

The Ambush of Grief

By Rebecca Simon, MSW, Family Services Coordinator at the Pacific Northwest Transplant Bank

During the busy holiday season, experiencing sadness for the loss of a loved one can feel overwhelming and often isolating. It can be the task on the list that does not get done; it can be the negative thought we push out of our minds with a shrug or a headshake. It can be a feeling masked by a busy schedule, or a timeline that needs to be fulfilled. But it is there.

Sadness can occur for many reasons—when a friend moves away, when a job is lost, when an appointment is cancelled, or when feeling sick. For many, it weighs most heavily after a loved one dies. The ability to express and sit with sadness is different for everyone, and when there is an expectation from others, explicit or sensed, that grief has a fixed timeline, experiencing the feelings surrounding the loss of a loved one can be challenging.

Those who have traveled this journey share that some days and weeks are better than others, and that although it never goes away, the rawness of the grief accompanying loss becomes more tolerable over time. However, what is often left unacknowledged is the significant struggle associated with the routine activities of going to work, school, or social events. In these, there can be an underlying

fear that something will unexpectedly spark the unbearable sadness of loss just below the surface. Others talk about dreading the “How are you doing?” question, which if answered truthfully, may push others away or make everything feel even more uncomfortable. In all of this, there is the fear that something or someone will trigger our sadness unexpectedly and leave us feeling overwhelmed,



awkward, and unsure of how to act.

Years ago, I worked with a gentleman who had recently lost his wife. In

am•bush [am•boo sh]

1. The act of lying in wait to attack by surprise.
2. A sudden attack made from a concealed position.

our conversations, he described a phenomenon he called “the ambush of grief.” As he explained, “I can be walking through the supermarket on a regular Tuesday afternoon, after a peaceful, nice day, and then, just like that—Kaboom!—I’m blindsided by sadness and find myself sobbing as I try to pick out green beans. It’s from out of nowhere. It’s an ambush.”

What makes an “ambush” so seemingly unbearable is that it is a surprise—nothing has prepared us for its appearance. Similarly, there may be very few clues to predict its departure. Because we cannot anticipate when or where an ambush may occur, we must come up with ways to care for ourselves when one happens.

An ambush of grief can trigger feelings other than sadness. It may cause

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How Family and Friends Can Help

THE HOLIDAYS can be a particularly difficult time for someone grieving the loss of a loved one. Is there anything you are aware of that someone could do for you that would help? Has someone done something for you in the past that you found particularly helpful? Please share with us things that friends and family members have done (or can do) for you to help you get through the holidays.

We asked families these questions on our donor family email list; some of their responses follow. Please visit www.donorfamilyforums.org to read the full responses or share your own experience. To join the email list, write to donorfamily@kidney.org and ask to "Join the NDFC email list."



Last year, our friends snuck into our home and made sure our daughter Delaney's stocking was filled for Christmas. It was filled with donations that our friends and family had made to different organizations around the country in her name. We were overwhelmed with the generosity and kindness of everyone around us. It was so great to wake up and see her stocking filled with so much love!

—Tiffany Smith

Acknowledgement! I don't want my son Jeffery's name to be kept silent. I love to talk about him and have other people and family speak of him.

—Pattilynn Eanes (Zippran)

I have such caring women in my life, four sisters and many friends. It will be 16 years since we lost our 18-year-old Courtney. One family sends emails and cards continually. I know we are close to their hearts when they give us encouraging words. Now I have a friend who has lost her grandmother who was like a mother to her after her mother passed at a very young age. I will watch her kitty, watch her condo—be there for her. We never get over this, but you have to keep The Faith. Faith is not about everything turning out OK; Faith is about being OK no matter how things turn out.

—Carol Minnich

Losing my son at the age of 16 was devastating, but my family and my son's friends have been so supportive, even after five years. We have a special tree at Christmas for my son, and every year, my 14-year-old daughter puts a new special ornament on it that relates to something her brother was interested in. On the anniversary of his passing, we have a special web page where the kids and family can talk to him, and I get great joy out of reading all the wonderful and sometimes silly things that are written on there. We continue to celebrate his birthday every year with his favorite German chocolate cake, and this year on his 21st birthday, family and friends wrote notes that we attached to balloons and then released. I am so blessed to have had him for 16 years, and doubly blessed for the support system I have.

—Sonia Fisher

My mom died of a massive stroke on October 5, 2010. The past months have been very difficult. But what touched me most is the support of those you'd not likely expect. On my mom's birthday in March, I received a few calls from her good friends saying they knew the day would be difficult, but they were thinking of me. How thoughtful of those people to remember my mom's birthday and to call me. I also received a call on Mother's Day, saying that my mom and her family continue to be in people's prayers and thoughts. So, months after my mom's death, people are still feeling her loss. Those acts have meant so much to me. The call wasn't from family, as you'd expect, but a friend of my mom's. What a truly gracious friend.

—Tara Ivory

My mom passed away four years ago this December. The last time I saw her was Thanksgiving Day and, one week later, she was admitted to the ICU as unresponsive. Because this event is so close to two major holidays, this time of year can be very draining on my family and me. I appreciate those friends and family who do not ignore her presence during holiday discussions, and who understand that avoiding the "elephant in the room" does not make it less difficult—but in fact, more so. I am grateful for the friends who share stories of her during the holidays and allow her memory to continue on.

—Kelly Schmitt



I have a friend who has sent me flowers on the anniversary of my son's death and his birthday for the past nine years. It is so comforting to know that someone is still actively paying attention to my loss and I cherish her thoughtfulness every day. During the first two years after my son's passing, she sent me a note every month with encouragement and inspirational clippings from magazines. I looked forward to these tokens of gentle caring and they really helped me during the first year and, especially, a really difficult second year, after his passing.

—Peggy Lehr

small. miracles

DR. THOMAS A. NAKAGAWA was the recipient of the 2010 Musculoskeletal Transplant Foundation (MTF) DonorCARE Award, given for his outstanding efforts in the support and care of donor families.

As the Director of Pediatric Critical Care at Wake Forest University School of Medicine, Dr. Nakagawa was recognized for his extraordinary efforts, which include helping to design a butterfly garden and memorial wall while working at the Children's Hospital in Norfolk, VA. He also designed a special pin to recognize the courage of families of child donors that is given out at the Brenner Children's Hospital in Winston-Salem, NC.



found to receive donor kidneys, these can now be transplanted "en-block" (both at the same time) into adults.

Warren: *What is the biggest misconception about transplantation in children?*

Dr. Nakagawa: Perhaps the biggest misconception is that most children waiting for organs need a heart transplant. Only about 10% of children need a heart transplant. The majority of children on the national waiting list need either a kidney or a liver.

Warren: *What was the most interesting transplant you've ever participated in?*

Dr. Nakagawa: The most meaningful case I have been involved with was the cross-country transport of a neonatal donor from North Carolina to California.

The parents wanted their baby to be a donor. When they heard that the distance and time required to fly the heart to California meant the heart couldn't be transplanted, they asked why we couldn't take their baby to California to recover the heart there. After extensive arrangements, we were able to transport this infant donor to California where the heart was successfully recovered and transplanted into a newborn who was being kept alive by cardiac and respiratory support.

It never fails to amaze me that, in their darkest hour, some parents find the strength and courage to think about the well-being of others.

For Those Who Give and Grieve Editorial Board member, Jim Warren, spoke with Dr. Nakagawa about his work with children waiting for organ transplants.

Warren: *How would you describe the state of pediatric transplantation today?*

Dr. Nakagawa: The state is both hopeful and promising. Last year, for the first time in history, we transplanted more organs into children than there were children on the waiting list. In addition, the number of children who died while waiting for an organ was at an all-time low.

There are also exciting advances in the area of pediatric transplant medicine. These include heart transplants between infants with non-compatible blood groups, neonatal heart transplants, split liver grafts, and infusion of donor liver cells into children with liver failure.

Child donors are also helping adult recipients. When a suitable child cannot be

For Those Who Give and Grieve

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EDITORIAL OFFICE

National Donor Family Council
NKF, 30 East 33rd Street • New York, NY 10016
800.622.9010 • 212.889.2210 • Fax: 212.689.9261
www.donorfamily.org Email: donorfamily@kidney.org

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Remember...



Samantha Marie Aviles
June 18, 1988 - July 7, 1996



Albert Dejesus
January 8, 1967 - August 14, 2009



Alexa Faye Hall
August 9, 2007 - November 13, 2007



Paula Spangler
March 16, 1957 - February 17, 2009



Bradley Adam Blair
February 3, 1989 - May 7, 2009



Chris Friend
July 25, 1972 - February 15, 2008



Don W. Layman
May 5, 1958 - August 9, 2004



Barry N. Weaver
June 15, 1950 - September 27, 2008



Craig Robert Bresson
January 8, 1985 - November 26, 2006



Agnes (Betty) Godfrey
December 29, 1937 - November 27, 2004



Daniel George Mateik, III
December 26, 1984 - June 23, 2009



Judee G. White
September 21, 1941 - September 19, 2007



Stephanie Calvert
May 4, 1983 - May 14, 2004



Daniel T. Guerin, III
July 21, 1945 - May 22, 2009



Matt J. Pettola
January 1, 1954 - February 23, 2004



Justin "Dudley" White
November 7, 1988 - January 14, 2007



Shawn Edward Daugherty
February 26, 1973 - October 11, 2002



Monica Anne Gustafson
April 9, 1953 - March 23, 2009



Kevin T. Rotter
June 18, 1957 - November 8, 1998



David Lee Youngblood
June 19, 1956 - June 4, 1999



Tim Scannell
January 22, 1948 - May 15, 1998

Bridging the Gap between Hope and Possibility

By Penny LaBrecque, The North Carolina Eye Bank, Inc.

Miracles start with ordinary people, courageous individuals of all ages, races, and walks of life who want to make a difference in the lives of others. The decision to become an eye donor allows miracles to occur all around the world. The gift of sight can be a life-changing act for recipients and donor families alike. We are proud to share one of our heartfelt letters sent to The North Carolina Eye Bank this past year. A corneal transplant recipient writes:

“ Never will I know your name. Nor will I ever get to see your face, hear your voice, or see your smile as we meet. But I am forever in your debt, and I will forever be grateful to you. You are an angel sent from above.

Because you cared enough about the lives of others, you gave of yourself. You checked that box saying that, in the event of your death, you would freely give of yourself, so that others may have a second chance with their lives. To let another see their children grow, and have children of their own.

I'm one of those people who you have given a second chance to. While my life was never itself in any danger, the use and availability of my left eye was.

But you, my Angelic Hero...YOU gave me a second chance. YOU gave me the gift of sight. To see out of BOTH eyes, my children playing, laughing, and growing into wonderful people.

Thank you for what you have given to me. I'm so very sorry that you cannot be here for me to personally show you my gratitude. I can only hope that you are looking down from above and smiling.

In fact, in my heart, I could NEVER truly thank you enough, or the family and friends that you left behind, for your generosity and love.

I'm trying my best to honor you, and to 'pay it forward,' as a fellow organ/tissue donor myself. That is, by spreading and bringing awareness to the cause and need of donation. In my quest, I hope that I am honoring you, your gift, and your life. Not to mention your legacy.

On this Thanksgiving Day, I will be thankful for my children, my husband, my extended family, and my friends. My Angelic Hero, most of all, I will be eternally thankful for YOU.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the Eye Bank Association of America (EBAA). In addition, The North Carolina Eye Bank (NCEB) was founded in 1951, making it one of the first eye banks in America. The North Carolina Eye Bank celebrated their 60th anniversary, last month. The NCEB was the first headquarters of the EBAA.

The EBAA and NCEB, along with the many other eye and tissue banks in the United States and world, remain dedicated to honoring the wishes of donors and their families.

Little Waves

Like a stone falling in water
You passed beyond our sight
Leaving cherished memories
That ripple through our lives

By Douglas Harrell, Donor Husband

Holiday

Reflections

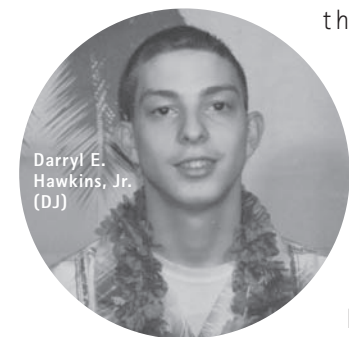


Shine a Light!

By Shelly J. Sinn (Till), Donor Mother

I unexpectedly lost my 20-year-old son DJ in July 2006. Even though half a year had passed, I didn't look forward to December. I didn't want to enjoy the holidays because DJ could no longer enjoy them. I went through the motions because I had other family members and friends who still deserved to enjoy the holidays and looked forward to celebrating at our house. When it came time to exchange gifts, I was given a small, engraved, lighted ornament that was a tribute to my son. It filled me with a lot of emotions and memories of past Christmases and good times.

After the holiday season that year, while returning all my cherished Christmas artifacts to their packaging, I came across a little tree that DJ had made out of wire coat hangers and a simple string of Christmas lights. He saw beauty in simple things. I had forgotten that. I pulled out that little tree and repaired it. It has become a centerpiece for all Christmas gatherings, not just because DJ made it, but because a small, lighted ornament reminded me that healing starts with a little light and grows over time. Bring it out, dust it off, share it with others. Let your loved ones' light shine.



Darryl E. Hawkins, Jr. (DJ)

Madison and Malia

By Alexandra Teska, Midwest-Eye Banks

As 12-year-old twins who were born blind and received the "gift of sight" through cornea transplants as infants, Madison and Malia have used their unique opportunity to tell their personal story to inspire and inform the public on the topic of eye, organ, and tissue donation. They have a diversified set of skills that has allowed them to succeed in becoming ambassadors for the Michigan Eye-Bank.



Their biggest accomplishment is the book that they wrote and illustrated at age nine, *The Blind Porcupine*, which tells the story of cornea transplantation from their perspective, while promoting donation. Their book has 6,000 copies in circulation around the state and is available at a

few local stores, libraries, and many Lions Clubs. All contributions for *The Blind Porcupine* go to the eye bank, and those funds are directed to keep the book in circulation. The girls have also held garage sales in order to fundraise for the eye bank.

Madison and Malia speak at many different events across the state, with audiences ranging from 5 to 200 people. They share their story with ease while explaining why eye, organ, and tissue donation is such an important cause that is close to their hearts. The girls work tirelessly, promoting donation in everything they do, and have taken on the cause of registering donors at events in their community.

They have a strong sense of philanthropy, and have held quite a few fundraisers. The girls volunteer mainly on behalf of the Michigan Eye Bank, helping to achieve its mission of "the restoration of sight," but they have also volunteered on behalf of various Lions Clubs around the State of Michigan. They continue to attend group meetings, conventions, and conferences for medical examiners and any other entity that would further their cause of promoting the gift of sight.

Every volunteer activity the girls participate in revolves around their ambassadorship with the Michigan Eye-Bank and how they can best give back to the community after receiving their precious gift of sight.



Madison and Malia

My (Identical) Hero

By Shelby Britt Miller, Donor Sister



Shelby and Shannon

What is it like to be a twin? From the time I was a child, through the passing of my identical twin Shannon two years ago, that was the question that people asked me the most. My answer was quite simple: "It is all I know and it is amazing—what is it like *not* to be a twin?"

Growing up, Shannon and I were always together. We attended university together, started two companies together and were never apart for any extended period of time over 35 years. The "twin bond" is real. I was the first to hear her heart beat in utero, and then on August 14, 2009, I would be the last to hear it.

Shannon had just given birth to her second daughter. A week later, she had a migraine headache, which was not uncommon for either of us. When the headache persisted, we decided to go to the hospital. Driving there, my gut told me something was very wrong. We found out that Shannon's blood pressure was 198/100.

Before we could get her treatment, Shannon had a seizure and a massive brain hemorrhage. I could not believe what I was hearing. "She has a week-old baby and a 3-year-old," I was crying and screaming, but I knew she was gone and I was alone. Soon my family arrived at the hospital to hear the dreaded news that she had zero chance of survival. After 36 hours, she was declared brain dead.

Since the life of our Uncle Raymond Miller had been prolonged 10 years by a heart transplant, there was never a thought that Shannon wouldn't donate her organs—not even a twinge of it not happening. I asked a nurse, "How long?" She replied, "Tonight or tomorrow." I looked at her and said, "Could you please call the organ transplant team in?" She looked at me stunned and said, "Well I think they are 30 miles away." My reply was, "I do not care if they are in New York—just get them here." Shannon was going to donate everything. In the face of tragedy, her children would know that their mommy was a hero.

Shannon was able to donate everything—all her organs, eyes, bones, and tissue. This past April we heard from the person who received the organ I most wanted to know about: her heart. Can you believe it, his name is Raymond! We met him and his beautiful family, and my family got to listen to the heart Shannon donated, beating so strong in Raymond. Shannon's spirit was living on, and this gentleman was able to live and love his family and children because of her gift of life. It was such an amazing moment.

To find solace, I walk the beach every day and find sea glass so that her children know that their mommy is in my thoughts every day. This is my time with Shannon and God to marvel at the absolute beauty that this world offers. With time, I realized that I was one of the most blessed humans ever. I had an identical twin for 35 years—a true gift from God. I experienced unconditional love and a bond most people will never know.

I feel so very blessed to be a twin, and I honor and cherish this gift. Shannon is the twin I strive to be like, a hero in life and death. I was so proud to be her twin.

Three Rocks

By Marilyn Dumbaugh Meneses, Donor Wife



My husband John was considered a "rock" to those who knew him and leaned on him.

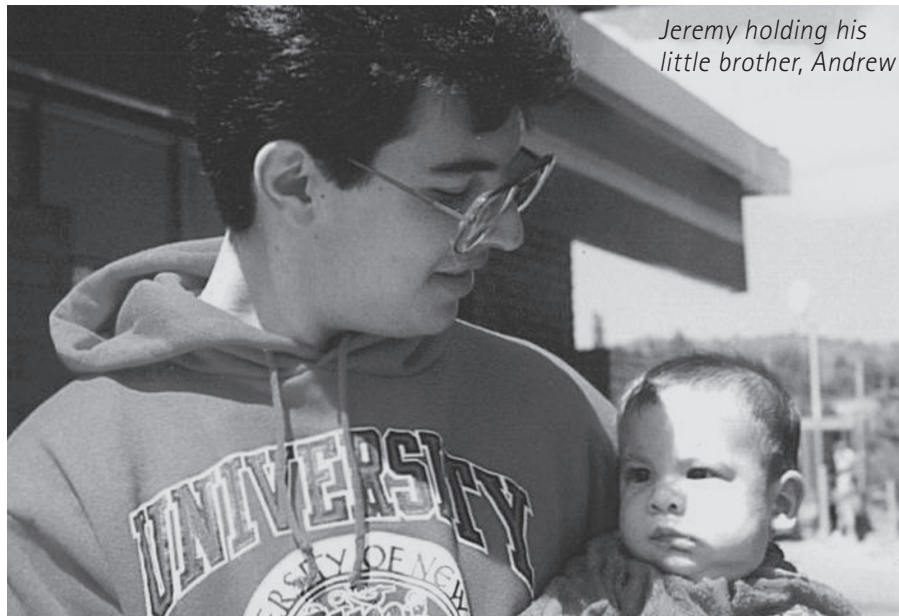
On one of our vacations, John and I went mining for ruby sapphires in Sheffield Mine in the Great Smoky Mountains. When we were mining, we found a stone in the rough. We left it in North Carolina to be made into a ring.

That night, on May 31, 2010, John passed away. The photo here is the last picture taken of us. At the funeral, I had a bowl of 250 black rocks with this note:

John has been friends to many who leaned on him as a strong rock. Please take one and put in purse, pocket, or a place you'll have access to. When you need his advice, rub the stone and he'll be there as he was in the past.

At the end of the funeral, there weren't many stones left in the bowl. Over the past year, I've been approached by family members and friends who show me that they still have their rock and tell me stories of how it has helped them.





Jeremy holding his little brother, Andrew

White Rose

By Mushroom Montoya, Jeremy's Father

Sunny mornings are rare in October in the Great Northwest. Thirty miles southeast of Seattle, clouds drizzle millions of water droplets on a normal autumn day. The seventeenth of October 1992 turned out to be an abnormally warm and sunny day. The brown and yellow leaves of the alder trees littered our backyard lawn. The lingering water droplets from the previous night's rain glittered on the leaves, reflecting the unusual October sunshine. A flock of geese flew overhead, reminding me of the autumn migration of cranes in New Mexico, the Land of Enchantment.

After my morning run, my neighbor came over to chat about the roses that were still blooming. When she told me that her white rose bush was in full bloom, I told her that white roses symbolize death. They represent our own mortality with their lack of pigment, without which they can't color our world.

On that unusually sunny day in 1992, we received a phone call that all parents dread when their children are away. Our son, Jeremy, was a University of New Mexico student, living 1400 miles from home. A nurse from the University of New Mexico Hospital trauma unit was on the other end of the phone asking for permission to provide medical care for our son. He had sustained a severe head injury from a motorcycle accident.

We granted permission and immediately made arrangements to fly to Albuquerque. Our plane landed in the early morning hours. Having spent the day at the hospital, we made our way to a friend's house that evening. She told us that we could stay with her as long as we needed.

Leaving for the hospital the following morning, I walked out of her front door and noticed a beautiful white rose bush in full bloom, growing in front of our friend's home. The pit of my stomach dropped when I saw a few petals at the base of the rose bush. I stopped and stared at the rose and its petals, as much for its beauty, as for its message. The rose was telling me that our first born child would die from his injuries. I walked to the car, not wanting to see or think about the white rose bush anymore.

I drove to the hospital, a little too fast, trying to erase the image of the white rose bush from my mind. I wished it had not been growing at the entrance of our friend's home. But every morning, on

our way out the door on our way to the hospital, I would see the white rose bush. Each morning more white petals collected at its base. Their whiteness blemished brown and yellow as their vibrancy bled out into the dry New Mexico air. I stopped each day, acknowledging the rose and silently pleading with it to stop dropping its petals. I didn't want to see its warning signs that were telling me that our son was dying. Every morning fewer petals lived in the bloom and more lay dead and dying on the ground.

On the seventh day, as I walked out of the front door, I tried not to look. But I couldn't stop myself. My shoulder slumped as tears began to flow over my cheeks. All of the white petals had fallen on the ground and the flowers were no more.

My feet felt heavy as I walked to the car. My mind's eye could only see the white rose petals decaying on the ground. We drove in silence to the hospital. A little before midnight, Jeremy, our first born son, died. The white rose petals gave their life, showing me what my ears were too terrified to hear.

Like the handsome white rose blossom, our handsome grown son spent his last days giving us a last chance to admire him and say good-bye. Jeremy died, leaving behind his body that was still beautiful and still vital. And like the white rose bush, Jeremy had other branches, his organs. We honored Jeremy's wish to donate his organs, thereby giving a new lease on life to many people.

The white rose no longer serves as a warning, telling me of impending doom. Rather it reminds me of the gift of life that our son gave to so many. And yet, when I see a white rose, I cry a few tears for Jeremy.

By Sameet Kumar, PhD

Editor's note: While this article specifically addresses grief after a murder, it contains good information for all grieving families, and particularly those who have lost their loved one in an accident or other sudden death.

I am a clinical psychologist who has worked with people going through cancer, including patients and caregivers, for over 13 years. When I started working as a psychologist I found that the existing theories about grief did not work well, and so I looked towards spiritual teachings to help my patients navigate their grief journeys.

One year, at the World Gathering on Bereavement, I conducted a meditation workshop focusing on loving-kindness meditation (also called "metta practice"). I was quite surprised when I learned most of the participants were the parents of murder victims. They found the exercises in the workshop extremely helpful, and I have been conducting grief workshops at such conferences for several years since.

No grief is ever the same. However, when a person is killed as opposed to dying from illness, there is no time to prepare. We usually don't see it coming—it's random, or even worse, we may lose several family members, either as victims or as perpetrators against each other. This can severely shake our deepest held assumptions about how we view the world, our faith in God, and our beliefs in justice. Depending on the circumstances, we may be constantly reminded of what happened to our loved ones by intrusive and insensitive media attention. In these situations, the intensity of acute grief can come back again and again, sometimes without any sense of predictability or foresight.

With the families of murder victims, the grief journey is often dictated by the legal process, which is much

different from the emotional process. When our loved one is murdered, we don't get to say goodbye. We wind up going back in our minds to the last conversations we had with them—did we say enough? Did we do enough? Could we have done something differently? There are layers of unfinished business that often can't be fixed. One of the main challenges is to develop a relationship with a murdered loved one in which the manner of their death isn't mixed in with every thought or feeling we have about them.

One of the things I have found to be the most helpful for all grieving people is to let them know we all grieve differently, and that grief has a lot of ups and downs; it's often not very neat or orderly. There is no perfect way to grieve. That being said, all grieving people need to make a special effort to engage in self-care. Good nutrition, sleep, regular exercise, and meditation are the ideal cornerstones of any healthy lifestyle, but more so when we are experiencing the stress of grief.

In my book *Grieving Mindfully: A Compassionate and Spiritual Guide to Coping with Loss*, I encourage grieving family members to begin the practice of mindfulness meditation to manage the stress of grief. Mindfulness meditation is currently the focus of extensive research, and the science validating its beneficial effects is constantly growing. The book uses this exercise in different ways, because if there is one thing that I feel grieving people can benefit from, it is better stress management.

I have also found that loving-kindness meditation, metta practice, is uniquely suited to help people grieving the loss of a murdered loved one. Metta practice involves visualizing in stages: first yourself, then your loved ones, then an enemy or someone who has caused you harm, and, finally, all living beings and sending them unconditional love. The benefits of the practice are often immediate, but they also continue to unfold over time. For the families of murder victims, it can connect them with their loved one without the taint of hatred they may feel toward

Grieving, continued next page

Love

the murderer. They can also begin to develop a relationship with their loved one that does not have their murder as a central aspect of who they were.

I recently worked with a family in which the mother developed a catastrophic illness when one of her children was murdered. The horror of this was immense. One of the things that was helpful for the family was simply to have a safe place to talk about their feelings. Like many other families in which a loved one has been murdered, their friends didn't know what to say to them. Compounding this was the mother's illness. A lot of well-meaning advice can sound insensitive, even cruel. A safe place where the family could come to talk, cry, and express their feelings without judgment was what they needed most. Therapy may also help you cope with your loss, and provide a safe sanctuary for your grief journey. I would encourage using a therapist who has had experience working with trauma, murder, and grief.

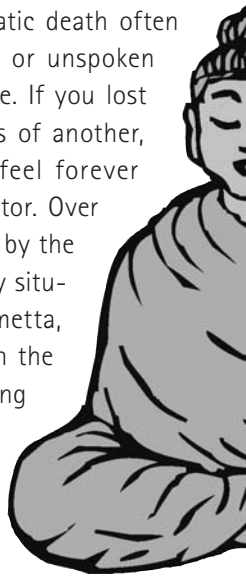
I think it is helpful for all people experiencing grief to know that there are ups and downs that can stretch on for a very long time. This is normal. Our culture stresses terms like "closure" that make it sound as if grief is part of your life for a while, then you "get over" it. But how do you get over a murder? The truth is, grief often just becomes part of who you are, but it doesn't have to be all that you are. There is still living to be done.



Loving-Kindness Meditation

by Sameet Kumar, PhD

Losing a loved one to sudden or traumatic death often leaves a feeling of unfinished business or unspoken goodbyes that can linger for a long time. If you lost a loved one due to the harmful actions of another, your memories of the deceased may feel forever tangled with your anger at the perpetrator. Over the years, I have been consistently awed by the power of forgiveness in the most unlikely situations. The Buddhist meditation called metta, or loving-kindness, can help you unleash the power of forgiveness and bring you healing after violent loss. Parents of murdered children have told me that this exercise liberated their memories of their loved one from the manner in which they died. I hope that it can bring you the same relief.



Find a quiet spot where you can practice this meditation:

- Close your eyes and begin by taking three deep, slow belly breaths. With each breath, bring your awareness from your surroundings to the rising and falling of your breath.
- With your eyes still closed, visualize your body. As you imagine your body, inhale and say to yourself, "May I be free from suffering." As you exhale, say to yourself, "May I be at peace." Spend five minutes breathing in this way.
- Now, imagine your loved one as you would like to remember them. Open your heart to them. As you inhale, silently extend to them the wish: "May you be free from suffering." As you exhale, silently express this wish for them: "May you be at peace." Practice for a few moments in this way.
- Now, imagine the perpetrator. If you don't know who it was, you can visualize them however you imagine them to be. If either of these is too difficult, you can imagine them as a child. Extend to them the same wish as you inhale: "May you be free from suffering." As you exhale, send the person this wish: "May you be at peace." Practice this for as long as you feel comfortable.
- Finally, imagine all creatures on our planet: all the people, all the animals, plants, insects, and sea life. As you inhale, send the planet and every living thing the wish: "May we all be free from suffering." As you exhale, send planet Earth the wish: "May we all be at peace." Practice for a few moments in this way.



us to question whether we have grieved the "right" way, that perhaps there's something wrong with us, or that feeling bad somehow negates the days/minutes/hours when we've felt better. There may even be a fear that we've deluded ourselves into thinking we are doing okay, as if the ambush of grief is evidence that we are not doing well.

As a traveler through grief, it is important to remember that although your journey is your own, you are not alone. There are others who, like you, are stepping through each day, finding some days harder than others. Martha Whitmore Hickman writes in *Healing after Loss: Daily Meditations*

for *Working through Grief*, "When the waves of pain rise highest, we think we will be swept under, that we cannot make it. But we can. Our work then is to accept the pain, and to wait. We can do other things while waiting—talk with people, go to the store, read, work in the garden. Even as we do these things we are aware of the pain, scraping against our heart. But if we accept these bad days as a part of the course of healing, then better days, better moods will come. The pain will moderate; we can be confident—proud even, in our newly acquired strength."

Returning to the gentleman who first introduced me to the term "ambush of

grief," I spoke with him a few months after he told me about his grocery store ambush. He had just returned from visiting his adult daughter in California, who he had helped move into her first apartment. He talked about helping her pick out furniture and putting pictures on the walls, including a large framed picture of his late wife, her mother. He told me that there had been a few more "ambushes" of grief since we had last spoken, but in between, there had been some good moments which had led to good days, and even a few good weeks. He could not stop the ambush when it struck, but he could see some brighter days amongst the gray.

Caring for Yourself During "The Ambush"



REMEMBER TO BREATHE

- Disregard what others are doing. Ignore those who may be looking at you. Just breathe.
- Find a safe place. If you need to sit, find a chair or a wall, or park yourself on the floor. If you are driving, pull over and breathe.
- Get your bearings. Once you catch your breath and survive the initial onslaught of emotion, decide whether you want to continue what you were doing, or save it for another day.

FIND SUPPORT IF NEEDED

- Reach out to family, friends, or colleagues.
- Remember, there is no timeline for grief; your journey is your own.

DO SOMETHING HEALTHY

- Go for a walk.
- Call a friend.
- Give yourself an opportunity to clear your head.

PUT THE AMBUSH IN CONTEXT

- Take a moment to remember all that you ARE doing or accomplishing (i.e., going back to work, picking up your children from school, or even getting out of bed in the morning).
- Remind yourself that it is not uncommon for both sadness and challenge to coexist. When we reference grief as a journey, these are the "rolling hills" on your path.



The *Quilt on Tour*



April 9–22*

**Mt. Pleasant, MI, Chippewa River District
Library Donate Life Month display**

Contact: Andrea Graham, 989.773.3242

One panel of the National Donor Family Quilt is displayed year-round at the National Donor Memorial in Richmond, VA. (This Quilt panel will sometimes be moved for display at other national events.) For more information, contact Erin Kahle at 800.622.9010.

For information about reserving a Quilt panel, please contact the NDFC for updated information and pricing. The NDFC can be reached by email at donorfamily@kidney.org or by phone toll-free at 800.622.9010. Please notify the NDFC of any special requests, including requests for a specific panel of the Quilt. Arrangements will need to be made to display the Quilt properly and obtain permission from the venue where the Quilt will be displayed.

* **PLEASE NOTE:** This schedule is subject to change. Call the National Donor Family Council at 800.622.9010 for the most up-to-date information. The entire Quilt is not on display at these events, and not all events are open to the public. Please call the contact person for more information.

Over the years we've published many helpful articles on topics requested by our donor family readers. From our most recently published issue, to issues dating back to 1995, you can view back issues of *For Those Who Give and Grieve* on our website at www.donorfamily.org

Also, if you would rather receive the newsletter by email to help us save printing costs, please send us an email at donorfamily@kidney.org and we'd be happy to accommodate your request.

of the National Donor Family Council
is to enhance the sensitivity and effectiveness of the organ and tissue recovery process, to provide opportunities for families to grieve and grow, and to utilize the unique perspective and experiences of these families to increase organ and tissue donation.