



Giving Yourself Permission... Andy McNiel



Holidays are rich with meaning. Perhaps that's what makes them so difficult when we are grieving. Holidays have deep roots in our lives, for they are bound by tradition, marked by celebration and filled with expectation. Yet, grief has a way of casting a shadow over even the most meaningful things in our lives, including holidays, birthdays and other special occasions. We anticipate the coming of these days, but unlike in the past, quite often, our anticipation is not one of joy and excitement, but one of anxiety, stress and worry.

We worry that we will have to face that day without the presence of our beloved. We dread seeing all the celebration, happy faces and good cheer, while we are dying on the inside. We are concerned that if we are sad, then we will bring others down, so instead of participating in family gatherings, we plan to stay away in order to spare others our pain. And so, grief casts its shadow upon the holidays, even before the holidays actually arrive. In a sense, we give our holiday, with all the potential for meaning that exists, entirely over to grief.

So, do we have any choice in the matter? Indeed we do. While grief will certainly be a part of our holidays and special occasions, whether we plan for it or not, it does not have to have exclusive reign over them. After all it is your holiday season and you can give yourself permission to participate in the holidays however you might want. While joy, fulfillment and hope cannot

necessarily be planned or conjured up, we can make choices that create the potential that we will experience them.

As this season is upon us, be patient with yourself. Give yourself permission to experience both joy and sorrow. Allow yourself to be with others, as well as find solace in solitude. Give thanks for those whom you love and who love you. Remember always those who are no longer with you, but who will always remain present in your heart and mind. This time of year is difficult in the midst of grief, but it is also rich with meaning. Give yourself permission to experience both this Holiday Season.

Special End-Of-Year Appeal

Help Provide Hope for Others

See Page 2 For Complete Details
& Enclosed Donation Envelope

Two New Support Opportunities For Bereaved Parents

Holiday-Themed Bereaved Mom's Groups
November 19th & December 10th
10:00a.m.-11:30a.m.
Call (205) 251-3430 to let us
know if you would like to attend.

Bereaved Dad's Dinner Group
November 18th 6:00p.m.-7:30p.m.
Call (205) 251-3430 to let us
know if you would like to attend.

Dear Friends,

As we approach the end of 2008, we want to thank you for your continued support of our programs even during these difficult economic times. As you all know, we are dependent upon your generosity to continue to provide counseling and support at no charge. So many of you have been faithful over the years, attending the Tears to Hope breakfast, purchasing Amelia Center Calendars and making annual donations to sustain this most important work. So, thank you for your on-going support.

There are a couple of things we want you to be aware of as we look toward 2009. First, we will not be printing an Amelia Center calendar this year. We know there are many who look forward to the calendar each Fall season, but the project has become much too costly over the years and we want to divert these funds to program services, which continue to see increased demand each year.

In addition to this change, we have also decided not to hold the Tears to Hope breakfast in 2009. Though this has been an excellent event, we want to find a more economical way to share about The Amelia Center and to encourage community members to support our program. So, during the first quarter of 2009, we will be sending out packets to our contributors that will give you information about our financial needs for next year, new ways of giving to The Amelia Center and ways you can share that information with others. Please keep an eye out for this information as we start the New Year.

For now, we ask that you consider what you might be able to give to help us reach our financial goals for 2008. We have enclosed a donation envelope with this edition of Tears to Hope in anticipation that you will send your financial support. Please make your checks payable to "**The Amelia Center.**" Every gift counts!

Wishing you all the best during this holiday season,

The Amelia Center Staff

The Importance of Rituals

Brian S. Rodgers



Rituals are an important aid in creating meaning out of meaninglessness. This movement toward meaning and purpose is often like a gravitational force while grieving. When a child dies, and with any loss really, the survivors are often left to pick up the pieces. Often this process involves struggling to find answers to unanswerable questions. Our very nature can make us crave control over a situation that leaves us feeling so out of

control. We tell ourselves that if we find meaning in this tragedy, somehow it will hurt us less.

Rituals allow the grieving individual begin to find meaning and acceptance in the tragedy of the loss. Rituals allow the mourner a tangible way of honoring the life of the loved one who has died. Rituals are symbolic acts that serve to memorialize the loved one who has died, while at the same time allowing us to spend some of our energy "doing something" to work through our grief.

When searching for rituals, sometimes we need not look further than our own faith traditions. These rituals and tra-

ditions often facilitate facing the hurt and the pain and experiencing the transformative power that the grieving process can be for the soul. Judaism is an excellent example of faith rituals supporting the bereaved. "The Jewish faith has a rich tradition of caring for the psychosocial needs of the individual," Rabbi Brian Glusman shares. This tradition sets aside time for the mourner to experience the full range of the physical, cognitive, spiritual, and emotional ways that grief impacts us. It sets aside a period of 'shiva' for seven days. During this time the mourner stays home and receives the support of friends and the community. These friends come to help them in their grief- not take it away. This is a time for the community to come together with the individual and share in their sorrow, as they would rejoice with them in times of joy- such as weddings. Friends and family join the mourner to care for their needs during this time.

During this period of shiva, the family covers all of the mirrors in the home to symbolize focusing on the relationship that is lost, as opposed to one's self. This practice also reminds the family how important it is to mourn. A candle is also lit, as it is during so many faith-based rituals,

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Chasing Away the Winter Blahs Elaine E. Stillwell

Reprinted from Grief Digest, Centering Corporation, Omaha, Nebraska, 402-553-1200.

We can congratulate ourselves. We're making it through the holidays. Hey, we're even standing up! We might feel exhausted, but we can pat ourselves on the back that we made it over another hurdle. But now what do we do as winter really sets in and everything seems gray and grayer? How do we get the energy to move through these dismal days; what can drag us out of bed on cold winter mornings; what can motivate us to rebuild our lives; how do we hang in there until the welcome signs of spring appear?

I faced those same questions after my first Thanksgiving and Christmas without my two oldest children, twenty-one-year-old Denis and nineteen-year-old Peggy, who died in the same August 1986 automobile accident. Turning the pages of the calendar and dealing with the New Year seemed overwhelming, but as least now it was a different year than when they died. What kind of progress was I making? Was there something I actually enjoyed? Could I hear myself laugh? Was I learning how to do my grief work?

I found a few things that comforted me and seemed to shorten the endless days that challenged my broken heart. I was actually able to chase the winter blahs away or at least keep them at bay for a few heavenly hours. Each time I found something helpful I put it on my "Rescue List" so I could repeat it and remember it the next time I needed to scrape and claw my way out of that dark hole of grief. You, too, can create a list of helpers for "blah-free" living. You might like to try a few of mine.

Treasure that book. As I curled up on a comfy sofa with an inspiring support book, while enjoying a cup of coffee or tea or sipping a glass of wine, I learned from those who have walked before me, and it brought moments of relief and hope to my fragile spirit. Inviting comforting words into my soul and taking time to ponder their motivating messages was like handing me a roadmap out of my misery. It felt like an angel pointing the way to better days. Run to the library or to your favorite bookstore or order a recommended book online. Treat yourself to a few inviting support books to fight the blahs with potent, powerful ammunition.

Write your heart out. No one ever suggested that I journal each day, jotting down the ups and downs of my darkest days, but instinctively I helped my heart by writing about my children and about the things that helped me survive. I guess I was emptying my heart of the pain, pouring it onto paper. It helped me express what I was feeling, allowing all the suffering to spill out rather than to fill up and later be like Niagara Falls. Writing helped me discover my pattern of grieving, and that enabled me to make decisions and choices knowing what my heart needed as I was creating my new normal. Start jotting down a few sentences when you feel the blahs closing in. Discover the power of words as you reveal what makes you tick. Armed with the knowledge of

what helps you and what makes you crazy, you can boldly face the enemy, and watch those winter blahs make a fast retreat.

Surround yourself with loving people. They listen to your story, hear your moans and groans, wipe your tears, make no judgments and "walk the walk" with you. We may not be able to lean on immediate family members and close relatives since they, too, are battling grief, but good friends can be our anchors. They realize that our heartache and tears are a tribute to what we have lost. They acknowledge that the depth of our pain testifies to the depth of our loss. Our grief gives our loss significance, we don't want anyone to "fix" it or take it away. We just want to wallow in it, savoring every minute as we adjust to the loss of our loved ones. Don't let anyone hurry you. Make your own timetable. Go at your own pace. Stick with this special circle of loving friends. Welcome their calls or visits, share a cup of tea, designate chores to them that seem overwhelming to you, and bask in their love as they wrap you in hugs-all sure protections against the winter blahs.

Start counting. How grateful I was to have a husband who never left my side and one remaining child, a daughter, a true Taurus who chose life after burying her only brother and sister. I had a happy career teaching little third graders, loving friends to walk the walk with me, and my faith that carried me through the darkest days, filling me with its deep and gentle peace. Take time to peek into your heart and begin counting some of the blessings you may have been ignoring. Even though we feel robbed of a very special person, along with many of our hopes and dreams, our hearts can get a jump-start when we acknowledge the blessings that also are a part of our lives. Whether it's our spouse or our children, a dear friend, a rewarding career, hobbies that keep us busy, the comfort of music, prayer, nature, laughter or whatever else brings us joy, these blessings can be like wrapping our hearts and souls in velvet, cushioning them from the terrible blow we have suffered. Just acknowledge them to feel their soothing embrace and the strength they infuse in us. When we sense the "blahs" approaching, all we have to do is reach out and grab one of these trusty gifts to feel their healing power. It's almost like waving a magic wand for help or having a genie in a bottle appear to grant our wish for survival. Now's the time to start counting, stacking up all those blessing as we build an impenetrable wall for keeping the winter blahs out of our life.

Revive the spirit. It could be time to break out of our grief shell. Take a peek at the calendar and choose a date to do something that you enjoyed doing with your loved one. It could be as simple as going to a movie or buying a box of Valentine chocolate. I walked the beach, put up the Christmas tree and celebrate "Hallmark" occasions. All

Holiday Card Campaign

This holiday season, consider making a gift in honor of your friends and family to The Amelia Center. We will send those you would like to honor a beautiful holiday card that has gold leafing on a Red & Cream-Colored Background.

The holiday card reads "Instilling Hope and Happiness All Throughout the Year," on the front. The reverse reads, "In the spirit of the holiday season, a donation has been made in your honor to the Amelia Center at Children's Hospital. Best wishes for Happy Holidays and a happy, healthy New Year."

Please contact Patricia Murphree at (205) 251-3430 or via email at Patricia.Murphree@chsys.org for more information on how you can support this campaign.



The Importance of Rituals Continued From Page 2

Candles are powerful symbols of life and the spiritual side of our lives that must be nurtured. Think of the many times during our lives where the lighting of candles helps to set a time apart as holy and separate.

To conclude this seven-day period of mourning, a prayer is said to verbalize the transition to the next step on the path of mourning. A sample prayer follows, taken from A Jewish Mourner's Handbook by Rabbi Ron Isaacs and Rabbi Kerry Olitzky.

We rise up now to face life's task once more. There will always be moments of loneliness, for a loved one has

passed from our midst. Teach us to always be thankful for the life of our dear companion and for the opportunity for sharing so many joyous moments with him/her. May we honor their life by rising above despair and find consolation in seeing people. Amen.

This is just a brief touch of some of the wonderful life-affirming rituals that celebrate the psychosocial needs of the mourner in Judaism. Each faith carries with it ritual and tradition that has helped members of their body of faith make it through difficult times. Cling to your own personal rituals and traditions!

Chasing Away the Winter Blahs Continued From Page 3

brought back precious memories. Remembering a date on the calendar gives meaning to a day and gives us something to look forward to. Maybe this is the time to schedule a get-a-way weekend to a relaxing resort or to visit a special person you would be thrilled to see. Every chance we got, my husband and I visited our daughter who was away at college, totally enjoying seeing her and delighting in the amenities of a lovely hotel nearby. Just the change of pace, getting out of the house, taking a ride, seeing different scenery, enjoying being with loving company or just eating inviting meals was a tonic for our aching hearts. Plan ahead and keep those winter blahs at arm's length by immersing yourself in the joys of yesterday that now provide sweet memories and also in creating the new joys of today.

Keep moving. When you're grieving, there's no such thing as too much physical exercise. Get yourself up and moving, even if it's just walking around the block. It gets you out of the house, in touch with others, noticing nature and away from sitting all day, perhaps popping pills or drinking too many "relaxers" or raiding the refrigerator. In those dark

days, my daily exercise was faithfully walking my black Lab, Mickey, three times a day. It was like a catharsis for me as I told him all my secrets and cried my eyes out. We could jog and run, roll in the snow, and walk through rain, wind and sub-zero temperatures-refreshing and exhilarating to the spirit when grieving 24/7. Come to think of it, I think Mickey actually walked me around the block!

Today, many folks run straight to the gym, especially when they're having a bad day. They're not even afraid of those torture machines; they welcome them! They find that working out doesn't take away their excruciating grief pain, but it does clear their minds, exhaust their bodies, provide an outlet for their raw, pent-up emotions, enable them to breathe easier and perhaps even help them get a better night's sleep. The extra bonus is that they are getting in really good shape for the chase. The winter blahs won't have a chance! They will be chased right out of town!

Good luck outrunning the winter blahs using your favorite heart-helpers!

Hopelines

Sometimes you just need to talk with someone who knows what grief feels like...

Mary Bailey, brother, 46, illness; daughter, auto accident
560-0419*

Anita Colburn, daughter, seizure disorder/accident
256-236-9747

Millie Gillespie, daughter, auto accident 841-7783

Pam & David Hagan, daughter, 18, auto accident
566-4026* or 664-8008*

Carolyn Hudson, daughter, 15, suicide 991-9186

Debbie Johnson, son, 17, accident 664-0822*

Terry Johnson, wife, cancer 664-0822*

Sandra Essex, daughter, murdered, 426-1657*

Cynthia Joyner, son, murdered, 682-8837*

Brenda Parker, son, 32, AIDS 822-7150

Mary Sahawneh, son, 16, shot 853-6769*

Eileen Klyce, miscarriage; son, accidental alcohol overdose; son, drowning; daughter, died after a heart transplant
967-2374



Yes, I would like to make a financial commitment to supporting the mission of The Amelia Center!

Your Name: _____

Your Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

This gift is: ____ in honor of ____ in memory of

(Name)

If your gift is in honor/ memory, please indicate whom you would like informed.

Memorials need to be received by the 12th of the month prior to publication.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: ____ Zip: _____

I wish to remain anonymous I would like to receive more information on The Amelia Center

Mail contribution to The Amelia Center| 1513 Fourth Avenue South | Birmingham, AL 35233

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To Increase the Impact
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Call our offices to
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NATALIE COLLIER

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MATTHEW COVINGTON, for his 21st birthday

Carolyn Wheeler, his mother

JAMIE ECHOLS

Randy and Beverly McClendon

JIM GAINES

Bao Luo and Liu Zhu, his parents

JASON TIMOTHY GREGG

Donna Stone

JUSTIN GRIFFIN

Tom and Teresa Bergob

Maria and Jim Brandt

BLAKE NELSON GUTHRIE, for his November birthday

Donald and Nancy Guthrie, his parents

KENDRA HAUER

Prince of Peace Catholic Church Brownie Troop #476

CRAIG KUSTA

Bob and Patty Hanna

Larry and Wendy Kusta, his parents

Randy and Beverly McClendon

NATHAN LEWIS

Larry and Wendy Kusta

BRIAN JOSEPH MADONIA,

for his October 12th birthday and Christmas

John and Donna Madonia, his parents

FAITH MESSINA

Prince of Peace Catholic Church Brownie Troop #476

NATHAN ROBERT MOREHART

Richard and Virginia Morehart, his parents

TOBY MORGAN

William and Pat Brasher

TERRA MORRIS

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TROY PAULMENO

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Lisa Elliott

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DUAN ZHU, for his 22nd birthday on November 4th

Bao Luo and Liu Zhu, his parents

Jim Liu, his grandmother

Jim & Joanne Dearth

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**THE
COMPASSIONATE
FRIENDS**

Support Group Meetings

The Compassionate Friends Support Group is open to any parent grieving the loss of a child. The group meets for a light meal before the group (5:45-6:30p.m.) after which the group meets from 6:30-8:00p.m. **Meetings are held on the 2nd and 4th Mondays of each month at The Amelia Center.**

Upcoming meeting dates:

November 10th- Handling the Holidays

November 24th

December 8th

December 22nd- No Meeting

Visit www.thecompassionatefriends.org
for more information.



National Children's Memorial Day 2008

5PM Bradley Lecture Center

Join Us on Sunday, December 14, 2008

Children's Hospital

Bradley Lecture Center

1600 Sixth Avenue South- 4th Floor

If you would like your child's photo included in our special audio-video presentation, please submit a photo to use by **December 1st**. We may have a photo on file, but will need you to confirm this by calling (205) 251-3430.

**This is a hard deadline to allow time
for producing the video.**

**Event T-Shirts will be available for purchase at
The Amelia Center by November 17th for \$15.**

Providing a Place of Hope for Grieving Children, Parents and Families for Over Ten Years



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The Amelia Center is a department of **Children's Hospital** and publishes **Tears to Hope** six times throughout the year as a resource for bereaved persons. As a department of Children's Hospital, we are a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization supported by the generosity of the community. Special Program funding is provided by the **United Way of Central Alabama** and **A Little Hope**.

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