

# sudS Spirit



*Robert Pederzani*

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## Welcome *from the Editor*

There is nothing better than when our daylight extends into the evening providing us with extra time to enjoy the outdoors during the next two seasons. Sunshine does so much for us and our attitudes. It is really noticeable when there is more of it. I recently had the privilege to speak at the monthly seminar offered by the Circle of Life Coalition of Berks County. My topic? "Picking up the Pieces: Grieving, Forgiveness, and Survival after the Sudden Death of a Spouse" My message was one of hope, faith, and patience that I have been practicing for these past thirteen years.

**sudSSpirit** was founded in 2008 to help provide a place of comfort, compassion, and hope for those that have experienced a sudden unexpected death of their spouse or significant other. Meetings are held monthly in Reading, PA and Bennington, VT. All meetings are Free and No registration is required. Additional information is within this newsletter. **sudSSpirit** stands for "*Sudden Unexpected Death of a Spouse – Survivors in Participation to Inform, Renew, Improve, and Triumph*"

If this is the first time you have heard about us and are in need of some help through our support group chapters, please see page three in the right margin for additional information about our chapters. We also have a list of other resources on page two in the left margin that may be helpful to you. This newsletter is available to anyone anywhere regardless of their specific loss so if you know of someone that can benefit from these pages, please share this with them and have them contact us with their email or address information and we will make sure that they become part of our mailing list for future publications. You may also contact the editor/founder directly at **717-866-2401** or [sudsspirit@gmail.com](mailto:sudsspirit@gmail.com). We also have a facebook page should you want to check that out.

Thank you to those that have been long time supporters of our group and thanks to all of those that we have helped along the way for believing in yourself and us to help you in your time of need. **Together We Can Help Each Other Heal.**

## Spring's Messenger

*by John Kreiser*

Oh, robin red-breast, where are you?  
Old messenger of Spring  
Please fly on home, we need you  
And the weather that you bring  
Some people think that groundhogs  
Tell us when the Winter's through  
But some of us know better and  
We watch for signs of you  
We listen for your songs of joy  
To permeate the air  
The sun above, decides it's time  
To linger longer there  
Then right on cue, the ground thaws out  
New buds appear on trees  
Spring flower bulbs begin to sprout  
Coaxed by the gentle breeze  
Yes robin, please return here now  
To build your sturdy nest  
And entertain us with your songs  
Of Spring from your red breast

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## Thoughts to Ponder - Editor

"As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison."

*- Nelson Mandela*

"Everyone grieves in different ways. For some, it could take longer or shorter. I do know it never disappears. An ember still smolders inside me. Most days, I don't notice it, but, out of the blue, it'll flare to life."

*- Maria V. Snyder, Storm Glass*

"You don't drown by falling in the water; you drown by staying there."

*- Edwin Louis Cole*



Dominic Murgido - Editor

## INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Welcome

Spring's Messenger

Thoughts to Ponder

Quarterly Quote

Reminiscing

Book Review

Advice

Find Joy in Every Day

Understanding Grief

An Entry from My Journal

## Quarterly Quote

*- Editor*

"You will lose someone you can't live without, and your heart will be badly broken, and the bad news is that you never completely get over the loss of your beloved. But this is also the good news. They live forever in your broken heart that doesn't seal back up. And you come through. It's like having a broken leg that never heals perfectly—that still hurts when the weather gets cold, but you learn to dance with the limp."

*- Anne Lamott*

## Resources

- Editor

GRMHA (Greater Reading  
Mental Health Alliance)  
www.grmha.org  
610-775-3000

Berks Visiting Nurses  
www.berksvna.org  
610-378-0481

St Joseph's Spiritual Care  
www.thefutureofhealthcare.org  
610-378-2297

Compassionate Care Hospice  
1-800-777-5109

Family Guidance Center  
www.familyguidancecenter.com  
610-374-4963

Heartland Home Health Care  
and Hospice  
610-373-6898 or 888-800-0224

Circle of Life Coalition  
www.circleoflifecoalition.org

www.griefshare.org

Diakon Family Life Services  
www.diakon.org/fls/NPLoss.asp  
610-682-1337

Bennington Area VNA & Hospice  
www.bavnah.org  
802-442-5502

Bayada Hospice Services  
www.bayada.com  
855-696-2072  
610-367-1608

Pathways Center for Grief & Loss  
www.pathwaysthroughgrief.org  
800-924-7610

Spiritrust Lutheran Home Care &  
Hospice  
800-840-9081



## Reminiscing *by Dominic Murgido*

I just left Michael's Crafts having dropped off the last six items to be professionally framed. For the last three years I have been taking treasures created by the hands of my wife Sue and have been giving them the credit and honor they deserve.

My wife was very talented in sewing and when it came to counted cross stitch, her skill was second to none. She would not agree with me or anyone that tried to compliment her on her creativity and skill set. She never looked at her projects as being something to be admired by others. Sue was modest to a fault.

She worked part time for Dimensions. Dimensions was a business that sold kits for people to do on their own. Sue was the person that created the sample displayed on the walls for the customer to see what the finished project looked like. Besides a paycheck, she would receive a discount to purchase kits on her own.

Sue created many beautiful things and would frame and mat some of them herself. Others she created never received a frame but remained stored away in a box somewhere.

In a way to honor and remember her I've resurrected projects from boxes and took poorly framed treasures and provided them with a new look professionally done. Afterward, I would find a place on a wall within my home. At this writing, there are about eighteen of what I call treasures adorning my walls. One of a kind, made by her, priceless pieces of time and talent that have a special meaning to me.

I look at these daily and reflect of a time passed; a happy time where she enjoyed working on and completing each one of them. Seeing them gives me joy and comfort knowing her hands touched and created what they offer. In a way, doing this has been cathartic for me. Creating memories from memories but in a new perspective. Sometimes I enjoy taking them all in as I stroll around my home with a cup of coffee or a glass of wine in hand like I am in some art studio looking at a personal collection.

Any of us that have lost a loved one wants to and does remember them. We all have different ways that we do this. It could be a one time event, an annual celebration, or a daily ritual that brings

them into our present world and makes us smile. Only we understand this desire.

Memories of our loved ones are priceless to us. We will always feel connected to them and look forward to any opportunity to talk about or reflect upon the life we had with them.



## Book Review - Editor

### **Bearing the Unbearable: Love, Loss, and the Heartbreaking Path of Grief**

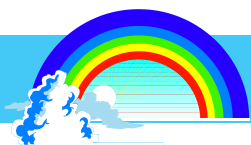
*by Joanne Cacciatore*

The author explains how grief might be embraced is an individual journey. For some, the journey might be enriching. For others, the journey might be a descent into inescapable despair. But what this book makes painfully clear: There is no elixir; there are no good works to accomplish as compensation; there is no 12-step program; there is no way around grief--only through it; there is no conquering grief--rather, mustering the courage to surrender to it; and there are no answers to the question "why" and perhaps no reason even to ask "why."

Like so many have mentioned, Dr. Cacciatore writes with heartfelt candor. Because her grief is centered on losing her daughter, her depth of feeling and understanding of the universality of grief is very clear. Every case study is filled with wisdom that touches my own grief. She speaks with utmost respect about her daughter as well as those people she has helped in her work. I'm so grateful that there is no exploitation whatsoever, no formulas--she acknowledges how unique we are and so of course, we each process grief differently.

This book is a testament of how grief moves into our lives in the most unimaginable way and how we can transform that grief into something more tangible and constructive through contemplative process, love, and empathy. What she teaches is that the suffering is a direct link to our love, to those that are gone, and in that love and loss is a tangible beauty and thanksgiving that can break through the chasm of false belief that we need to "get over" it and move on and manifest our grief into something tangible and beautiful.

As this book drills home: Only by avoiding love might one avoid grief--if one loves, one is destined to grieve.



## Advice *by Ellen Perry Berkeley*

Perhaps you've been reading lots of books and articles about grief – what it means and how to manage it. Or you've been talking to lots of people about how they've gotten through a similar grief, and how you can do so yourself. You've seen the same advice come up often, both from people you know only from their printed words, and from people you know deeply from their disclosures.

All these words can be comforting. They can be seen as information from “experts,” who have been labeled “sources” from the time this subject began to come into its own, several decades ago. Or they can be seen as caring guidance from people who have traveled this path themselves. But what if those doing the writing don't seem well connected to their subject and therefore don't seem good sources? Or what if those trying to help us, based on their own experiences, don't seem to have traveled this path well?

I remember a friend telling me about a grief group she was in, where the leader, a social worker, ran the group into the ground, totally ruining any possibilities it might have had for those still in it. She was unable to offer empathy to participants, unable to send a hug across the room. Possibly, too, unable to listen. Also, she never spoke about any grief she might have experienced herself. Instead, she just repeated the same “truths” again and again – so often that my friend thought of throwing a chair at her. The most-repeated truth was that everyone grieves differently. OK, I surely believe this myself.

But even with a better leader in a grief group, or a loving friend advising us, not all of their “truths” will be true for everyone. How about this “truth,” for instance – that serious decisions must wait until the first year of grieving is over?

It's probably good advice to delay major decisions for a while, because in the earliest months of grieving, we are distracted, foggy, not thinking clearly. Yet I know one woman who, four months after her husband died, moved from the home they had shared. “I knew what I wanted,” she said, “and I knew he'd want what I wanted.” Happily, the move was a good one. Does this negate the advice given to everyone that heavy decisions should be postponed for a full year?

Not necessarily. Much of the advice available to people who are grieving is definitely helpful. How can we know, though, which advice might not be helpful?

That isn't an easy question, especially when we're in a time of immense sadness, and serious damage to concentration, and considerable stress from new chores.

My own advice would be this: We need to acknowledge that each of us, as a person and now as a survivor, is unique. In responding to our new lives, therefore, we should try to make our best personal response to all decisions. Some advice

will certainly speak to us firmly, but we should feel free to disregard any advice that doesn't. It's true that we're heart-broken and thought-damaged – not thinking clearly – but perhaps we're also too vulnerable to take any advice without question.

The best advice, therefore, might be this. Everyone does grieve differently. Absolutely. So each of us must decide what suits us as individuals. We can listen to others. But with regard to our own needs and wishes, we must also listen to ourselves.

This makes us stronger, of course, deciding whether it feels OK to move, when it's OK to re-connect with the world, which of our spouse's things we'll unload – and much more.

If we refuse any advice that doesn't fit, we shouldn't be judged for this. Why? Because each of us is a unique person, someone who loved (and was loved by) the special person who died. The deceased would want us to continue being ourselves, and to keep building ourselves. We honor our beloved by honoring our specialness.

## Find Joy in Every Day

*by Kay Oxford*

I've had a lot of losses in my life, but 11 days after my husband died, I believe it was a special sign that led me to a refrigerator magnet that read, “Find Joy in every day” and I bought it. It changed my life. People tell me you can't, but I know better because I've lived it the last 12 years. You have to LOOK for joy to find it.

The sorrow doesn't need looking for, it finds you, but the joy needs to be ferreted out. Oh it's not like the joy “before”...doesn't compare! Recognize and acknowledge the least little thing that is good that comes your way! For me it might be something as innocuous as a stranger letting me merge in traffic, or someone holding the door open for me. Seeing deer in my backyard. A rainbow (there was a triple rainbow amidst a tremendous thunder/lightening storm at the moment my husband died). A hummingbird (they were special to us). A phone call from a friend or my sisters. A check in the mail that was just what I needed. The list is endless.

It's not about the thing, it's about ACKNOWLEDGING it. To do so is to begin to live in the present and not miss what IS for lack of what ISN'T. We can't change what ISN'T anymore, but we can live what IS now. It's a practice, a way of life, indeed, an art. Living in the present. Being present. This is the way back to life.

**About the Author:** Twelve years ago Kay lost her husband, and later her mother and several pets. She is active on griefhealing.com and currently leads a grief support group in her rural town in Oregon. In her free time she enjoys hiking with her dog and making cards.

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### sudSSpirit Bereavement Support Group

meets monthly in the following locations:

#### Berks Chapter

Reading, PA.

4<sup>th</sup> Wed. of the month  
6 PM

Exeter Community Library  
4569 Prestwick Drive  
Reading, PA 19606  
610-406-9431

#### Bennington Chapter

Bennington, VT

4<sup>th</sup> Tues. of the month  
6 PM

Bennington Free Library  
101 Silver Street  
Bennington, VT 05201  
802-442-9051

For additional information,  
Please check our facebook page or email:

[sudsspirit@gmail.com](mailto:sudsspirit@gmail.com)  
-Berks, Pennsylvania

[sudsspirit.vt@gmail.com](mailto:sudsspirit.vt@gmail.com)  
-Bennington, VT

or phone:

**717- 866- 2401**  
-Berks, Pennsylvania

**802- 441- 5562**  
-Bennington, VT

- Editor



## Understanding Grief *by Jane Brody*

Although many of us are able to speak frankly about death, we still have a lot to learn about dealing wisely with its aftermath: grief, the natural reaction to loss of a loved one. Relatively few of us know what to say or do that can be truly helpful to a relative, friend or acquaintance who is grieving. In fact, relatively few who have suffered a painful loss know how to be most helpful to themselves.

Two new books by psychotherapists who have worked extensively in the field of loss and grief are replete with stories and guidance that can help both those in mourning and the people they encounter avoid many of the common pitfalls and misunderstandings associated with grief. Both books attempt to correct false assumptions about how and how long grief might be experienced.

One book, "It's OK That You're Not OK," by Megan Devine of Portland, Ore., has the telling subtitle "Meeting Grief and Loss in a Culture That Doesn't Understand." It grew out of the tragic loss of her beloved partner, who drowned at age 39 while the couple was on vacation. The other book, especially illuminating in its coverage of how people cope with different kinds of losses, is "Grief Works: Stories of Life, Death and Surviving," by Julia Samuel, who works with bereaved families both in private practice and at England's National Health Service, at St. Mary's hospital, Paddington.

The books share a most telling message: As Ms. Samuel put it, "There is no right or wrong in grief; we need to accept whatever form it takes, both in ourselves and in others." Recognizing loss as a universal experience, Ms. Devine hopes that "if we can start to understand the true nature of grief, we can have a more helpful, loving, supportive culture."

Both authors emphasize that grief is not a problem to be solved or resolved. Rather, it's a process to be tended and lived through in whatever form and however long it may take. "The process cannot be hurried by friends and family," however well meaning their desire to relieve the griever's anguish, Ms. Samuel wrote. "Recovery and adjustment can take much longer than most people realize. We need to accept whatever form it takes, both in ourselves and in others."

We can all benefit from learning how to respond to grief in ways that don't prolong, intensify or dismiss the pain. Likewise, those trying to help need to know that grief cannot be fit into a preordained time frame or form of expression. Too often people who experience a loss are disparaged because their mourning persists longer than others think reasonable or because they remain self-contained and seem not to mourn at all.

I imagine, for example, that some adults thought my stoical response to my mother's premature death when I was 16 was "unnatural." In truth, after tending to her for a year as she suffered through an unstoppable cancer, her death was a relief. It took a year for me to shed my armor and openly mourn the incalculable loss. But 60 years later, I still treasure her most important legacy: To live each day as if it could be my last but with an eye on the future in case it's not.

Likewise, I was relieved when my husband's suffering ended six weeks after diagnosis of an incurable cancer. Though I missed him terribly, I seemed to go on with my life as if little had

changed. Few outside of the immediate family knew that I was honoring his dying wish that I continue to live fully for my own sake and that of our children and grandchildren.

Just as we all love others in our own unique ways, so do we mourn their loss in ways that cannot be fit into a single mold or even a dozen different molds. Last month, James G. Robinson, director of global analytics for The New York Times, described a 37-day, 6,150-mile road trip he took with his family following the death of his 5-year-old son, collecting commemorative objects along the way and giving each member of the family a chance to express anger and sadness about the untimely loss.

Ms. Devine maintains that most grief support offered by professionals and others takes the wrong approach by encouraging mourners to move through the pain. While family and friends naturally want you to feel better, "pain that is not allowed to be spoken or expressed turns in on itself, and creates more problems," she wrote. "Unacknowledged and unheard pain doesn't go away. The way to survive grief is by allowing pain to exist, not in trying to cover it up or rush through it."

As a bereaved mother told Ms. Samuel, "You never 'get over it,' you 'get on with it,' and you never 'move on,' but you 'move forward.'" Ms. Devine agrees that being "encouraged to 'get over it' is one of the biggest causes of suffering inside grief." Rather than trying to "cure" pain, the goal should be to minimize suffering, which she said "comes when we feel dismissed or unsupported in our pain, with being told there is something wrong with what you feel."

She explains that pain cannot be "fixed," that companionship, not correction, is the best way to deal with grief. She encourages those who want to be helpful to "bear witness," to offer friendship without

probing questions or unsolicited advice, help if it is needed and wanted, and a listening ear no matter how often mourners wish to tell their story.

To those who grieve, she suggests finding a nondestructive way to express it. "If you can't tell your story to another human, find another way: journal, paint, make your grief into a graphic novel with a very dark story line. Or go out to the woods and tell the trees. It is an immense relief to be able to tell your story without someone trying to fix it."

She also suggests keeping a journal that records situations that either intensify or relieve suffering. "Are there times you feel more stable, more grounded, more able to breathe inside your loss? Does anything — a person, a place, an activity — add to your energy bank account? Conversely, are there activities or environments that absolutely make things worse?" Whenever possible, to decrease suffering choose to engage in things that help and avoid those that don't.

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### An Entry From My Journal

"For whatever reason I opened one of two memory boxes packed by both of us in 1997. I cried, remembered, and smiled. It's nice to know that they are there for whenever I need them to be"

— Editor

