

SPRING

sudS Spirit

Quarterly Newsletter

THIS ISSUE IS DEDICATED
IN LOVING MEMORY OF:

HAL

SPRING 2018

Volume 10, Issue 3

Welcome *from the Editor*

I have often taken the liberty to share on these pages thoughts and stories as they relate to my dog, HAL. He played an important role in my life after my wife Sue died.

During the week between Christmas and New Years' Hal joined my wife and is now at peace. He is no longer in any pain or discomfort. I wouldn't have missed the love of my dog even knowing the pain that has to come in the end. Only time will take the deep hurt to a place where I could think of him without tears. I am better off for having shared his company. My memory of HAL will live on in my heart. I have taken an opportunity to share my final thoughts about HAL in this issue.

This issue also marks the **10th Anniversary** of the beginning of **sudSSpirit** Bereavement Support Group. Ten years ago in April, 2008 **sudSSpirit** held its first meeting at the Exeter Community Library, Reading, PA and I am proud to say we still meet at this same location with the community partnership that has evolved between us and the library. I wish to thank Mallory Hoffman and Exeter Community Library for their continued support in our mission to help others.

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. A Facebook page is also available, please find and Like us on Facebook. 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.

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.

Rebirth

by John Kreiser



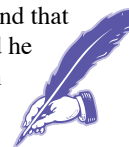
Daffodils cheerily wave their hellos
Dancing in unison as the wind blows
Miniature sunbeams complete with a smile
Beckoning springtime to stay for awhile
Hyacinths, crocuses, violets and more
Colliding calliope of colors galore
Yellow forsythia, lawns luscious green
High in the heavens, clouds cottonball clean
Nest-building birds back from winter vacation
Surveying each site for the perfect location
Chipmunks and squirrels, ground moles and rabbits
Skittishly scurry renewing old habits
Groundhogs emerge from their quiet abode
To dine absent-mindedly alongside the road
This season of miracles enlivens our senses
Refreshed, let's rejoice as the rebirth commences

Reprinted with permission from the author who is a past attendee and facilitator for sudSSpirit.

An Entry From My Journal

"Hal's death was and continues to be very difficult for me. I must believe he is no longer in pain and discomfort. I also want to believe in the Rainbow Bridge and that Hal is reunited with his Master and he is happy and healthy once again on the other side."

-Editor



Dominic Murgido - Editor

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- Editor

"We who choose to surround ourselves with lives even more temporary than our own, live within a fragile circle, easily and often breached. Unable to accept its awful gaps, we would still live no other way. We cherish memory as the only certain immortality, never fully understanding the necessary plan"

-Irving Townsend

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



My Best Friend is now in a better place

by *Dominic Murgido*

I knew him for 15 years. No one knew me like he did. We both shared something; we lost a loved one 12 years prior. A loved one that was such an important part of our life was gone forever, in an unexpected instant. That sudden loss was traumatic for both of us. Neither of us knew what we were going to do or where our life was taking us going forward. It was scary. We both were in sorrow in our own ways but there for each other to find peace and solace.

We became dependent on one another. We knew that each other needed the other more now than ever before and we became closer than ever before as a team and were part of everything together.

He was so patient with me. He was understanding. He knew when I was sad. He comforted me when I cried. He made me smile and laugh out loud. He brought joy to my life. He was my dog. His name was HAL.

HAL wasn't always my dog. He was the dog of my wife, Sue. Handpicked by her from a litter of pups in a home in Ohio, HAL was welcomed by both of us into our home. Sue wasted no time with training HAL. He was put through every training she could find and passed all with flying colors. HAL even herded sheep at a farm one time. He became part of agility training and was even in training to learn a game for dogs called Fly ball. But his ultimate and most meaningful training for himself and his Master was Therapy Dog Training. HAL trained for and passed rigorous tests to be certified by two associations, one state and one national. HAL also became part of a Therapy Dog group as well as being on his own to visit those less fortunate. Sue and HAL visited hospitals, assisted living centers, nursing homes, and would even visit the elderly home alone to bring a little joy to their day. When talking about their day, Sue's face lit up with excitement and HAL stood proud wagging his tail. I wasn't sure who enjoyed helping others more? Sue or HAL.

As ironic as it is, I became the much needed recipient of a Therapy dog after Sue's death. A Therapy dog whose sole mission was to help me cope with the loss of my wife. I then became his therapy support person to help him deal with the loss of his Master. For twelve years we did everything together. Each of us aging along with many changes in both where we lived and what we did. We experienced multiple moves where we occupied three homes in two states and my work schedule went from nothing to part time to more than full time, long hours, nights, and some weekends. He experienced new neighborhoods, new back yards, and new dog friends. HAL went from having dog friends he saw weekly at a dog play group to being alone when I was

away at work and lasting long hours at a time till we saw each other. He has been to many parks and walking trails enjoying his time outdoors. HAL

loved the snow and the cold and got his fill while we lived in Vermont. An artist we met there actually painted HAL's portrait for me.

The bond we shared was unmeasurable. Hal was the last being to see Sue before she died. She took him to the trail for a walk right before she left for work that day. Little did Hal or any of us know she would not return home; ever.

Hal gave me the best years of his life and I would not be where I am today without his presence, support, and unconditional love. I have talked a lot about Hal to many people over the years and so many of my friends and family know the role he played in my life. No one would question the devotion and caring attitude we had for each other.

HAL's kind eyes reflecting his soul provided peace and comfort to all. We were both together for that length of time to help one another and be there for each other. I will never forget you Hal. You will be forever in the hearts of those that knew you and loved you. Thank you for being there for me.

HAL: October 31, 2002 - December 28, 2017



Book Review - Editor

Healing Moments

by *Mary J. Nowyj*

This collection of thirty - three inspiring reflections after the death of a spouse is from an author who has experienced the loss of her husband. Mary shares thoughts of isolation, holidays, triggers, faith, and memories. As one who knows, the author connects to the reader searching for validation of their own feelings and emotions.

I found reading this seventy-one page book very helpful to me. I identified with her moments concerning my own loss. To quote from the back cover: "giving meaning to the experience of grief becomes necessary if we are to continue our connection with others"

If interested in obtaining a copy of this book, please see www.centering.org

Grief: Coping with reminders after a loss *by Mayo Clinic staff*

When a loved one dies, you may be faced with grief over your loss again and again, sometimes even years later. Feelings of grief may return annually on the anniversary of your loved one's death and on special days throughout the year, such as a birthday or religious holiday. Even memorial celebrations for strangers who died in catastrophes, conflicts or disasters can trigger the familiar pain and sadness of your own loss.

The return of these feelings of grief isn't necessarily a setback in the grieving process. It's a reflection that the lives of others were important to you and that you grieve their loss and still miss them. Learning more about what to expect and how to cope with reminders of your loss can help make the grieving process a healthy, healing one.



What to expect when grief returns

The memories and emotions of a lost loved one that are reawakened through reminders are often called anniversary reactions. These reactions, which can last for days or weeks at a time, can raise a host of emotions and physical problems similar to the ones you faced when you were first bereaved, including:

Sadness, Loneliness, Anger, Anxiety, Nightmares, Lack of interest in activities, Crying spells, Replaying images in your mind related to your loved one, Trouble eating, Sleeping problems, Headaches, Stomach upset.

Anniversary reactions can also evoke powerful emotional memories — experiences in which you vividly recall the feelings and events surrounding your loved one's death. You might remember in great detail where you were and what you were doing, for instance, when your loved one died.

Common triggers of grief — a year of 'firsts'

Some reminders of your loved one are almost inevitable, especially during the first year after a death. That's when you'll face a lot of "firsts" — those first special days that'll pass without your loved one. As the weeks and months go by, you may also face other significant days or celebrations without your loved one that can trigger your grief again. Some of these "firsts" and other special occasions that can reawaken your grief include:

- The first holiday Mother's Day, Father's Day or another day you would have honored your loved one Weddings and wedding anniversaries Family reunions Childhood milestones, such as the first day of school, prom, homecoming and other child-oriented days
- Anniversaries of special days — when you met, when you became engaged, when you last saw your loved one alive, when you took a big trip together

Your reactions to these firsts and special occasions might be intense initially. But as the years pass, you'll probably find it easier to cope — but not forget.

Reminders can be anywhere, and unexpected

Reminders aren't just tied to the calendar, though. They can be anywhere — in sights, sounds and smells, in the news or on television programs. And they can ambush you, suddenly flooding you with emotions when you drive by the restaurant your wife loved or when you hear a song your son liked so much. Another death, even that of a stranger, can leave you reliving your own grief.

Even years after a loss, you may continue to feel sadness and pain when you're confronted with such reminders. Although some people may tell you that grieving should last a year or less, grieve at your own pace — not on someone else's expected timeline.

Our Mission

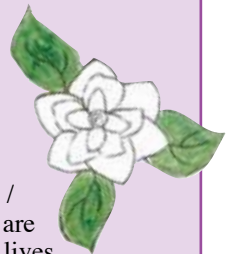
sudSSpirit wants to provide you with a supplemental group experience in addition to professional therapy and / or counseling sessions that are currently happening in the lives of those interested.

sudSSpirit does not take the place of professional guidance and we encourage you to seek therapy as required.

sudSSpirit wants to provide a comfortable setting with a sense of community among those in attendance. People should feel free to communicate and share feelings as it pertains to their journey through the grieving process.

sudSSpirit wants those in attendance to realize they are not alone with this problem and the group is available to provide infinite support.

-Editor



Tips to cope with reawakened grief

Time itself can lessen the intensity of your grief. You can also take measures to cope with anniversaries, special days and other reminders of your loss so that you can continue the healing process, including:

- **Be reassured.** Remember that anniversary reactions are common and normal and that the pain fades as the years pass — although it may never go away completely.
- **Prepare for episodes of grief.** Knowing that you're likely to experience anniversary reactions can help you understand them and even turn them into opportunities for healing.
- **Look for healing opportunities.** You might find yourself dreading upcoming special days, fearful of being overwhelmed by painful memories and emotions. In some cases, the anticipation can be worse than the reality. In fact, you may find that you work through some of your grief as you cope with the stress and anxiety of approaching reminders.
- **Reminisce about the relationship you had with the person who died.** Try to focus on the good things about the relationship and the time you had together, rather than the loss.
- **Plan a distraction.** Take a weekend away or plan a visit with friends or relatives.
- **Start a new tradition in your loved one's memory.** For example, make a donation to a charitable organization in the person's name on birthdays or holidays, or plant a tree in honor of your loved one.
- **Tune out.** Limit your exposure to news reports about tragic events if you become more anxious, sad or distressed.
- **Connect with others.** Draw family members and friends close to you, rather than avoiding them. Find someone who encourages you to talk about your loss. Stay connected to your usual support systems, such as spiritual leaders and social groups. Consider joining a bereavement support group.
- **Allow yourself to feel sadness and a sense of loss.** But also allow yourself to experience joy and happiness as you celebrate special times. In fact, you might find yourself both laughing and crying.
- **Attend a memorial.** You may find it healing to attend a public memorial service or ceremony that marks the anniversary of tragedies, disasters and other events that claimed lives. These kinds of ceremonies can help draw people together and allow you to share experiences with others who feel similarly.

When grief becomes overly intense or painful

Normal grief symptoms gradually start to fade within six months or so. In some cases, though, your grief experience may be much more complicated, painful and debilitating. Or your grief may get worse over time instead of better, or it may last for years.

In these cases, you may no longer be simply grieving. Your grief may have progressed into a medical disorder, such as: Depression, Post-traumatic stress disorder, (PTSD) Complicated grief.

If your grief interferes with your ability to function in your daily life, see your doctor, primary care provider or mental health provider for evaluation and possible treatment.

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And Then There Was Spring by Anne Landefeld

I felt it today., that familiar anxiety of Spring, as the world was in mid-thaw, snow droplets, dripping into gutters. Buds are fighting to burst out of tree branches. The boots that felt essential yesterday felt incongruent today. Everyone was drinking iced coffee even though it was still 30-something degrees.

I remember the Spring when I myself had to thaw. I remember seeing blossoms and realizing the depths of my grief. I remember another Spring so full of questions that I could not yet answer and so full of terror at the uncertainty. Spring catches me by surprise. Spring bursts out of trees and emerges from under layers of clothing with a speed that finds me unprepared each time.

There is a bird chirping outside my window while the snow melts, and I find myself begging for a bit more time under the heavy covers to reflect, to put the pieces in order, to stave off the grief, uncertainty, loss or fear of the above, to be ready for Spring, just-this-once. Therein lays my discomfort. There is something disquieting about feeling like your emotional state is out of step with that of your universe...

Reprinted with permission from the author who is a past attendee of sudSSpirit.



Staying on this Earth *by Ellen Perry Berkeley*

"I don't know why I'm living now." How often have we heard this from someone recently widowed? Even from ourselves. There's usually more: "I'm not needed now by anyone. Why am I still here?" And more: "After what I've seen in my spouse's death, I want to be in charge of my own passing."

Are these thoughts expressing guilt at still being alive, or despair at life's suffering? Who knows?

There are many ways, undoubtedly, to take one's life, either to end our struggles here on earth, or to join the recently departed in the heaven that we hope exists.

But let's think, instead, about staying alive. True, we aren't loved, or needed, as we once were. But that doesn't mean we should cease to value our lives. We can replace our feelings of hopelessness and abandonment. Hard to believe, some days, but we can.

Probably none of the following is possible during our earliest grieving. Soon, though, just a couple of these things will engage us in life again. A new life. Here are my suggestions.

■ Watch a funny show on TV, or an old movie on a DVD, and hear yourself laugh. We're laughing alone now, but we'll certainly find other people to laugh with. Be happy, even for a few moments. Or watch sad movies and cry it out. Tears are good for us, we're often told. We're not often told, though, that laughter is also good.

■ Make new friends. Old friends sometimes recoil at any mention of the deceased. You needn't accept this "unfriendly" behavior. And finding new friends isn't difficult. Try this. "Do you come here often?" It's a bit tacky to be sure, but it's definitely productive. (I met my husband with the completely false "I know you from somewhere, don't I?" Only six months later, our wonderful 43-year marriage began.)

■ Revisit places (perhaps going there only in your mind) where you spent happy times with your beloved. You'll feel warmed, knowing that you experienced a truly special love. Treasure those wonderful memories.

■ Give of your time and energy to a local organization – a church, a hospital, a branch of a national charity. You'll either be in touch with people who have their own difficulties, or you'll be aware of such people in other ways, maybe as you arrange a tag sale to support folks you'll never meet, or maybe as you knit socks for children you'll never know. The latest research says that volunteering is good for one's health, both mental and physical. Your schedule has freed up. With much you can offer, volunteer proudly.

■ Join a support group. If a grief group isn't nearby, create one. You'll be opening your heart to people who are going through precisely what you're going through. Sometimes it's easier to be open to people you haven't known until now. In any case, relax fully, knowing that the group's rules will prevent anything said at these meetings from going further.

■ Engage in new activities. Find new hobbies, learn new things, explore creative ways to spend the time now on your hands. Take risks. Believe in yourself.

■ Take good care of your good self. Eat sensibly. Take your medicines regularly. Go to doctors whenever anything changes. (Women tend to visit doctors comfortably. Men don't.) Maybe you'll get this happy dismissal: "Go home and make room for some sick people." Or even this: "Great that you came as early as you did."

If your spouse didn't encourage you to find the person you could be, you can now make this journey alone. You'll be surprised to discover, in yourself, a person who is full of life! If you were well along on this path, however, just keep on keeping on!

The last thing our spouses would've wanted was to have us throw away our lives. Yes, our lives aren't what they once were, but they're surely worth living. Let's be grateful, hopeful, eager, to be alive. No less importantly, let's proceed without guilt at being alive.

The author is a long-time and grateful attendee of our sudSSpirit group in our Bennington, VT chapter.



Thoughts to Ponder - Editor

"While flailing about in an ocean of grief we must be mindful not to drown those trying to rescue us"

-Richard Paul Evans
"Walking on Water"

"Faith is the bird that sings when the dawn is still dark"

-Tagore

"He who conceals his grief finds no remedy for it"

-Old Turkish Proverb



sudSSpirit Bereavement Support Group

meets monthly in the following locations:

Berks Chapter

Reading, PA.
4th Wed. of the month
6 PM

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

Bennington Chapter

Bennington, VT
4th 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
-Berks, Pennsylvania

sudsspirit.vt@gmail.com
-Bennington, VT

or phone:

717-866-2401
-Berks, Pennsylvania

802-441-5562
-Bennington, VT

- Editor



Things Have Changed Since Then *by Kathleen Jacques*

Two years ago, I rented out my house and took my nine year old daughter and my eleven year old son to Europe for the summer by myself. Nine years ago, I never would have fathomed such a scheme. Nine years ago when my husband died, I barely made it through the necessary routines of the day. Oh, how things have changed since then. I remember wishing I could go to sleep and accelerate the healing overnight. It was the hardest work that I ever did – to contain my grief and simply function. I didn't deny my grief – I let it run its course. I experienced all its variants; the anger, the sadness, the raw fear. Somehow, the intensity of these emotions diminished little by little. I don't know when or how the pain lessened and my inner resources grew, and my pleasure in life returned. But somehow the light returned.

I still miss my husband. I haven't remarried. Sometimes I'm lonely and anxious but there is once again laughter and delight in my world, where nine years ago, I thought I was banished forever. There was no magical turning point when suddenly I was at peace. There were only moments of peace here and there. Some days more, some days less. All the while I guess there was a strength developing; a strength derived from the knowledge that I'd made it through yet another day.

I discovered that the second time I had to face certain events or people after his death was easier than the first. Surviving these first encounters made me realize that I would survive the next ones, and I became less apprehensive. You endure, and that gives you something to hold on to. Endurance itself is an accomplishment.

I would say it took me a full two years to merely stabilize. By stabilize, I mean to just be conscious of things other than his death for most of the day. After two years, my days were not dominated by thoughts of my husband's death. A shaky balance was restored. I could look back and see how far I'd come. After three years, I'd begun to make new friends, and for the first time I felt I could really interact, not just observe. I was able to give something of myself in a relationship and not just worry about protecting myself from additional harm. I had spiritual and emotional energy to spare. This was a milestone.

In nine years I've learned much about myself, and people in general. I've acquired some humility. I know how easy it is to be smug and selfish. And I know what it is to really feel someone else's pain because I've been there, too. Life is a process; nothing ever stays the same. You won't feel exactly the same next year as you feel today. This terrible pain you are feeling now will redefine itself as time goes on. With hard work, you will find the burden easier to bear. Like exercised muscles grown strong, you will acquire the substance to withstand your loss. You will accumulate layers of understanding, acceptance, and forgiveness. And in time, you will find peace. But you must give yourself all of the time it takes. This will be your hardest journey, and no two paths follow the same course.

Kathleen Jacques is an Editor of the HOPE FOR BEREAVED Handbook and a freelance writer. Reprinted with permission from Hope for Bereaved, Inc., Syracuse, NY



Spring – HOPE's Own Season *by Patricia Ward*

It's easier to feel hopeful when spring is near. The cold, dark, short days of winter give way gradually to light, warmth, and new growth. It is this growth that is most important for those of us who have known loss.

For we all must go through the winter of sadness, guilt, and grief. It must come. There is no detour. If we try to rush or ignore what we feel, it will remain with us, clouding our lives. It is scary to give in to those emotions, though. We don't want to be unhappy, and nobody wants an unhappy person around for very long – especially when they can't understand exactly what's causing it. It would be easier, we think, to simply refuse to acknowledge the emptiness and just go on with life as usual. It certainly seems as if this is exactly what is expected by those around in a very short time.

I can tell you from experience that it does not work! The best way, the only way out of grief, is through it. Just as we must experience January to appreciate March, so must we experience loss to be able to grasp the hope of

healing. Spring can not come before winter.

Slowly, pleasant memories and laughter replace sadness and tears, as new leaves appear on the trees. We have not really lost our

loved one, for their presence and influence remains with us; not as a sad reminder, but as a color in our personal rainbow. Just as the crocus blooms bravely each year at the same time, sometimes surrounded by snow, so healing replaces grief. It will come, as long as we acknowledge the grief and work through it. Then, in time, as tulips stretch toward the sun, we can reach to the joy!

May this season of new growth and sunshine help us all in our journey towards healing.

Pat Ward is a freelance writer from East Syracuse, NY Reprinted with permission from Hope for Bereaved Inc., Syracuse, NY

