

SUDDEN UNEXPECTED DEATH OF A SPOUSE
BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT GROUP



sudSSpirit

Quarterly Newsletter

THIS ISSUE IS DEDICATED
IN LOVING MEMORY OF:

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Welcome *from the Editor*

This Fall issue marks the third anniversary of this publication. The inaugural edition, Fall 2008, followed the first meeting of **sudSSpirit** that took place in April, 2008. **sudSSpirit** was founded to help provide a place of comfort, compassion, and hope for those that have experienced a sudden unexpected death or their spouse or significant other. Meetings are held monthly in Reading, PA, Etters, PA, and Bennington, VT. **sudSSpirit** stands for “*Sudden Unexpected Death of a Spouse – Survivors in Participation to Inform, Renew, Improve, and Triumph*”

sudSSpirit has a Facebook page. We hope that it will become a tool for those of us seeking comfort with our grief journeys, connect with one another along the way, share experiences, and provide the support we all need. Please like us on Facebook.

The Fall season is one with special holidays and can be difficult for many of us.

In this issue, we look at how to manage grief during these holiday situations. John Kreiser shares a beautiful poem, *Enduring Love*, while the editor writes about missing his better half and provides the story behind the **sudSSpirit** logo. Lou LaGrand talks about questions to ask your self when mourning and a well written “wish list” is included that is directed to those that are around us during our grief journey.

This issue also includes our regular features; book review, thoughts to ponder, quarterly quote, an entry from my journal, and resources. Facebook.com/sudsspirit and our email sudsspirit@gmail.com has been added to resources.

Any bereavement support group is there to help you in your time of need as you process the loss of a loved one. We encourage you to seek out and become part of one. Don't give up until you find one that you are comfortable with and you feel that it is helping you cope.

If you would like a brochure with more information about our Reading, PA group, please call 484-336-5097. Email kaizan2@gmail.com. If you would like a brochure with more information about our Etters, PA group, please call 717-938-1928 (ext 241) or Email lmurry2@comcast.net. If you would like a brochure or the current newsletter with more information about our Bennington, VT group, please call 802-440-8100 or Email sudsspirit@gmail.com. You can also reach us at facebook.com/sudsspirit

An Entry From My Journal

“I look at her picture and think it was light years ago that we were one. I never thought that time would come and go and only one of us would be present for its recognition” -Editor



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 that they are not alone with this problem and the group is available to provide infinite support.



Dominic Murgido - Editor

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Quarterly Quote

- Editor

“Part of the work of grieving is to channel our emotions and energy into activities that help us redefine ourselves”

- Ann Hood

Together we can help each other heal

Like us on Facebook

Resources

- Editor

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

Berks Counseling Center
www.berksc.org
610-373-4281

Caron Counseling Services
1-800-678-2332

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

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

Reading Hospital
www.readinghospital.org
610-988-8070
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

Pinnacle Health Hospice
800-222-5236

Circle of Life Coalition
www.circleoflifecoalition.org
610-372-3638

www.griefshare.org

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

VNA & Hospice of Southwestern
Vermont Health Care
www.svhealthcare.org
802-442-5502

facebook.com/sudsspirit
sudspirit@gmail.com



Missing My "Better Half" *by Dominic Murgido*

We all know the phrase "where's your better half" as people refer to your partner, husband, or wife when they would see you without them on occasion or at events. The question meant a lot more than where is your partner.

Deep down it reflected something that none of us realized, the "better half" played an important role in our lives as a couple and we far too often took it for granted. I miss my better half. I believe my better half really was what the label implied.

She was the glue that kept things together in our lives. She was the planner, the organizer, the encourager, and the inspiration behind my successes. She made me feel comfortable about my life and living it to the fullest with her. She allowed me to grow and become things I never thought I'd be. She made me feel needed and wanted and never alone as I do now at times.

Those of us that have survived the death of our spouse knows that distinct feeling of aloneness that at times comes out of nowhere and overcomes us with great sadness. It is at those times when we know our better half is no longer with us to pick us up again. We miss them.

All of us at one time or many times have wished that the day it happened can be relived and there would be something that we could do or something that could be done to prevent that tragedy from happening to them and to us. We wish that it was all a dream and we would soon wake up from a very long nightmare and life as we knew it would return.

It is not going to happen. We have to acknowledge this and understand that we probably can try to replace some of those feelings we experienced from our better half's involvement with another partner or a close friend or family member. We can also try to focus on ways that we can become a better person by ourselves through involvement with other activities that are rewarding to us and make us feel better.

Although my better half is no longer with me, she will always be within my heart and close to my soul providing a comfort level that only she knew how to do.

The Story Behind the sudSSpirit Logo *by Dominic Murgido*

I have been asked many times about the **sudSSpirit** logo; the cross with a peace dove and a gardenia flower at the base of the cross with the acronym **sudSSpirit** across the middle of the cross. The acronym stands for

Sudden
Unexpected
Death of a
Spouse
Survivors in
Participation to
Inform,
Renew,
Improve, and
Triumph



The cross is another story.

I was never one for wearing any kind of chain or necklace so when I received a silver chain with a sterling silver cross with a peace dove in the center of it one Christmas in the 70's, I wasn't sure how to react. It was nice and it was appreciated and it was from my soon to be wife. I did wear it occasionally but most times it remained in the box it came in.

When I started traveling for work and went places that took me away from her for a few days

or a week at a time, the necklace came with me and I wore it to feel closer to my wife and that worked for me. I started to become accustomed to it.

Wearing that necklace now *all the time* works for me. It is now a permanent part of my being and a way to always have the memory of her with me against my chest close to my heart.

The gardenia flower was one of her favorites and I bought one for her from a street vendor in San Francisco during a weekend getaway after taking a ride on a cable car. We had a wonderful time in CA being our first time there and had the dream to return there again for another adventure, but that was not to be. I am so grateful that we took the time to travel there and many other places during our life together.

I miss my wife and I know that she is around me in spirit being proud that I took her passing and turned it into a positive to create a bereavement support group to help others cope with their grief journey.

A favorite flower plus a Christmas present from the distant past and an acronym became the reality of what represents **sudSSpirit** today – two chapters in PA, one in VT, and growing.



Four Key Questions to Ask Yourself When Mourning

By Lou LaGrand



Good grief counselors know that asking important questions helps mourners find their own answers to deal with the great losses they are facing. Successful mourners frequently pose questions to themselves, in their quiet moments alone, so that they can make choices in their best interests. Revisiting certain questions periodically helps in evaluating where you have been, in what direction to continue, or possibly to change the direction of your thoughts and efforts.

Here are four questions that possess many individual answers, which at some point have to be asked in order to adapt to loss and change, especially the death of a loved one. When they should be asked depends on your individual needs and circumstances. The best that can be said is when all the caregivers have gone home, you have dealt with the despair and numbness for weeks on end, hoping things will get better and the pain will lessen, the time has arrived. Only you can make that call. Begin with the following.

1. What do I want? This is arguably the most important question we have to ask ourselves throughout life when we are faced with problems and new or old challenges. Specifically, for mourners, it asks whether you will choose to be defined by your loss or will be restoration oriented. That is, you will continue to search for ways to adapt to the "year of the firsts" and the many times you will be reminded that your loved one is not physically present to assist with the normal tasks of living. It means recognizing the importance of working for peace of mind as a priority.

2. What do I do now? Taking action is the basic building block for coping well. It is one thing to talk about where to begin to accept your "new life," quite another to decide on the specific behaviors needed to carry out what in your heart you know has to be accomplished. This is where you may need input from a grief companion, intimate friend or relative (we all need heart to heart relationships), or a professional counselor whose practice is primarily with those who are grieving. They can provide ideas to consider and then you can decide what feels right to you as well as what you can use or at least try out.

3. What is my purpose/mission/goal in life? Having a purpose is an essential life need. Without it we lose our sense of meaning and importance. Making a contribution in some way is a boost to self-esteem. Spend much time considering your strengths and weaknesses, where you can create your purpose or take up one you already possess

and improve upon it. This involvement is crucial to your search for peace.

4. What symbol, experience, or belief do I need in order to allow the inevitable—that life perpetually brings change, some of which is totally unwanted? Here again is where much thought must be given to current beliefs about life and death and how acceptance of change has to be accommodated. There is no choice in this regard. A huge step forward is coming to the realization that resisting change is the prelude to unnecessary suffering. Therefore, find a symbol, an affirmation, experience, or new meaning that will allow you to accept what has occurred and cannot be changed. Read as much as you can about how others have gotten to the point of acceptance.

In all of the above, self-discipline is absolutely necessary for coping well and meeting new responsibilities. Why? Because we have to do the distasteful, what we dislike doing, when we would rather not. The pain of great loss is a sign to take a new road in life. Along the way, keep reviewing these key questions and the progress being made, where you can do better, and how you can tap into the resources that are available for the asking.

Never forget, we always have the choice to respond positively or negatively to any situation thrust upon us. We can change unproductive behavior patterns, and bring peace to our inner life. The solution lies in recognizing thoughts and behaviors which drag us down and courageously substituting new routines and actions.

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Thoughts to Ponder - Editor

"Grieving is a process of moving from losing what you have to having what you lost"
- Edna St. Vincent Millay

"Loss makes artists of us all as we weave new patterns in the fabric of our lives"
- Greta Crosby

"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes"
- Marcel Proust



Berks Chapter meets monthly on the 4th Monday at 6:15 pm at Exeter Community Library, Reading, PA.
For information call 484-336-5097 or Email kaizan2@gmail.com.



Cumberland / York Chapter meets monthly on the 2nd Thursday at 7 pm at Fishing Creek Salem United Methodist Church, Etners, PA.
For information call 717-938-1928 (ext 241) or Email lmurry2@comcast.net



Bennington, VT Chapter meets monthly on the 4th Tuesday of the month at 6 pm at It's All About The Bean coffee shop, Bennington, VT. For information call 802-440-8100 or Email sudsspirit@gmail.com



Book Review - Editor

WIDOWED

by Dr. Joyce Brothers

Dr. Joyce Brothers delivers hope and courage in this book as she opens her heart about the loss of her husband. Grief can hit anyone at anytime and Dr. Brothers relating her personal journey allows the reader to know that they are not alone along this path of bereavement.

Writing with compassion, she details her feelings and emotions as well as her loneliness and despair and provides advice to try to overcome and put change in your life to become whole again.

Although written from her perspective that provides insight for the widower, I found this book to be helpful to the widower. I highly recommend this book.

Enduring Love

by John Kreiser

Each day, I wake alone in bed
 Inches from where she laid her head
 And though she's absent from this life
 She'll always be both soulmate, wife
 She never truly went away
 I feel her presence every day
 Upon my thoughts her visage treads
 To gain brief respite from the dead
 A tender memory from afar
 Exuding warmth, a twinkling star
 Disrupting sense of time and space
 Removes me gently from this place
 To archives deep within my mind
 Where love's preserved for all of time
 Evoking smiles of joys held dear
 Or quaking sobs of anguished tears
 Her body rests within the ground
 Yet lively memories still abound
 The pall of death has failed to thwart
 The love that's sheltered in my heart

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 from the author

My Wish List

- I wish you would not be afraid to speak my loved one's name. They lived and were important and I need to hear their name.
- If I cry and get emotional if we talk about my loved one, I wish you knew that it isn't because you hurt me: the fact that they died causes my tears. You have allowed me to cry and I thank you. Crying and emotional outbursts are healing.
- I will have emotional highs and lows, ups and downs. I wish you wouldn't think that if I have a good cry my grief is all over, or that if I have a bad day I need psychiatric counseling.
- Being bereaved is not contagious, so I wish you wouldn't stay away from me.
- I wish you knew all the crazy grief reactions that I am having are in fact very normal. Depression, anger, fear, hopelessness and questioning of values and beliefs are to be expected following a death.
- I wish you wouldn't expect my grief to be over in 6 months. The first few years are going to be exceedingly traumatic for me. As with alcoholics, I will never be cured or a formerly bereaved, but forevermore be recovering from my bereavement.
- I wish you understood the physical reaction to grief. I may gain weight, lose weight, sleep all the time or not at all, develop a host of illnesses and be accident prone; all of which are related to my grief.
- My loved one's birthday, the anniversary of their death and the holidays can be terrible times for us. I wish you could tell me that you are thinking of us on these days. And if I get quiet and withdrawn, just know that I am thinking about my loved one and don't try to coerce me into being cheerful.
- I wish you wouldn't offer to take me out for a drink, or to a party. This is just a temporary crutch and the only way I can get through this grief is to experience it. I have to hurt before I can heal.
- I wish you understood that grief changes people. I am not the same person I was before my beloved died and I will never be that person again. If you keep waiting for me to get back to my old self you will stay frustrated. I am a new creature with new thoughts, dreams, aspirations, values and beliefs. Please try to get to know this different me — I'm the one who'll be here from now on.

Author Unknown

Managing Grief During the Holidays

The holidays are a busy time, full of joyful gatherings of family and friends, a time of reflection and fond memories. But for those who have experienced the death of a loved one, the holidays can seem much more daunting, especially stressful and lonely. For those affected by the recent hurricanes that devastated much of the south, this holiday season may present an even greater sense of loss.

While it may be a struggle, there are things that can be done to ease the grief and make coping less difficult. The National Funeral Directors Association offers the following suggestions for the bereaved to help them better cope with the holiday season:

Take care of yourself, both physically and mentally. Don't be afraid to set limits. The holiday season is busy enough that it can exhaust anyone, but if you are shouldering an extra burden of grief, it only makes it more unappealing. Get enough sleep, eat well, and take time out for yourself. Think about what family traditions you want to take part in, and what may be too much, and don't be afraid to say no to activities that may overwhelm you.



Share your memories with others. Speaking about your loved ones and sharing remembrances can often help alleviate some of the pain of the season. If it helps, take part in a memorial or remembrance service at your local place of worship or family funeral home. Spending time with others who understand what you're going through is often a great source of comfort.

Above all, do what's right for you.

Your family and friends care about you, and will likely offer advice about what they think is best for the grieving process. Don't forget to do what feels most comfortable for *you*.

If volunteering at a local hospital or food pantry helps you heal, then seek out opportunities in the community. If stepping back from a more active role in your family's celebratory activities is the best way, let them know. It is perfectly natural to need time and space to honor your feelings, and the memory of your loved one. But don't forget to seek out your family and friends for support. You are not alone.

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www.nfda.org/grief-resources