

Summer 2021



Honoring the Past and
Rebuilding the Future

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Putting Closure to the Use of the Word “Closure” in Grief

by Alan D. Wolfelt, Ph.D.

People in grief are often led to believe they somehow need to achieve “closure” after the death of someone loved. In fact, it’s such a common misconception that many of us have thoroughly internalized it. We’re not sure where the idea came from, but we may consider it a given—and we may struggle when we find that we’re unable to cross that mythical finish line. Why aren’t we reaching closure? Is something wrong with us?

No, nothing is wrong with us. What’s wrong is the goal of closure. The truth is that people simply do not get over grief. There is no closing of the book. There is no shutting of the door. There is no resolution. There is no end. Grief lasts forever.

While it’s true that when someone we love dies, the death indeed ends—forever—our experience of live, bodily presence with that person, our love for them and our missing them go on. As the body is being laid to rest—an event that is sometimes associated with “closure”—we grievers are just getting acquainted with our grief and our needs of mourning. But there is hope! There is something we can work to achieve in our grief. When

we actively mourn—express outside of ourselves—the grief thoughts and feelings we have inside, we are working toward healing. We are moving and changing. Over time and with the support of others, to mourn actively and regularly is to find ways to integrate the loss into our continued living. There is no closure, but there is what I call “reconciliation.”

Reconciliation instead of closure

Reconciling our grief means integrating our new reality of moving forward in life without the physical presence of the person who died. Not just surviving, but really living, even thriving. It typically takes months and years of hard work to get there. With reconciliation comes a renewed sense of energy and confidence, an ability to fully acknowledge the reality of the death, and a capacity to become re-involved in the activities of living. There is also an acknowledgment that pain and grief are difficult, yet necessary, parts of life.

As the experience of reconciliation unfolds, you will recognize that life is and will continue to be dramatically different without the presence of the person who died. We come to reconciliation in our

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"CLOSURE"

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grief journeys when the full reality of the death becomes a part of us. Beyond an intellectual working through of the death, there is also an emotional and spiritual working through. What had been understood at the "head" level is now understood at the "heart" level.

To choose the path that leads to reconciliation requires that you first descend, not transcend. You don't get to go around or above or below your grief. You must go through it. And while you are going through it, you must also find ways to continually express it if you are to integrate it into your being.

You will find that as you begin to reach your goal of reconciliation, the sharp, ever-present pain of grief will give rise to a renewed sense of meaning and purpose. Your feelings of loss will never completely disappear, of course, yet they will soften, and the intense pangs of grief will become less frequent. Hope for a continued life will emerge as you are able to make commitments to the future, realizing that the person who died will never be forgotten but that your life can and must continue. The unfolding of this journey is not intended to create a return to an "old normal" but instead the discovery of a "new normal."

Signs of reconciliation

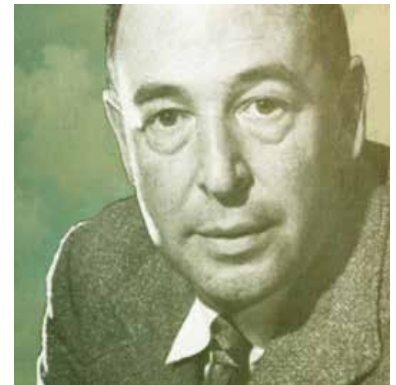
To help you explore where you might be on the path to reconciliation, I've created the following list. You don't have to check each item for incremental healing to be taking place. Reconciliation is an ongoing process. In fact, if you are early in your work of mourning, you may recognize any of these signs. Regardless, this list will give you a way to monitor your movement toward healing and trust that if you are actively mourning, you are on the right path.

- A recognition of the reality and finality of the death.
- A return to stable eating and sleeping patterns.
- A renewed sense of release from the person who has died. You will have thoughts about the person, but you will not be preoccupied by these thoughts.
- The capacity to enjoy experiences in life that are normally enjoyable.
- The establishment of new and healthy relationships.
- The capacity to live a full life without feelings of guilt or lack of self-respect.

- The drive to organize and plan your life toward the future.
- The serenity to become comfortable with the way things are rather than attempting to make things as they were.
- The versatility to welcome more change in your life.
- The awareness that you have challenged yourself to mourn heroically—and you have survived.
- The awareness that you do not "get over" your grief; instead, you have a new reality, meaning, and purpose in your life.
- The acquaintance with new parts of yourself that you have discovered in your grief journey.
- The adjustment to new role changes that may have resulted from the loss of your relationship.
- The acknowledgment that the pain of loss is an inherent part of life resulting from the ability to give and receive love.

Reconciliation does not happen all at once. Instead, it emerges much in the way grass grows. Usually we don't check our lawns daily to see if the grass is growing, but it does grow and soon we come to realize it's time to mow the grass again. Likewise, we don't look at ourselves each day as mourners to see how we are healing. Yet we do come to realize, over the course of months and years, that we have come a long way.

*One of my greatest teachers, C. S. Lewis, wrote in **A Grief Observed** about his grief symptoms as they eased on his journey to reconciliation. "There was no sudden, striking, and emotional transition," he wrote. "Like the warming of a room or the coming of daylight, when you first notice them they have already been going on for some time."*



C.S. LEWIS

On the path to healing, there usually is not one great moment of "arrival" but rather a myriad of subtle changes and small advancements. It's helpful to have gratitude for every baby

"CLOSURE"

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step along the way. If you are beginning to taste your food again, be thankful. If you mustered the energy to meet your friend for lunch, be grateful. If you finally got a good night's sleep, rejoice.

Of course, you will also take steps backward from time to time on the path to healing, but that is to be expected. Keep believing in yourself. Recommit each day to your quest to reconcile your grief and have hope that you can and will come to live and love fully again.

I hope you'll join me in my efforts to put closure to the use of the word "closure" in grief. The next time someone asks if or suggests that you're reaching closure, tell them there's no such

thing. The conversation that ensues will help both of you—and our world.

*Printed with permission. This article appeared in the Spring 2019 TAPS magazine. A longtime TAPS supporter, Dr. Alan Wolfelt serves as Director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition and is a member of the TAPS Advisory Board. He has written many books that help people mourn, including *Healing Your Grieving Heart After a Military Death* (coauthored with TAPS President Bonnie Carroll.) Visit www.centerforloss.com to learn more about grief and to order Dr. Wolfelt's books.*

A German Shepherd, a Doberman, and a cat died.

In heaven, all three faced God, who wanted to know what they believed in.

The German Shepherd said, "I believe in discipline, training, and loyalty to my master." "Good!" said God. "Sit at my right side."

"Doberman, what do you believe in?" asked God.

The doberman answered, "I believe in the love, care, and protection of my master."

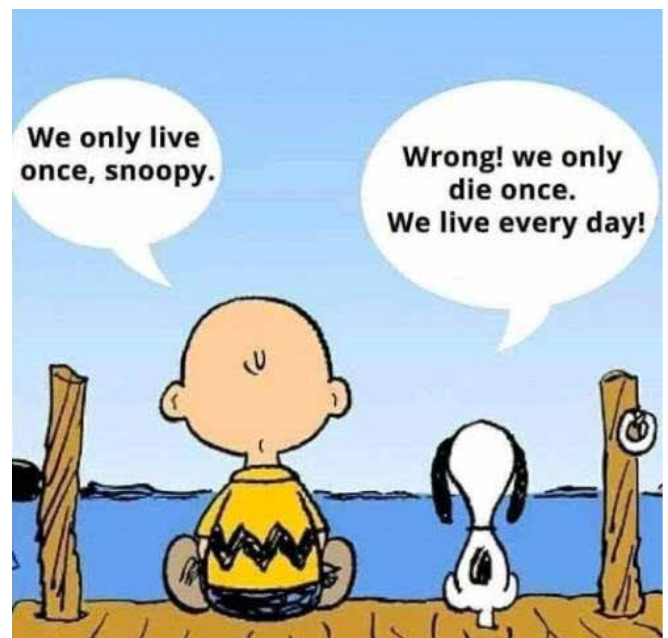
"Aha," said God. You may sit to my left."

Then God looked at the cat and asked, "And what do you believe in?"

The cat replied, "I believe you are sitting in my seat."



On the Lighter Side





EDITOR'S JOURNAL

NAN ZASTROW

Co-Founder,
Wings – A Grief Education Ministry

SIGNS THAT OUR LOVED ONE'S SPIRIT LIVES ON!

During these pandemic times, those who are grieving are likely more aware and connected with their loved one who died than ever before. Quarantine provided a lot of time to think and ponder death and the beyond. It was a time to observe and be open to the signs and messages of those who died. Some people were burdened with “survivor’s guilt” wondering why a loved one died due to the virus, and they did not. Some lacked shortened, virtual, or absent services to say a proper good-bye. An opportunity to feel their loved one’s presence or receive a message that they are okay would certainly be a precious gift.

Connection through messages, signs, symbols, and mystical happenings are not only desired and welcomed, but may be one of the single most important things a mourner yearned for in these stressful times. However, the pandemic is not the catalyst for happenings that are unexplainable. Messages and miracles from beyond have been happening since the beginning of time. In today’s world, we feel more comfortable talking about these strange happenings without being scrutinized for an overactive imagination or a fantasy trip. Are you a believer or a skeptic?

I felt this was a good time to give all of us a renewal of Hope by sharing some stories from those who have had connection or communication (call it what you like) with their loved one who died. This issue should help you determine your own opinion on “Can this be true?”

To start, I’ll share two events that were signs to Gary and me that our son, Chad’s, presence was confirmed

within two days after his death. Each event, so typical of him, helped us feel that he was okay. We also believe these messages confirmed that his unexpected death (by suicide) was not meant to hurt us but happened with a bad decision during an emotional event in his life overwhelmed him.

The morning after his death, we awoke to sunshine pouring through the windows when only the day before a wicked spring ice storm raged through our town. I walked through the house, as I did every morning and intentionally strolled through the foyer. The front door was open—just a crack. I closed it and asked Gary if he had used the front door. (Rarely was our front door used except when visitors came.) He replied that he had not, and the subject was dropped. We went to his parent’s house later, and Gary’s Mom said their front door was open a crack that morning and the sun was shining in. This was strange because their house didn’t even have a stoop by the front door, and it was actually unusable. Gary and I both looked at each other and grinned. No coincidence. We interpreted it as a sign that Chad was there.

A few days later and the night before the funeral, Gary and I were lying in bed talking. Suddenly we heard a crash in our lower level that caught our attention and we went silent. We both asked each other, “Did you hear that?” Then, simultaneously, we heard the familiar pounding sound of hands pounding up the stairs. Chad would always come upstairs making a commotion with his hands pounding the step ahead of him as he

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SIGNS...

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ascended. Coincidence? Never. The noise in the lower level was a plant that fell into the bathtub. (That plant sat there for months undisturbed. The pot didn't break and only a small amount of dirt came out of the pot.) If it wasn't for this distraction, we might have missed the important encounter!

We continued to have messages and signs. And, still today, I'll have a rare one, mostly through dreams. I am a believer. The spirit does exist after death. The veil between life and death is very thin. I believe our Heavenly Father allows these encounters to encourage us and assure us that our loved one is okay and has just passed to a different dimension; but love and life continue. I'm grateful for this gift of Hope!

I BELIEVE HOPE IS FOUND

From the book: Hitch Your Hope to a Star, by Nan Zastrow

I believe hope is found in:

- saying yes instead of no;
- loving the concept of living; dying can wait.
- turning the sad memories, to stories of the living soul;
- forgiving the unforgivable, not planning for revenge;
- counting your blessings; not your challenges;
- mending relationships instead of replacing them;
- saying, "I'll always remember", not "I'll never stop missing you;"
- getting up, instead of laying down;
- giving in gracefully, when you have nothing to gain;
- letting go, when you can't change the outcome;
- looking for the miracle; not just waiting for it to happen;
- strengthening your spiritual self, not being angry at God for your lack of faith;
- counting your steps forward; not the ones that sometimes drift back;
- saying, "what next?" instead of "why me?"

Hope begins your journey. Believe in it. Trust in it. Imagine it. Feel the energy.

Wings
A Grief Education Ministry

How to Connect with Wings:

- Email: nanwings1@gmail.com
- Postal: P.O. Box 1051, Wausau, WI 54402-1051
- Ph: 715.845.4159
- Visit Wings on Facebook

- Follow the EVENTS calendar posted at the website wingsgrief.org
- Subscribe to the free online ELetter sent quarterly.
- Visit centeringcorp.com for grief articles and resources. Follow Nan's articles published by Grief Digest.

Reader Feedback



We asked our readers, "Have you been touched, changed, or given a gift of peace by a unique encounter with your loved one who died?" And the stories we receive were wonderful encounters that give comfort and hope that our loved one lives on! Read on! Enjoy! Believe in the mysteries of life and death!

I had an incident about 24 1/2 years ago. I had a busy middle schooler who had to get up early for school and was involved in after-school activities as well as homework. I also had a preschooler who got up just after my middle schooler left for school in the morning for 2 1/2 hours. My youngest daughter, Katherine, recently born was not sleeping through the night yet. I would be up with her a couple of times during the night. Needless to say, a couple of months into this schedule, I was very tired and was starting to wonder how much longer I was going to be able to continue this routine.

Then, one morning I didn't hear my alarm and my oldest daughter did not as well. I was awakened by the phone. When I answered the phone, there was a strange noise on it. I had a very eerie strange feeling come over me in the room. For whatever reason, I felt my deceased mother's presence giving me a helping hand. It was the strangest feeling. I knew it was her and I started to cry and thank her for being there in the room. It was a time in my life that I really missed her and needed her. I knew she was there, and it gave me some strength.

I also believe she was an Angel for me one day while I was driving in a hurry, and something made me slow down.

It was a very strange, odd nudge or feeling again. Nothing that I had ever felt before. It was when the kids were young. I haven't felt her in a long time, but I miss her and think of her a lot and all that she has missed in our lives.

Julia - Barrington, Illinois

After my teenage son Evan died, I started seeing feathers everywhere. At first, I thought it was just coincidence and that the idea that the feathers might be a sign from my son was just the wishful thinking of a grieving mother. Then one day when I was on a walk, I said out loud, "I miss you, Evan." I looked down right then and there was a feather in my path. Evan always pointed out funny warning signs (like electricity that looked like a monster chasing someone who got too close, for example). I saw a humorous warning sign on a boat lift and commented on how much Evan would have liked it. I turned around and the water on the other side of the dock was filled with white feathers.

Feathers continued to remind us of Evan. During a particularly emotional time on the 5th anniversary of Evan's death, my youngest son, Nathan, was going through a rough patch at school with his football coach. His father also died that year and we decided to prove that our family was normal and okay

by being involved with the football season. On one particular night, Nathan got home from practice and dumped his little bag of dirty practice clothes onto the table. Along with the t-shirt, shorts, and socks, there was a large feather. The bag hadn't been outside. It was emptied every single day. Where did the feather come from? I can only give one answer, even if I don't understand how it happened. Evan. Somehow, all of my angst disappeared. Evan was ok and we were going to be okay, too. Do I think Evan has some kind of power to pull strings here on earth? Not really, but I do think he found a way to communicate with us and it was through that darn feather!

Stephanie - Seattle WA

About a year after my daughter died, my husband and I decided to take her 6 year-old son to Disney World. Her favorite song was "Over the Rainbow" which we explained to him as we went through Wizard of Oz ride. While we waited on the runway on our return flight home, I was in the window seat, my grandson was in the middle seat and my husband on the aisle. The weather was sunny and lovely and had not rained. All of a sudden, I noticed a beautiful rainbow outside the window. I turned to my husband and grandson and

said “Look at that rainbow” and they said “what rainbow?” I am certain that my daughter was letting me know that she knew we were taking care of her son and knew about our wonderful trip with him.

Bunny - Boynton Beach, FL

Recently, my wife and I have experienced some unexplainable occurrences that have left us wondering. My son, Jason, passed away on January 20, 2020. There is a series on Netflix entitled “Surviving Death” two days after watching this series, I was placing clothing into our dirty laundry 5-tiered hamper. As I pulled out the hamper, something caught my eye in the back left corner of the drawer within the hamper. I reached in and retrieved a penny. Here in Canada, pennies have been out of circulation for a few years. I cannot remember ever having pennies in my pockets prior to placing clothes into the hamper. As I gazed upon this penny, I was immediately reminded of the Netflix series. As I focused in on the year of the penny, I thought to myself that it would be remarkable if this newly discovered penny had the same year on it as my son’s birth year. Sure enough, the penny was from 1986, the year my son was born.

On two separate occasions, on our downstairs fireplace, the top fireplace louvers fell to the floor with a loud metallic crash. These louvers must be lifted up and then pulled forward to release them from the fireplace. The first occurrence happened while my wife and I were upstairs having dinner. We heard a loud crash and we both went to

investigate. We looked only on the main floor of our bungalow, not finding any evidence. After dinner my wife went downstairs and discovered the louvers scattered on the tile in front of the fireplace. The second time this happened was late at night as we were watching television. The only light was from the projection bulb for the television screen. We heard that now familiar metallic crash and as my wife and I turned to each other then turned behind us, the louvers were once again scattered about the floor.

On this recent occasion, at 03:09am, (I remember because I looked at the clock) I heard a loud thud. I asked my wife if she heard it at which she immediately replied yes. We were still and quiet in case there would be more noise from a possible intruder. After some time, I got up and checked the house for any signs of what the noise may have been. Unsuccessfully, I returned to bed. In the morning my wife discovered a full pineapple that was on our countertop near the backsplash was on the floor. I have not ever seen a pineapple tip over and roll off the counter by itself.

These are some unexplained occurrences within our dwelling. If they are from my son, I welcome him with open arms of love. Maybe someday, I will get to query him to see if he was responsible.

Mike - Leduc Alberta Canada

I am so grateful to feel my husband around me all the time. I would not have made it through this without the signs that he is with me. They give me strength to continue putting one foot in front of the other and doing the best I

can with the sad circumstances we were given.

I see him in the violets, when the lawn is more full of them than I have ever seen before, in the field of yellow flowers that show up on our wedding anniversary and the single beautiful flower blooming from his grave on my birthday. I see him in the butterfly that fly’s along side me and follows me. A cardinal sits outside my window when I am sad but I know that I am not alone.

One day, a bald eagle made a big circle in the sky and flew down to my eye level about 18’ ahead of me. As it came closer to me, its wings were flapping furiously. The eagle appeared to be waving to me. This happened three times, each time the wings would wave at me (as I interpreted it) and I waved back. Then it started gliding in circles higher and higher until it actually disappeared up into the sky (or heaven as I believe) where I could no longer see it. I really felt like my husband was showing me how free from pain he is and that he is happy in heaven. This sign brought me so much joy and peace.

Two days before I sold our home, a bald eagle flew over the apartment where I was moving. I was not exactly sure it was an eagle because I could not see the white head. Then it flew over again and turned towards me so I could see the beautiful white head and I knew my husband was telling me the apartment is my new home and he is with me and it would be ok. Just the assurance I needed during such a sad time.

In my darkest hours, I believe my husband has visited me. He stands very close and doesn’t speak during

the visit, but I know exactly what he is telling me. His visit brings me so much comfort that I gain the strength I need to keep going another day. Those visits have been the biggest blessing I could receive because they rejuvenate me and bring back all the love we share. My guy was such a good man, and he took such good care of me that it seems normal to me that he is still with me looking out for me. I would not have

made it without his and God's help.

A cardinal will sit outside my window when I am sad or worried about something and I know it is a sign that I am not alone. The cardinal always shows up when I need to see it the most.

Sue - Edgar WI

I have experienced signs from my loved one that have made me feel comforted.

Every time I see butterflies following me on a walk or cardinals, they feel like signs from my loved one. I have noticed that each year on my loved one's birthday, it's rained, and it doesn't feel like a coincidence to me. It feels like the signs happen right when I need them the most, and it helps me feel reassured that my loved one is still here in his own way.

Rebecca - Wausau, WI

Saved by a Parachute

After the death of our son, Brian, the Fourth of July was difficult. The day seemed much worse than Thanksgiving, Christmas or Easter.

Those days, extended family surrounded us and Brian's absence was cushioned by family activity and support. The Fourth of July was different because we often celebrated with just immediate family. Being shattered by his death, we weren't sure how to observe the day without him.

The holiday was also special because Brian took special measures to make it so. He was our firebug. He played a major role in selecting the fireworks we ignited. Once, he came home saying the family favorites were no longer available, but he had picked out some better ones for the grand finale. His selections did not disappoint. It was an awesome grand finale.

I was amazed he remembered the names of the colorful cones and rockets we "oohed" and "aa" over each year, but that was Brian, sensitive and caring. I told him I trusted his judgment but didn't have the heart to say I liked all of them. It wouldn't have mattered which he chose, any would illuminate the night and bring delight. I may not have remembered them, but he did. And it had been his care that made the displays joyful.

The first year following his death, we decided to spend the day with our extended family, but declined the offer to view the nightly fireworks. Our hearts were still too tender, and we thought that would be too overwhelming. It was hard to imagine enjoying colorful, bright lights when the darkness of grief overshadowed us.

Late in the afternoon, anxious for the fireworks to begin, the younger kids begged to shoot off the parachutes so they could play with them. With most of the adults playing ball, the older kids agreed to help.

Between the two canisters, there were ten parachutes, five red and five blue. There were also five kids. Instantly, they figured out they would each get two.

Under watchful adult eyes, they burst into the air. Immediately, the younger ones scrambled to catch the paper and string delights. Unfortunately, a slight breeze carried the light-weight shells into the trees. We looked high and low, eventually finding all but one red parachute. By that time, the kids had moved on to other events. In a strange way, the falling parachutes mirrored my own fall into grief. Having one missing parachute just reinforced the fact that Brian was also absent.

Near nightfall, we said good-bye and made our way home, 45 miles away. While driving, we decided to stop at the gravesite. We needed time with Brian. It got darker faster than we anticipated, but we figured our headlights would illuminate our way.

The car parked, my husband got out and walked to the far side of the headstone. He bent down and picked something up. Since he was beyond the lights of the car, I did not immediately see what it was. He held it up: a red parachute, exactly like the one we failed to find earlier. A chill ran through me, despite the summer's penetrating heat. I burst into tears trying to explain that we had found all, but one red parachute earlier in the day.

To some, the simple act of finding the parachute is mere coincidence, but not to my grieving heart. Seeing it gave me a comfort I cannot explain. This was a sign of Brian's presence, his spirit alive. It was as if he was saying, "I picked this one out just for you. I knew you would like it." Even through the tears, it was a spectacular grand finale.

Janet - Fremont NE

MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE



NAN ZASTROW

This is our personal story of “messages from beyond.” This story is included in my book *Holding Onto Hope—When Loss Hurts...Finding a Reason to Shine*. I encourage you to order your copy today for amazing perceptions of living beyond loss and finding meaning and purpose again.

In my journey through grief, I’m always amazed at how Gary and I continue to grow. And, how many times and in how many ways God has reinforced our Wings ministry as our mission in this life.

In our support groups, we are often asked: “Do you believe that our loved ones can communicate with us after death? Can unusual “happenings” be signs or messages?”

Some people will never accept that our loved ones can provide us messages after death. Others believe and hold tightly to the signs and messages that may appear coincidental, but typically provide a beautiful, confirming message that love lives on.

The subject of after death communications (ADCs) has been scrutinized, hypothesized, and factualized for many, many years. There will always be skeptics, and there will always be advocates. Our newsletters have shared experiences over the years. We’ve invited experts like Lou LaGrand and Judy Gugenheim to our annual Spring Seminars to share their research. And, inevitably such seminars are hugely popular. Perhaps the

reassurance that life continues is exactly what we need to know when someone loved dies.

I’ve had my share of messages over the years...but it’s been a few years since I’ve had one so emotional and moving as a recent occurrence which was epic to me.

For over 20 years, Gary and I treasured this large 20 inch “milk” bottle that belonged to Chad. He deposited his loose change in it. After his death, we took the bottle and put it in the back of our closet on the floor. We’ve moved it about a dozen times since his death, as we relocated from one new house to another. But we never had the heart to empty the jar. It was as though its presence was a “message” that Chad was with us always.

This time, as we began packing the boxes for yet another move, I lifted the seriously heavy jar from its hiding corner on the floor of our closet. I talked to Gary about “giving it up”, emptying the contents, and letting it go---the fact is: “It was about time.” We agreed to take it to the bank and cash it in.

MESSAGE IN A BOTTLE

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Perhaps this jar was just another linking object that bound us to the memory of our son. After all, he touched the jar and coins almost every day. No matter how long we hang on to something that was a precious reminder of our loved one, at some point the decision must be made to relinquish the treasured piece. I reasoned that if we didn't do it... someone else would. Someone else would have no idea what the jar represented. Someone else wouldn't understand how the message of this jar gave us a sense of peace! It's not as though it was growing monetary interest in its hiding place. Every time I vacuumed the floor, the head of the vacuum cleaner clunked into the heavy jar. And I would say, "Hello, Chad." I finally justified our decision. I chuckled as I thought Chad was probably wondering what the heck we were doing hanging on to the jar since 1993!

Gary carried the heavy glass milk bottle into the bank and began dumping the change into the automated coin counter. The sound of metal clinking and clanging as it swirled around in the machine was almost unnerving. Finally, it quit, but the attendant tried just a couple more swirls as there were a number of coins that didn't count or pass through the machine. She removed the orphan coins. One was a quarter with a hole drilled through it. There were several Canadian coins, but most amazing was a lead token. Gary scooped it into his hand. In the car, he retrieved the token and handed it to me. The message on that token in the bottle was mind boggling. After all this time, there was one more message we shared with Chad.

I was unprepared for the impact of the token that Gary held. Chad got this token from somewhere. I don't remember giving it to him. He deposited it in the bottle along with other loose coins. And on this particular day, bridging the gap between the past and the present, it brought us joy!

During those 20+ years (since Chad's death), we formed a non-profit organization named "Wings". We selected the name based on a verse that I once cross-stitched and framed. It hung on our wall during the growing years. The verse simply stated: "Two gifts we should give our children. One is roots and the other is wings." When Chad died, we found comfort in believing he "spread his wings" leaving this life for something greater. We, in turn, spread our wings to help ourselves and others cope with grief through our non-profit ministry which educates the bereaved about grief and encourages them to find hope to live again.

I rolled the token over in the palm of my hand and read the inscription with tears streaming down my face. Beneath a set of embossed wings on the token, it read "Spread Your Wings".

For just a few moments, I felt a resounding sense of peace. And I thought: "I'm not sure, Chad, if the inscription on that token was meant for you or for Gary and me, but I believe we both accomplished this sacred goal!"



GOD SPEAK TO ME

**THE MAN WHISPERED,
“GOD SPEAK TO ME.”
AND THE MEADOWLARK SANG,
BUT THE MAN DID NOT HEAR.**

**SO, THE MAN YELLED
“GOD SPEAK TO ME.”
AND THE THUNDER ROLLED.
ACROSS THE SKY,
BUT THE MAN DID NOT LISTEN.**

**THE MAN LOOKED AROUND AND SAID,
“GOD, LET ME SEE YOU.”
AND A STAR SHINED BRIGHTLY.
BUT THE MAN DID NOT NOTICE.**

**AND THE MAN SHOUTED.
“GOD SHOW ME A MIRACLE.”
AND A LIFE WAS BORN.
BUT THE MAN DID NOT KNOW.**

**SO, THE MAN CRIED OUT IN DESPAIR,
“TOUCH ME GOD,
AND LET ME KNOW YOU ARE HERE.”
WHEREUPON GOD REACHED DOWN
AND TOUCHED THE MAN.
BUT THE MAN BRUSHED THE BUTTERFLY
AWAY AND WALKED ON.**

Be Good to Yourself

SELF CARE TIP

Hope is mysterious, but it has a powerful affect on our lives. The uncertainty that follows the death of a loved one is normal. We can struggle silently, or we can search for hope that gives meaning to things we don't understand. This is the kind of hope that comes from within. We can surrender and be helpless or fight and regain control over our lives. Finding hope takes effort. Now is the perfect opportunity to get positive. The restraints of COVID19 are less and we are free to

pursue things with renewed purpose, greater resiliency, and heightened energy.

Give yourself permission to heal. Every day is an opportunity to be more loving, more giving, forgiving and even empowered. We all have the capacity to find hope and meaning. Let it begin!

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Rest In Peace, Mr. President

By Todd Van Beck

Rest in Peace, Mr. President. That was the hope...that our presidents would rest in peace, but that has not always happened. For example, between 1865 and 1901 Lincoln's remains were moved 18 times.

Funerals are a reflection of how people live their lives, and this remains true for the funerals of our U.S. presidents. This series offers a glimpse into the deaths and funerals of our presidents, while offering overdue recognition to the scores of funeral professionals who labored ceaselessly to carry out the wishes of the presidents, their families, and in some cases, the wishes of the United States government. Each account tells an interesting story. —TVB

ANDREW JOHNSON

the seventeenth President of the United States of America

No president ever came into office under more tragic and dramatic circumstances than did Andrew Johnson. He learned that he was going to be the 17th president when he was aroused by pounding on his hotel door, at which point a messenger blurted out the news of Lincoln's assassination.

While most presidents had been lawyers or military figures, Andrew Johnson was a tailor, and he did well in his chosen profession in his hometown of Greenville, Tennessee. Johnson entered politics and was elected to the Tennessee Assembly as a State Senator, then as a U.S. Congressman. He resigned that role to become the Governor of Tennessee, and in 1857, he was selected as a United States Senator from Tennessee.

Andrew Johnson had courage. Of that, there was little question. To illustrate this fact, Johnson was the only senator from a seceded southern state that refused to walk out and leave his position. This was viewed with high favor by President Lincoln. Hence, in the 1864 election, Lincoln chose Andrew Johnson, a Democrat, as his running mate.

President Johnson sought to carry out the lenient recon-

struction policies that had been envisioned by President Lincoln, but success was not to be the measure of his presidency. Johnson was short-tempered, stubborn, and walked around with a chip on his shoulder. Eventually, Johnson found himself embroiled in an impeachment trial. He was acquitted in the Senate by one vote.

Former President Johnson was elected once again as a United States Senator from Tennessee, the first time in American history that a former president served in the Senate. Andrew Johnson was now vindicated, and he eventually retired and returned to his home in eastern Tennessee

Johnson was not in great health in his later years. He suffered attacks of malaria, and in 1873, when a cholera epidemic swept through Greenville, he almost died. This illness left him weakened and probably affected his heart.

By the summer of 1875, Johnson was a dying man. In June of 1875, he lost vision in his right eye and had chronic headaches. It is probable that Johnson suffered a stroke at this time. In July, his lower extremities were not functioning properly, and he often stumbled when he walked. His side and face were bruised from when he took a nasty fall.

On Wednesday, July 28, 1875, Johnson boarded a train for the 45-mile trip to Carter County to visit his daughter. The trip exhausted Johnson, and upon arrival, he complained of being very tired and rested until the mid-day meal. After eating, Johnson went upstairs to sit and talk with his granddaughter. Suddenly, he fell out of his chair and was unable to rise. His tongue would not work, and he was placed in bed. It appeared as if his left side had been paralyzed.

By Friday, Johnson was in and out of consciousness, and at 7:00 PM, he slipped into a coma. Andrew Johnson died at 2:30 AM on Saturday, July 31, 1875. He had lived 66 years and 214 days.

News of Johnson's death spread quickly, and cities like Nashville, Memphis, and Knoxville were making plans to have him

buried within the bounds of their own cities.

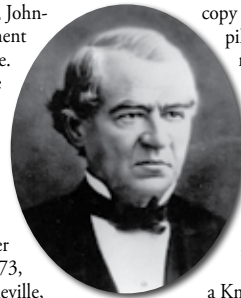
Johnson had left three funeral instructions. 1. He wanted the American flag as his burial shroud. 2. He wanted a copy of the United States Constitution as his casket pillow. 3. He wanted to be buried on top of Signal Hill outside Greenville on a spot that he himself had marked.

The members of the Masonic Lodge in Carter County took charge of their brother's remains and made arrangements to have the body returned home. Johnson's remains arrived at the Greenville station at 7:00 AM. The body was taken to the Johnson residence.

The President's casket had been sent by a Knoxville undertaker named **Lazarus C. Shepard**. The casket was covered with Masonic emblems and with black broadcloth. Undertaker Shepard would be engaged to conduct the entire funeral.

Tuesday, August 3, 1875 was the day of the funeral. The Masons gathered where they escorted Johnson's body to the Courthouse. The funeral for Andrew Johnson was carried out exclusively by the Knights Templar of which he had been a longtime member. At 1:30 PM, the burial was completed. The funeral procession was over half a mile long.

In 1906, the Johnson family donated the land where the President was buried to the government to be used as a National Cemetery. Today, it is known as the **Andrew Johnson National Cemetery**.



Todd W. Van Beck is associated with John A. Gupton College in Nashville, and has been an author, teacher, practitioner, and speaker for over 40 years. On May 30, 2018 Van Beck celebrated 50 years in funeral service. You can reach Todd at 615-327-3927.

FUNERAL HOME & CEMETERY NEWS
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Angels are Watching Over Us

By Gary Denniss, Bracebridge, Ontario, Canada

On the stormy winter afternoon of January 28th, 2004, our twenty-six-year-old daughter Londa was killed in an automobile collision on Highway 26 west of Barrie. The death of any child, regardless of cause or age, is overwhelming to parents, family, friends and the surrounding community. Though we are people of faith, our family experienced intense, long-lasting and complex grief just like anyone else would in similar circumstances.

The section of highway where the three-vehicle accident occurred is straight and uninhabited. Londa's big car slid sideways across the slippery, snow-covered road, into the opposite lane where the passenger side was struck by a vehicle which in turn was rear-ended by a truck. Shortly after the collision, a mother and her sixteen-year-old son Jimmy came along returning from Barrie to Elmvale following his driving test. They were the first on the scene and stopped to see if they could assist. Additionally, the O.P.P. and paramedics were called.

Later that day, Londa's husband called our home and asked us to come immediately to Royal Victoria Hospital. Londa was in an accident and would be flown by helicopter to Sunnybrook in Toronto. By then, family members, including Londa's pastor from the Barrie Free Methodist Church, had started to gather. Much prayer

and anxiety ensued, but the impact of the collision had damaged Londa's internal organs so badly that the prognosis was not good.

It was the attending physician at Sunnybrook who gave us that Londa died. Our family's journey of grief began around her bedside. Even with our family's strong faith, we couldn't change the fact that she was now with her Savior, Jesus Christ. At Londa's Celebration of Life we shared our common sorrow, common affection and common hope with seven hundred mourners who came to support us. We knew Londa was in heaven, but the heartache of her loss was very much with us that day and still is.

An Answer to our Prayers

It's only normal for Grace and me to wonder if Londa had suffered at the time of the accident. God provided an answer in His own time and way. A few days after the funeral, I visited Macaulay Public School from which I had retired in 1998 having no idea that God was about to answer our question and bring a strong measure of comfort and peace to our hearts.

A gift of peace and comfort was given to us by Tracy, a parent volunteer and a friend of ours. She asked to speak to me in the school hallway and with brokenness related this story. Her Dad, Peter, and Jimmy's Dad were co-workers. In chatting at work a day or so after the



accident, Jimmy's Dad told Peter about the sad encounter Jimmy and his mother had that fateful afternoon. Peter realized that it was our family that he was talking about.

Jimmy told his Dad that when he went over to the car to see if he could help, there was a young man sitting beside the woman in the driver's seat. He was quietly comforting her and covering her with a yellow blanket. When questioned later, Jimmy and his Mom told the police officer about the young fellow but he was nowhere to be seen, or the blanket, not even his footprints were near the car. There was no house from which he could have walked without being noticed. We later learned from Jimmy's Mom that there was an unusual calmness and quietness at the scene, and she also commented that Londa's distinctive blonde hair looked so beautiful.

The climax of the believer's association with angels comes at the close of our earthly journey. If the Lord tarries, everyone presently alive will someday pass out of

this life into the world beyond. When that happens, the Bible teaches that the angels carry the soul of the believers to their eternal home with God in heaven. (Luke 16:22 says that "...the beggar died and was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom.") We have every reason to believe this is true!!

The fact that a teenage boy would draw attention to a yellow blanket in this scenario was highly unusual in our thinking, but it was the defining factor in confirming that Londa had passed away peacefully at the scene of the accident and had not suffered undue physical pain. She had been gently escorted to her heavenly home by ministering angels. Of course, Jimmy and his Mom could not have known that in Londa's childhood, her "go to" item of comfort (security) was a yellow blanket.

God works in mysterious ways His wonder to perform, and for that we are grateful. "Gracious is the Lord and righteous; our God is compassionate." Psalm 116:5



**Our friends are like angels
Who brighten our days...
in all kinds of special, wonderful ways.**

**Their thoughtfulness comes
As a gift from above...
And we feel we're surrounded
By warm, caring love.
Like upside-down rainbows,
their smiles bring the sun...
And they fill ho hum moments
with laughter and fun.**

Friends are like angels without any wings...

**Blessing our lives
With the most precious things.**



Friends You Meet Along The Way

This message of acknowledgement and friendship was recently published in the newsletter of Hope for the Bereaved from Syracuse, NY. We, at Wings really appreciated the acknowledgement by Therese Schoeneck, Founder. When the caller ID showed her name, I immediately recognized her. I met Therese in 2005 when we were both presenters at the World Gathering in Vancouver, Canada. One never knows who you will meet, why they came into your life, or the impact they might have in the moment or in the future. She let me know that she has been following me and our ministry through Wings, and I had to agree that I have followed her through their newsletter. <https://hopeforbereaved.com/>



HOPELINE Newsletter - June 2021

A monthly newsletter of HOPE FOR BEREAVED, a not-for-profit community organization providing hope, support and services for the bereaved.



Grateful to Wings Editor Nan and Gary Zastrow founded Wings, A Grief Education Ministry 28 years ago after the death of their son Chad by suicide. Nan is the editor of a quarterly ELetter: Wings. It is an excellent newsletter. I encourage you to subscribe to their free online ELetter which I plan to do along with a donation. Wings is a non-profit like HOPE and has been unable to hold in person events which provide funding and educations. "Rituals for Remembrance After the Pandemic" on page 10.

<https://www.wingsgrief.org/>

KINDNESS

I shall pass through this world but once. If, therefore, there be any kindness I can show, or any good thing I can do, let me do it now; let me not defer it or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.



There is no charge for these groups, but... registration is required to receive the Zoom link.



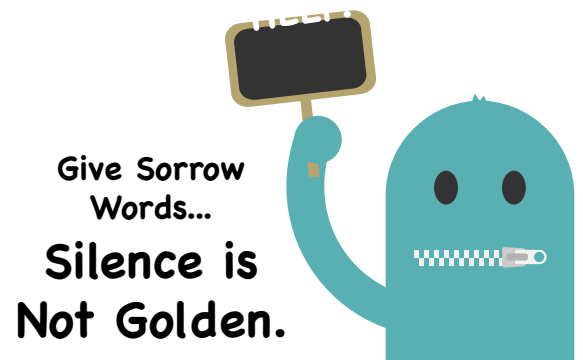
August 10, 2021
6:00–7:30pm CST

Have you ever thought that your loved one who died is supporting you, reassuring you and even cheering you on from beyond? Do you believe in the possibilities of messages and symbols as “signs” that your loved one can connect with you? Do you continue to “talk” to your loved one to relieve the stress of grief and give you a sense of peace? If these questions intrigue you, you may want to attend our session on Visits from the Twilight Zone where our curiosity and inner spirit beckon us to believe in things we can’t see or confirm. Learn about the behaviors that may prevent you from receiving this gift. And learn what gifts are out there just waiting for your acknowledgement.

Sept 21, 28 and Oct. 5, 12, 2021
6:00–7:00pm CST

Grief is something you may consider private and personal, as though only you can own it. We live in a culture that avoids talking about loss and one that wants us to move quickly through mourning to become our former selves. But grief is a process that takes time and work. Silence is not golden. When you give sorrow words, you express how you are feeling and begin to release your personal anguish. You teach others about your grief.

Grief that goes unnamed and unspoken, remains unresolved. Grief is an emotion that can rule your life. In this 4-week ZOOMGRIEF series, you will learn what’s normal and what’s necessary to heal your grief. Learn how grief challenges your common sense. Giving sorrow words after loss helps you find peace and meaning in your life going forward.



Nov. 9, 2021
6:00–7:30pm CST

We invite you to our Open-Microphone ZOOMGRIEF session that allows you to express your thoughts, ask questions, share your challenges, and feel a connection with others going through grief just like you. In this session, the facilitator, Nan Zastrow, will encourage you to talk about your grief, listen to the stories others want to tell, and/or share your own experiences.

Participants will be asked to honor confidentiality, be non-judgmental and respect each other’s feelings so this can be a safe place to talk. You don’t need to justify your feelings. This is not a counseling session—and we won’t be giving advice. It’s a time for you to share what is on your mind. Facilitation may include guided questions to create conversation and each session will conclude with an inspirational thought or healthy grieving tips.

Don’t grieve alone and keep your anxieties and fears bottled up inside. Discover how others are finding their way through grief. The goal of this session is to change the dark moments into hope and happiness again. We can do this together!

Register online at wingsgrief.org or email: nanwings1@gmail.com



Thank you to our sponsors:



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Facilitator: Nan Zastrow

wingsgrief.org | 715.845.4159

Holding Onto Hope When Loss Hurts

Finding a reason to shine!

“We must be willing to let go of the life we planned, so we can accept the life that is waiting for us.” (Joseph Campbell)

When the darkest moment in life changes everything you know to be true, it doesn't mean that your divine spirit can't be revitalized. After the suicide death of her son, Chad and his fiancé just 10 weeks later, Nan found that she was desperately searching for new meaning and purpose. Accepting that “this is real” and holding on to the belief that “I can do this!” begins the process of re-engaging in life again.

Nan vowed to live the best life possible under the circumstances and honor the precious memories of her son. She believes that everyone transforms through grief and moves onto to another stage, just as our loved ones who died move onto a new stage. They still live within us and influence our future choices and who we become after loss. Every dark cloud can have a silver lining of hope strengthened by not giving up or giving in. Nan offers her readers significant suggestions for healing after loss. This book is a testimony that the sun will shine again!

“Nan's writing is always fantastic. She shares her knowledge and experience in terms that everyone can relate to and understand. She has an amazing knack of putting feelings of pain and loss into hopeful thoughts. I highly recommend everything she writes.”

- Bunny, Florida



NAN ZASTROW

Available at:

Wings
A Grief Education Ministry

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

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

Cost:
\$9.95



Once a year Wings likes to acknowledge those who support the ministry of Wings—a Grief Education Ministry. We continue because of the donations we receive. Wings is a tax-exempt, non-profit, 501 c-3 organization. 100% of your donations supports Wings since there are no paid staff or administration fees. We are all volunteers serving from the heart.



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- Bunny Salomon—Boynton Beach, FL—In Memory of dau., Marilyn Ellen Farberman, husband, Jay
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- Tom & Karen Bentz, Venice, FL.—In Memory of wife, Judith Bentz; nephew, Chad Zastrow
- Mark and Judi Brost, Sedona, AZ—In Memory of daughter, Erin Brost
- Clarence & Sally Johnson, Wausau—In Memory of nephew, Chad Zastrow
- Dr. Henry & Bonnie Kanemoto, Wausau—In Memory of spouses: Tom Forcey & Elizabeth Kanemoto
- Sue Fox, Wausau—In Memory of sons, Bill and David, husband, Jerry
- Stephanie Darnell, Wausau-- In Memory of son, Evan Rieck and husband, Paul Rieck
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