Please tell us about it... E-mail me your book review kjcor@verizon.net to use in our next newsletter. K.C.

In his beautiful book, **A GRACE DISGUISED: HOW THE SOUL GROWS THROUGH LOSS**, author **Jerry Sittser** observes that, if we give in to those feelings of guilt and regret, we are in danger of what he calls the death of the spirit:

“Many people are destroyed by loss because, learning what they could have been but failed to be, they choose to wallow in guilt and regret, to become bitter in spirit, or to fall into despair. While nothing they can do will reverse the loss, it is not true that there is nothing they can do to change. The difference between despair and hope, bitterness and forgiveness, hatred and love, and stagnation and vitality lies in the decisions we make about what to do in the face of regrets over an unchangeable and painful past. We cannot change the situation, but we can allow the situation to change us. We exacerbate our suffering needlessly when we allow one loss to lead to another. That causes gradual destruction of the soul. This destruction of the soul represents the tragedy of what I call the “second death,” and it can be a worse tragedy than the first. The death that comes through loss of spouse, children, parents, health, job, marriage, childhood, or any other kind is not the worst kind of death there is. Worse still is the death of the spirit, the death that comes through guilt, regret, bitterness, hatred, immorality, and despair. The first kind of death happens to us; the second kind of death happens in us. It is a death we bring upon ourselves if we refuse to be transformed by the first death. “



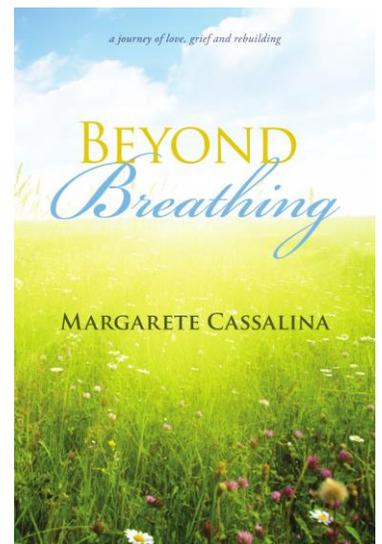
LOVE HONOR CELEBRATE: A MOTHER'S JOURNEY OF TRANSITION



October 9th, 2011 began much as any other day, but come nightfall it would come to redefine the essence of author **Deb Carlin Polhill**. Her youngest daughter, Cait Chivonne, just 28 years old, passed suddenly on that fateful day. Polhill embarked upon a journey, which she soon realized was under the love and guidance of her precious daughter. Polhill soon

discovered that her process of grieving would be through loving, honoring and celebrating Cait. "Love ~ Honor ~ Celebrate: A Mother's Journey of Transition," is one mother's story and first-hand account of the most profound loss of her life and how she chose to handle it. It is a story of remarkable faith and tremendous inspiration. Polhill's story reveals how the human spirit, via an open heart, can face a seemingly insurmountable devastation, yet continue to live, love, and grow. "Love ~ Honor ~ Celebrate: A Mother's Journey of Transition," shares the beauty in the sorrow, eloquently and reverently. It will stand as a towering memorial and tribute both to the author's cherished daughter and to life itself.

BEYOND BREATHING by **Margarete Cassalina** is a story of a mother's loss of her 13 year old daughter, Jena, to Cystic Fibrosis, a fatal genetic disease. Her journey takes you from unfathomable heartache to love and understanding of life's realities. Through her journey she learns that life lessons come from her children and the beauty of living and the power of love. In the span of one year she learns to go from depression and dependency to inner strength and the realization that love never ends and that there are no coincidences. That she is beyond just breathing.



GRIEF IS NOT LOVE by Jon Pederson

At a recent grief seminar, "The Courage to Grieve and Love", I heard what were for me some rather shocking intellectual pronouncements from the featured speaker Judy Tatelbaum. She bravely declared, "Grief is not a particularly great testimonial to dead people. Grief is not love." She clarified this by explaining that grief is a process, a natural healing that occurs when we suffer a loss, but one that we should ultimately grow beyond as we proceed toward a time of acceptance and internal peace.

Grief is not love. Could I ever confuse the two? Yes, I think I could. As much as I loved my son while he was alive and still love him now that he is gone, my grief could possibly overshadow that love if I allowed this to happen. The pain has been so intense, and even now, after two years, can be so unexpectedly piercing. Yet my heart recognizes the truth in the statement that grief is not love, even as my mind balks and rebels at this stark knowledge.

For me this was not yet another "head" experience but a gripping, visceral revelation. My grief, my pain, my sorrow at losing my child are as real as anything could be and often seem to be out of my control. The feelings come and go, sometimes strong, sometimes not. Yet the feelings of love are equally present and now I know that they can be sorted out from the grief and I realize that the love can go on even as the grief dissipates. There is a certain freedom and joy in knowing this and for that I am very grateful.

Head knowledge and heart knowledge. Sometimes we bounce back and forth between the two. Sometimes one grows large and threatens to outweigh the other. In the best of times, we have a blend and balance of the two.

As Bereaved Parents of the USA, we grope for meaning even as we console one another; sometimes for the moment at least, that's all there is.



Mid Hudson Bereaved Parents is thankful for all our members and friends who have opened their hearts and their wallets to donate to our group. These Love Gifts will be used to print a new brochure to send to funeral homes to be handed to parents who have just begun their grief journey. They will be used to maintain our website so that newly bereaved families can find us and receive comfort and inspiration from the articles and poems and stay informed of upcoming meetings and memorial events also funded by your generous donations.



MID HUDSON BEREAVED PARENTS OF THE USA

2014

Annual Candle Lighting Ceremony

Sunday, December 14

Rombout Fire House

901 Main St, Fishkill, NY 12524

6:30 Registration

7:00 Ceremony



Includes:

- ◆ Slide presentation of Our Children
- ◆ Live music performed by Jim Nurre
- ◆ Reception immediately following the ceremony

Please bring a finger food to share.

If you have not already done so, please submit your child's picture to be included in the Slide Presentation as soon as possible

✂

I plan to attend. NAME: _____

PHONE: _____

E-MAIL _____

Please print the name of your deceased child(ren) as you would like it to appear on the slide.

I am enclosing a picture of my child for the Slide Show. (Mail to: Kathy Corrigan, 5 Vanek Road, Poughkeepsie, NY 12603)

I will e-mail a JPEG format picture to you. (kjcarrigan5@gmail.com)

Please use the same photo from last year's ceremony

Please feel free to call if you have any questions.
Kathy (845) 462-2825

A Message from Medium George Anderson:

I've often wished that even if our loved ones cannot be seen, they would be able to cast a shadow, so that everybody who feels they are alone in their grief could look down and see the shadow of a familiar shape standing right next to theirs. But in a way--maybe not as visible or tangible, the souls cast their shadow over every part of our ongoing lives.

In so many sessions the souls tell us they have been there all the time--through the first frightening moments of loss, through the first baby steps we take in grief, alongside the guilt we experience when we start to enjoy things around us again, through the troubling times when we fall back into grief, and even silently through the times we can learn to continue on our own. The souls tell us that part of their spiritual journey in the hereafter is to continue helping us to complete our journey on the earth. But with so many doubts and a shortage of trust, people here don't seem to believe them.

The souls cannot cast a shadow, but they leave the shadow of themselves all over our lives--they are the invisible hands that reach in when we start to come unraveled by the sheer amount of work it takes to continue on the earth as a bereaved person. They are the warmth that runs through us when loneliness makes us cold. But they are also the silent stillness that comes to us when we demand they prove to us they exist and that our grief is not in vain. They are always there--and they always have been--they help in more ways than we will ever know until it is our time to pass.

Sometimes, at the beginning, it is minute by minute. Then as we start to live again, it becomes hour by hour. As we learn to laugh and continue, it becomes day by day. It lingers and fades, just the way shadows do. The more light we need, the stronger the shadow. The less light we need, the fainter the image. It all depends on us. But whether the shadow of our loved ones can be seen or felt, they promise it will always be there.

As long as we walk on the earth we will never have to do it alone. Look for the shadows--even if they only exist in your heart. No matter how they are perceived, they will always be there.



10 THINGS EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT SIBLINGS & GRIEF by Dr. Christina Hibbert

There are many things people need to learn about siblings and grief. Here are ten I would like everyone to know.

My sister, Shannon, brother-in-law, Rob, and I, two years before they died.

1) Sibling grief is often misunderstood—by parents, families, friends, and counselors, even by the siblings themselves. So much focus is given to the parents of the lost child, to the children of the lost parent, to the spouse of the lost adult sibling. And, rightly so. But, what about the siblings? What about the ones who, like me, have grown up with the deceased? Who believed they would have a lifetime with their sister or brother? Who now face that lifetime alone?

2) Sibling grief has been almost entirely overlooked in the literature on bereavement. It's no wonder, therefore, that even mental health providers misunderstand sibling grief. How are families supposed to know how to help siblings through grief if even the research on the subject is lacking?

3) Common emotions siblings may feel when a brother or sister dies include:

Guilt, Abandonment, Loss of Innocence, Fallout from the Family, Somatic Symptoms, Fears and Anxiety

4) Siblings may feel “trumped” by the grief of other family members. I sure felt this way, and it's common, since the focus is usually on the parents if a young sibling dies and on the surviving spouse or children if an older sibling dies. This may lead to minimizing a sibling's own loss.

5) Young siblings lose innocence when a brother or sister dies, which may lead to fears and anxiety; “survivor guilt” is also common. Experiencing death as a child becomes a lifelong experience of processing and understanding the loss. Children grow up with grief, understanding more as they get older. Fear of death or dying is common. Anxiety or worry about getting sick may become prevalent. In young siblings, guilt for provocative behavior or for unacceptable feelings (jealousy) is common. Young children may think, before the death, “I wish my brother were dead!” then believe they somehow caused it to happen. Older siblings may wonder, “Why them and not me?” Because siblings are usually similar in age, it can bring up many questions about the sibling's own life and death, and guilt along with it.

6) Surviving children do, unfortunately, end up taking the fallout from parents', siblings', or other family members' mistakes, emotional blowups, or neglect. In many ways, siblings often experience a double loss: the loss of their sister or brother, and the loss of their parents (at least for a time, but sometimes, permanently). I know this from experience. Though my parents did the best they could, after my youngest sister died, our entire family was different. My mom retreated into her own grief, staying in her room, depressed and sick for years. My dad retreated into work and anything to take his mind

from his pain. Luckily, I was already on my own, in college, at the time; my younger siblings weren't so lucky. At 9, 11, 14, and 17 years old, they grew up with a completely different set of parents than I had. I tried to step in as a "parent" figure over the years, but the separation from my parents in their time of need profoundly influenced their lives. It profoundly influenced *my* life. It profoundly changed our family.

7) Siblings may manifest somatic symptoms of grief, including symptoms that mimic the deceased sibling's symptoms. Especially in young children, symptoms like stomachaches, headaches, nightmares, body pain, digestive symptoms, and trouble sleeping are common. These should be seen as symptoms of grief, and hopefully, an adult in the family can help siblings work through their feelings and show them how to grieve.

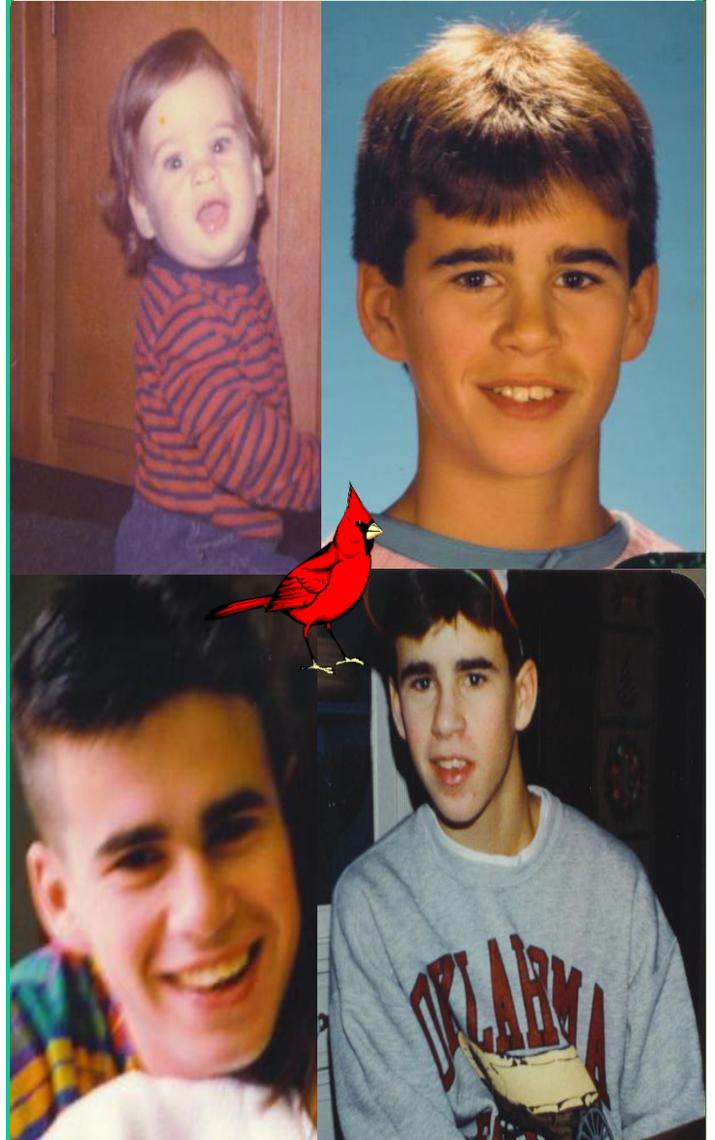
8) Having someone explain the loss to younger siblings, to be there for them and help them grieve, is ideal. Little children don't comprehend death in the same way adults do. It is therefore important to have somebody who can walk them through the loss and the grief process, to explain it wasn't their fault, to validate what they feel. If parents aren't able to do so, another family member or friend may, and hopefully will, step in.

9) Even adult siblings will feel the loss deeply. The pain isn't less simply because you're older. In fact, in many ways, it's harder. You understand more. You know what it means to die, and you will feel the pain of the loss in a different way than young children, who still haven't developed abstract thinking and understanding, will. Grieve your loss. If you're not sure how, here are some ideas.

10) My best advice for siblings in grief: Feel the loss as long as you need to, and give yourself time to heal. Because sibling loss is so misunderstood, you may receive messages that make you feel like you should be "over it by now." They don't know sibling loss. Now, you do. It takes time. Lots of time. It's not about "getting over" the loss of a sibling. You don't get over it. You create your life and move on, when you're ready. But you will always remember your brother or sister—the missing piece of your life.

I once heard someone say, "**When a parent dies, you lose the past. When a child dies, you lose the future. When a sibling dies, you lose the past and the future.**" That is the grief of a sibling—grief for what was past, and grief for what should have been the future. Just remember these things, my friends. Remember to be there for siblings in grief. You can be the difference in helping them create a bright future, even if they now must do so without their beloved sibling.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY MICHAEL!



*You are the pause between my
words, the whisper in my silence
and the light when I close my eyes.*

Author Unknown



*Love you always and miss you forever
Mom, Dad, Pete & Lexi, Chris & Jaime*