



WISHful Thinking Andy McNiel



We are well into 2009 and during this time of the year we typically evaluate where the last year has taken us and what we would hope to accomplish in the year to come. It is in this light that I would like to do some wishful thinking, to offer a New Year's **WISH** to those of us grieving the death of a loved one, whether this is our first or twenty-first New Year without them. Each

letter of the word **WISH** contains one element of my wish for us in 2009.

The first element of my New Years **WISH** is **Wisdom**. Grief is not only adjusting to a world without someone we love, though this is a great struggle. But, grief is also adjusting to a new understanding of the world around us, a very different world than the one we chose. In grief, we come to understand on a deeper level, that life is fragile, often unfair and unpredictable and that one way to regain a sense of predictability and justice can be found in our own daily choices, no matter how limited these choices might be. It is through this wisdom that so many have chosen to continue to connect with others, to find meaning and to bring triumph out of tragedy even in the midst of grief. It is this wisdom I **WISH** for 2009. The wisdom that tells us that we cannot go backward and regain what we have lost, nor will it benefit us to remain immobile, but we must keep moving forward with the memory of our loved ones, attempting as we go to, as the *Serenity Prayer* teaches us, accept the things we cannot change and to change the things we can.

Secondly, as we move through this year I **WISH** for **Inspiration**. Moments of great insight cannot be easily planned or staged for us to experience. Moments of great insight or inspiration often come when we least expect it. The key is to pay attention to the lessons we learn everyday, even lessons from our grief; those

moments of inspiration that come most unexpectedly through the kindness of others or the mystery of a peaceful moment, no matter how brief these things might be. So, I **WISH** for us all inspiration, those moments of revelation that are unplanned and unexpected, that bring a moment of peace in our pain and a glimmer of light in our darkness.

Thirdly, it is my **WISH** that we find **Strength** during the year ahead. Sometimes people will say to us in our grief, "You are so strong, I don't know how you do it?" Quite often the sentiment that is behind this statement is an assumption that in spite of life's circumstances, you are continuing to reach out, to heal and to stay connected with others. Meanwhile, down deep inside we do not feel very strong at all. Since we show others a different picture of ourselves than we feel inside, this can make grief a lonely journey. So, I **WISH** for us the strength to endure the loneliness, the emotional, physical, mental and spiritual anguish and the temptation to give up in our grief. May we keep in mind that sometimes it is the stubborn refusal to quit that propels us forward no matter how exhausted, winded and defeated we might feel.

Finally, I **WISH** for **Hope**. Let us consider for our purposes that hope is a choice, granted a difficult choice to make in the midst of tragedy, but a choice none-the-less. Let us consider that hope is a choice we make with each new day to hold onto hope or not, to believe in the possibility that our lives can know happiness and peace once again, and to hold on to the hope that we can heal and become stronger, even in the midst of our pain. May we choose to keep holding on to the hope that those who have died are with us in some way, encouraging us through our memories to keep living, reminding us that our lives can continue to know joy, even in our sorrow, as we face each new day of this New Year to come.

Memory is a way of holding onto the things you love,
the things you are, the things you never want to lose.
From the television show *The Wonder Years*

Two Roads Diverged Robert Smith



Robert Frost is thought of today as one of the greatest American Poets of our time. His work mostly focuses on nature and his life in New England. But what is not known about Mr. Frost by most casual fans is the grief he suffered through all of his life. When Robert Frost was 11 years old, his father died and left he, his sister, and mother to fend for themselves. After Mr. Frost married, his first child, a son, died at the age of three. Several years later, his last child, a little girl, died when she was only 3 days old. It was less than two years after the death of his daughter that he wrote the poem "Two Roads Diverged."

On the surface, this poem could easily just be about a casual stroll through the woods. But if you take a moment to remember he was on his own grief journey, I believe the poem reminds us that we all have choices to make. There will always be tough decisions to make on our own paths.

How many times have you contemplated what you should do next? How many times have you looked down each path as far as you can see, only to realize you will never know what each path will lead to unless you follow it? How many times do we choose to take "the road less traveled", not because it is the easier path, but because it is the right path? What does it say about us when we realize we are on the road less traveled, not by a choice of our own? I believe it should tell us that we must continue the journey. Sometimes moving forward is a choice. I hope each of you make good, brave choices as you continue your walk in the woods.

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;
Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,
And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.
I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I-
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Robert Frost

**"When one door of happiness closes, another opens;
but often we look so long at the closed door that we
do not see the one which has opened for us."
-Helen Keller**

**"Happiness is a choice that requires effort at times."
Anonymous**

**"Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow."
Anonymous**

Transitions Through Grief

Cheryl Wilms, Cedar Rapids, IA

Reprinted from The Compassionate Friends of Atlanta Newsletter

"I don't know how you've survived. It would kill me to lose my child." Oh, to have a nickel for every time I heard that statement! I'd spend every one of those nickels for an answer, for you see, I don't know how I've survived. Part of me didn't survive. Part of me died with my son. All those hopes and dreams I held close to my heart suddenly became memories along with my son.

Since that moment of his death I am a different person. I even have a different label; I am one of The Bereaved. Along with the overwhelming grief of no longer having my son to hold and care for, I faced the daunting task of adjusting to this new role I was forced to take on. The transition from active parent to bereaved parent is as full of challenges as becoming a new parent, only more difficult because it lacks that element of joy.

Up to this point, the transition has come in four different phases: First was the question: How do I live without him? He was nearly my whole life . . . his needs came before mine. Joy came from satisfying his need of nourishment for his body and mind and soul. Food and love and attention were easy to give to him. When he died, I lost my purpose . . . he no longer needed anything from me. And so began the daily struggle to find a purpose . . . the struggle to keep living. Each day, after the initial despair of waking and realizing anew that he was still dead, I worked hard just to get up, to find some activity to keep me occupied. After all, I was still here--my task must not be finished.

Then came the second transition with its question: How do I accept he won't ever be coming back? Once again, the search for purpose became my major occupation. The answer, in my particular situation, came in the form of another pregnancy. I was not trying to replace my son--I knew I could never do that--I was trying to be a mom with all the challenges and joys of raising a child, which of course meant a living, breathing, demanding child. My son's death also carried the high price of lost innocence; no longer could I believe that "it couldn't happen to me." It had happened to me, and the truth that life holds no guarantees would not be ignored.

The third transition in redefining who I was in the face of my son's death is rather ongoing: How do I live in the face of others' expectations I cannot meet? Many people expect the grieving period to be brief, no longer than two to three weeks--after all, life is for the living, right? The easy answer is to ignore those expectations and simply do what is right

for me. The problem is that bereaved parents don't generally have role models for how to function as a bereaved parent, and we grasp around for help, for clues, for anything that will help ease the intensity of our pain. When my grandfather died, no one told me to get a new grandfather. When my best friend's dad died, no one told her to find another dad. Why would so many think that I would be fine once I had another child? My living children fill my time, but everywhere I look, I see the hole left by what might have been if my first son had not died.

People who expected me to return to "normal" have been disappointed, bewildered and annoyed that I continue to make references to my first son. Memories of deceased parents aren't met with the rolling of eyes or changing of the subject the way mention of a deceased child is. My son's death took my future--each day is a loss, a loss of someone whose care was my primary responsibility and my defining purpose at this stage of my life. I can no longer be the person I was, a person untouched by the ripping pain of losing the presence of a child I loved more than my own life, of letting go of the hopes and dreams I had for him, of watching my vision of a future as his mother fade.

The last of the four transitions is also ongoing: How do I find my way back to living fully? Every day, each of us decides how to spend our time--each hour, each minute. Do I spend those moments grieving? Not all of them. With each day that goes by I find fewer moments of grief and more moments of either joyful or mundane activity. Of course, some moments are filled with a flood of grief nearly as intense as the rending of my heart when he was taken from my arms that last time. But joy has returned--in painfully slow increments--to our house, to my life.

How have I survived? I don't know. What choice did I have? Each transition has been work, hard work, sorting through what it means and learning to function in the face of these circumstances not of my choosing. My work has served me well: my role as a bereaved parent is no longer the first way I define who I am, but it is ever-present in my life and cannot be separated from all that I am . . . for the rest of my life.

Bereaved Mom's Support Group Interest Form

Would you like to be kept informed of the various groups and activities being offered for bereaved mothers? If so, please fill out the following to be added to our contact list.

Information about you:

Name: _____

Address: _____

City, State, Zip: _____

Phone(s): Home _____ Work _____ Cell _____

Email: _____

Name of Counselor at The Amelia Center: _____

Marital Status: ___ Single ___ Married ___ Divorced ___ Remarried

Please check all that apply (if any):

___ My child that died was my **only** child.

___ My spouse/significant other **is not** the father of my child that died.

Availability to Meet (check all that apply):

	Early Morning	Late Morning	Early Afternoon	Late Afternoon	Early Evening
Monday					
Tuesday					
Wednesday					
Thursday					
Friday					
Saturday					

Additional information about time and day availability:

Would you participate in any of the following activities if they were offered at The Amelia Center?

(Check all that apply)

___ Therapeutic support group

___ Topical discussions (i.e. Dealing with Guilt, Holidays, Parenting After a Loss, etc.)

___ Psycho-educational program (i.e. How personality affects grief)

___ Weekend retreat

___ Book discussion

___ Movie discussion

___ Scrap booking

___ Art-expression group

___ Coffee Social

___ Online support group

Please add your own suggestion: _____

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

Bereaved Mom's Support Group Interest Form

I prefer: (Check all that apply)

- One-time groups
 Multi-week groups that meet weekly
 Multi-week groups that meet every other week
 Multi-week groups that meet once a month

In regards to multi-week groups, I prefer:

Closed groups (These are groups that begin and end with the same group members- no new members are added along the way).

Open Groups (Groups where new members can be added at any time)

I have no preference

Information on your child/children who died:

Full Name (s): _____

Birthdate: _____

Date of Death: _____

Age at the time of Death: _____

Cause of Death:

Homicide Car Accident Suicide Accidental Drug Overdose

Accident Other (please specify) _____

Cancer Terminal Illness (please specify) _____

Date of diagnosis for cancer or other terminal illness: _____

Additional Information on the Cause of Death: _____

Please return to The Amelia Center:

FAX: (205) 251-5146

Mail: The Amelia Center
1513 Fourth Avenue South
Birmingham, AL 35233

Memorial and Honoraria Gifts

Gifts made in honor or memory of a loved one are a special way to celebrate someone while making a tangible difference in the lives of others. All donations help support the counseling services at The Amelia Center.

The deadline for inclusion in Tears to Hope is the 12th of the month prior to publication. Please remember that the deadlines for future editions will be earlier due to the new bi-monthly format.

DEADLINES

Dec 12th Jan/Feb Edition
Feb 12th Mar/Apr Edition
April 12th May/Jun Edition
June 12th July/Aug Edition
Aug 12th Sept/Oct Edition
Oct 12th Nov/Dec Edition

A suggested minimum donation is \$10 per honoree.

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***

Mary Ellen Capps, son, accidental overdose **822-1162**

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**

* Available Evenings

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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Call our offices to
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John and Catherine Amos, his parents
John and Marcia Edmundson
Randy and Beverly McClendon

CHRIS BARRICKLOW

Randy and Beverly McClendon

BRANSON KEITH BEARDEN

Linda, Edgar and Blake Bearden, his family

JON BELCHER, for Christmas

Tina Belcher, his mother

AARON BRAWLEY

John and Marcia Edmundson

JOEY BREWER

Marie Smitherman, his grandmother

NAT BRYAN

Bruce and Julie Berthon
Mr. and Mrs. Greg Burge and Family
Tim and Diane Donahue
Mr. and Mrs. James A. Haggerty, Jr.
Jack Hall
Steven Kabase
Jenny and Jeff Kirby
Moore and Trousdale, P.C.
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Gloria and Sidney Carton, her parents

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MATTHEW COVINGTON, on his 3rd year

to celebrate Christmas in Heaven

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Willie Henderson

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Evelyn Gordon

Phyllis Lyons

Beverly Phillips

Vestavia Hills High Science Department

Vestavia Hills High School Honors Club

Vestavia Hills High School German Club

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Randy and Beverly McClendon

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John and Marcia Edmundson, his parents

John and Catherine Amos

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Gayla Edwards, wife and mother

AMELIA ELLIOTT

Helen Letchman

BRAD AND BROOKE FRANKLIN

Jack and Darlene Franklin, their parents

JOEY FULMER

Annette and Don West

BRANDON GIBSON

Kay LeCroy, his mother

BOBBIE ALLINE GILLESPIE

Millie Gillespie, her mother

KELSEY GRACIEN

John and Catherine Amos

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Randy and Beverly McClendon

TOBY MORGAN

William and Pat Brasher

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Martha Crotty

KELLEY STEPHEN PREWITT, on his 30th

birthday, November 15th

Jean Prewitt, his mother

ELEANOR SHARRON

Kay LeCroy, her daughter

MOLLY QUINN

John and Catherine Amos

MICHELLE NICOLE ROYE, for her 30th

birthday, January 10th

Ronnie, Barbara and Ron Roye, her family

ALAN SANDLIN

Jerry and Celia Sandlin

STEVEN MATT SLATER,

for his 36th birthday

Marilyn Slater, his mother

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LAURA AND DAVID WOODRUFF

"Grief is not a problem to be solved. It is a process to be lived. Grief shows that we care about ourselves and others. Grief does not forget life- it remembers life. Grief honors and validates that which matters, helps us know ourselves deeper down, gain meaning and eventually resilience and vitality."

**Healing and Growing Through Grief,
Donna O'Toole, MA**



**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:

January 12th & 26th

February 9th & 23rd

March 9th & 23rd

April 13th & 27th

Visit www.thecompassionatefriends.org
for more information.

Inner Tempest Stilled by Beenie Legato

**Sometimes I sense a little flutter.
Like a shadow swiftly slipping by.
Or I hear a silent, gentle murmur.
Like a soft whisper from out the sky.**

**Sometimes... I hear you call my name,
Or clearly see your face before me.
And I feel that you are with me still.
Then peacefully... I come to know**

**As I am thinking happy thoughts of you
You, my son, are thinking of me too.
Loving memories fill my aching heart.
As dreaming dreams of what could be.**

**Or might have been, if you were here.
Until the piercing pain of losing you
Comes tumbling down on trembling fear.
And clearly once again I hear you say,**

**"But Mom, What if I had never been.
You could not then in LOVE remember me."**

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



**CHILDREN'S
HOSPITAL®**

The Amelia Center
1600 Fourth Avenue South
Birmingham, AL 35233

Physical Address:
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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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