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## Welcome *from the Editor*

Fall is one of my favorite seasons as it was for my wife too. So many wonderful memories of the past and how we use to spend Fall days and nights together. Like any other season, a change is taking place around us and at times within us. We process time through the seasons and hope for a better tomorrow.

**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](mailto:sudsspirit@gmail.com).

**In this issue:** You will always find the Quarterly Quote, Thoughts to Ponder, A Real Entry from my own Personal Journal along the way, a Book Review of a past reading of mine, our Dedication corner, and a poem. But that's not all. Since this season includes the holidays, we offer an article with some tips concerning that. Our feature talks about what to do if you don't know what to do after loss. It's not that confusing, really. Articles on "Taking Care of the Caregiver" and "Traveling through Grief" completes the newsletter. sudSSpirit's Mission statement is also included in this edition. Many of you have read this before in our brochure or occasionally in past newsletters.

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.***

## Consummate Conquest

by John Kresier

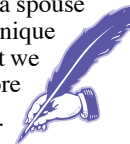
While walking through the woods so deep  
I came upon a hill so steep  
That roots of trees protruded out  
From rainwashed gullies all about  
It filled me with a sense of awe  
This mound of earth, so very tall  
I thought it would be fun to try  
To climb this pathway to the sky  
I started slowly up the trail  
Determined that I would not fail  
The path rose sharply to the top  
My body ached, I yearned to stop  
At last I struggled to the peak  
So overwhelmed, I could not speak  
What beauty! What a wondrous view  
Of earth below and sky so blue  
I sat there basking in the sun  
Acknowledging what I had done  
I gazed down at the tops of trees  
Their branches swaying in the breeze  
And far away or so it seemed  
I saw a great and winding stream  
And railroad tracks out farther still  
All this I viewed from on the hill  
I loved my perch atop this mound  
Surveying these things on the ground  
It took some effort to attain  
But reimbursed me for my strain  
By giving peace of mind and soul  
It helped me to exceed my goal

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## An Entry From My Journal

"We are a different kind of group or club, those of us that lost a loved one – a spouse or significant other – we are unique because of the loss of so much that we had with them and so much more that will never be."

-Editor



Dominic Murgido - Editor

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### Quarterly Quote

- Editor

**"Hugs are good medicine for whatever ails us. They can be lifesavers when we are struggling with grief"**

**-Dr. Leo Buscaglia**

## 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

Lutheran Home Care & Hospice  
www.lutheranhomecare.org  
610-320-7979



## What To Do If You Don't Know What To Do After Loss

by Karyn Arnold

If you read the comments in the forums of Grief in Common, you'll see that when griever are given an opportunity to share their story, they will talk about who they lost, when it happened, and the circumstances surrounding the loss. And besides their grief the one thing that so many of these griever have in common is the "end" of their story, where they say, "and now I just don't know what to do..."

For some there is a "to-do" list on the other side of loss. The planning of the memorial service perhaps, or the settling of the estate. There are closets to be cleaned out, thank you cards to write and phone calls to be made. I find for most there is a paradox in the chores that follow loss. While tedious and tiresome, sad and somber, there's still something to be said for the role these chores play in keeping a griever on track in the beginning, and the way that they keep the deceased in their daily life, plans and conversation.

But eventually everything on the to-do list gets crossed off and there's nothing actually left to do, but grieve.

And what does that look like? Crying all the time? Pining, longing and yearning? Because in the beginning everything about the grieving is a verb, an action – something to do. But eventually there comes a point where that changes and it feels like a noun- a thing: the grief. And what's a person "to do" with that?

As we try to figure out what's next or when we say "I don't know what to do" we may be basing it on the assumption that there is a right answer and a wrong answer...a right way to do things and a wrong way to do things.

**But the hardest fact to face may be that there isn't anything left "to do" after loss, but live.**

I think when people say "I don't know what to do" it's because in fact, they don't want to do anything at all. They want to curl up, go to sleep, and escape the living nightmare of loss. Anything that seemed essential before, all the running around and worries, have lost all importance- and for some griever it may feel like there's nothing left to do that has any meaning at all.

Because a great loss can teach us that we don't have control over our lives. That for as much as we plan and worry and hope, when all is said and done, our loved one has still left us and there is nothing to do that can change it. When griever say "I don't know what to do", what they're really saying is "I know there's nothing I can do to bring them back, and I don't know what to do with myself or this life I've now been given".

And so perhaps that's why the only thing left to do is to focus on healing, rebuilding and searching for sources of strength.

This isn't easy. In fact for most griever this may be harder than the grief itself. As much as

moving forward may seem like an obvious goal to an outsider, some griever aren't particularly interested in getting better. That place up ahead is only further away from their loved one. Further away from the familiar comfort of what used to be. Staying in the grief, and living in the memories of the past may feel like the only comfortable place to stay connected to someone who is gone.

Still, there comes a time for most griever when they feel that's no longer working for them. As much as they may want to go back, there's no denying the pull of time. The changing days in the calendar. The realization that life moves ahead whether we want it to or not.

Taking it "one day at a time" can be frustrating advice. Perhaps because a griever's day feels longer- experiencing 100 days worth of memories, second guessing and emotions each and every day. One day at a time requires patience, and a clear head. Everything about grief is just too much, and every single task and every decision becomes too overwhelming. Too tiring. Too hard to decide. Too little energy to care.

Instead, when trying to figure out what "to do" after the loss of a loved one, or trying to make a decision, ask yourself a few questions:

Does this need to be decided today?

Is someone expecting an answer from me?

Is there a deadline or a timeline?

We inadvertently create some of our own stresses by putting an urgency or deadline on decisions that may not otherwise exist. As we start out each and every day we can only focus on what is literally right in front of us. Get out of bed. Eat breakfast. Make an actual to do list. Seek out the tangible tasks. And as you go through each, consider the questions above. Some things, like paying bills, can't wait. But other decisions like, where am I going to live/what happens if I can't care for this house by myself/who is going to take care of me when I'm older, probably don't need to be decided (or frankly couldn't possibly be known or decided) today.

Each day, make time to sit with your grief or to connect with the loved one you've lost. Find a small ritual that could bring comfort (wearing their shirt to bed or sitting in "their" chair while you watch TV). Talk to your loved one as you go through the day, tell them what's going on and don't think it's strange to verbalize the difficulty you may be having in trying to make decisions or move ahead without them.

And above all, remember how much they would want you to be okay. And that some days the only thing "to do" is to get up and do your best to keep their memory alive.

**Reprinted with permission: thegriefftoolbox.com**





# Taking Care of the Caregiver *by Ellen Perry Berkeley*

Whether our loved one has died unexpectedly, or whether we've tended a dying spouse through a steady decline, there's something important we need to know. It's rarely discussed, but it affects us both before and after the beloved one has passed.

We're often told what to do for helpful grieving. But we aren't told how to pay attention to ourselves in another way. How, you may ask. It sounds simple: we must take good care of ourselves.

But it isn't simple. During our weeks or months of caregiving, we have little time or energy for ourselves. Our world has closed in on us, as we focus almost exclusively on the loved one. And afterward, when we're in the throes of heavy grieving - trying to absorb the shock, perhaps, as well as the loss - we don't have time or energy for much of anything. We're in a fog.

Even within that fog, though, we must pay attention to ourselves.

Here are some basics:

ONE: We must remember to take our medicines at the appropriate times. This is somehow different from giving medicines as a caregiver.

TWO: We must continue to eat what's proper. Cook a bowl of oatmeal, for example, instead of shaking out a quick sugary cereal. This requires some effort, surely, but if we have our own medical issues (high cholesterol, diabetes, whatever), we can't deny these issues. We can now, of course, eat on our own schedule, and to our own whims - I've had oatmeal for supper, and butternut-squash soup for breakfast, I'm tickled to admit. This can be easy, during these difficult times - even enjoyable. Mostly, though, we must eat. Sometimes folks who are grieving don't want to eat at all.

THREE: We must try to control our stress level, finding time for a hot bath, a massage, or anything else that brings relaxation. It could be listening to music, or having a phone-chat with a caring friend, or watching a comedy on TV. Put your feet up. Have a glass of wine (but only one!).

FOUR: We must tend to the important household chores before they reach a level that makes them seem insurmountable. Laundry. Trash. Bills. Messages. Repairs. These need attention. They don't depart by themselves.

FIVE: We must watch our weight. It's easy to eat too much and too often, as we go through our foggy, our sadness, our loneliness. But gaining pound after pound is never sensible.

SIX (and this was fiercely important for me): We must not forget the basic aspects of taking proper care of ourselves, as taught to us long ago. Brush our teeth. Avoid a completely sedentary life. Get enough sleep. (For an unyielding insomnia, we must get help.) My own error was not brushing my teeth for the several months surrounding Roy's death. I paid dearly for this lapse, losing quite a few teeth and paying huge dental bills.

SEVEN: We must get out from time to time. Life does go on, and the folks who get us out are dear friends indeed.

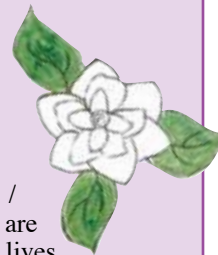
EIGHT: Maybe set up a blog or a website, to avoid repeating the latest news endlessly to all who want it.

You'll undoubtedly have more things to add to this list. And maybe you'll create a real list, posting it on your refrigerator door to remind you of what to do each day, each week.

I probably don't need to say the following, but there are some among us who might regard the items above as egocentric: paying excessive attention to ourselves alone. Yes, these items are about us, the survivors, but they aren't just for us. These items also honor our loved ones, who'd want us to proceed in good shape after they've passed. They'd want us to be in good health, and - in due time - in good spirits, as we move into our new lives. Let's definitely take good care of ourselves. We owe it to our spouses. We owe it to ourselves.

## 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

## Thoughts to Ponder - Editor

"Weeping may linger for the night, but joy comes with the morning" -Psalm 30

"On the wings of time, Grief flies away" -La Fontaine

"It is important, when dealing with all aspects of grief, to keep the process moving. The temptation is to freeze, to stay perpetually recoiled against so terrible a blow"

-Martha Whitmore Hickman



## 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



## Traveling Through Grief by Claire Bidwell Smith

The first time I traveled through grief was when I was eighteen, a few months after my mother died. I went to Europe to meet my best friend who was spending her freshman year studying abroad. The trip was one forced on me by my father who thought that I was spending too much time mired in sadness and lethargy. He knew, better than I, what it means to open oneself up to the world.

Leading up to the trip I felt a discernable anxiety. I was afraid to leave my newly widowed father alone, afraid to travel so far from home when my connection to it already felt so tenuous. Despite all of that, as my plane touched down in Madrid, I felt a shift, an unlocking of some sort. For the first time since my mother died I felt a twinge of freedom.

No matter your emotional state, traveling always provides an insightful vantage point into your life, but when you're grieving, that vantage point often widens into something much more. Grief is an isolating experience. It's lonely and quiet and it's easy to sink into. Reminding yourself that there is a whole world out there still turning on its axis can be vital.

Hopping a midnight train in Madrid with my friend Liz one night that spring was a moment charged with electricity, something I hadn't felt much of since my mother had died. It was a fierce reminder that not only is life a force, but that it was one I was unwilling to relinquish.

I returned home from that trip hungry for more. Less than a week went by before I impulsively took a bus from Atlanta all the way to San Francisco. I was only eighteen years old. Staring out the tall, smudged windows I realized that there was something to be appreciated about grief. The bereaved state I existed in wasn't just a sad place, but a strangely liberated place. In some ways it made me reckless, but only in that it erased all the little fears I'd always clung to about venturing out into the world.

The worst had happened; there was nothing left to be afraid of. Canceled flights? Getting lost in a foreign city? Missing hotel reservations? In the most thrilling way possible, none of it mattered anymore. This wild freedom would be something that would come and go through my years of grief - I lost my father seven years after my mother and a friend in between the two - but it became a strange thing to look forward to in the midst of loss.

A couple of months after my father died when I was twenty-five, I found myself on a tiny island in the Philippines, traveling alone in a place more foreign than any I'd ever been. By myself in a quiet mangrove forest one afternoon I actually felt less alone than I ever had, simply because, standing there with my toes sinking into the mud, I knew that I was irrevocably connected to the world.

**Reprinted with permission: Psychology Today 2-7-12**

## 3 Tips For Coping With Grief During The Holidays By Dr. Margaret Rutherford

(some editing required)

It's hard to describe.

It's bad enough that someone dies. Especially if they are young.

When it occurs during the holiday season, all the jingling bells and fa-la-la-las are a crude backdrop for pain. The stark emptiness of loss throbs through your veins. You can barely breathe.

Those who have had loved ones die at all experience a difficult enough time. "How am I going to get through everyone talking about blessings and presents?" "I just want to shut my eyes and it be January" Whatever scab that may have formed over the wound is ripped off. Memories of past holidays come flooding back.

Gut-wrenching sobs become the lonely connection with the one who will not be there; for this holiday.

Or maybe it's too painful to feel anything.

I have written about my own parents' deaths at Christmas in 2007. December 17<sup>th</sup>; my mom. December 24<sup>th</sup>; my dad. Going through the motions seemed paramount. After all, I had a 13 year old who was excited about Christmas. My husband's parents and other friends were counting on me for Christmas dinner. All the food was bought. Even some prepared.

I don't remember much except trying not to cry.

I hope that yours is not one of the families whose loss occurs during the holidays. But about 1/12 of you are.

Three pieces of advice:

1. Especially if it has been recent, allow others to help you. You could still be in shock. It is the time for receiving from those who love you.
2. Know that your grief will be unique to you. Don't feel that you must grieve the same way others do. Everyone will be different. Do the things that take care of you. That might be distraction. It might be the doing of tasks. It might be journaling about your pain. Whatever helps.



3. Understand that there are many facets of grief. Anger, denial, despondency; all of these feelings are normal. The most important thing is not to become stuck in any one feeling. It takes time; frequently a lot of it.

If you do find that you are trapped in anger or deep sadness, please reach out to a therapist, a pastor, or a friend. If not, your grief may consume you and you may become how you define yourself.

You can trudge through it with the help of faith, friends, or the knowledge that you must.

If you are not going to die along with them, you can celebrate their life as well as your own.

You can find more of Dr. Margaret at <http://drmargaretrutherford.com>. **Reprinted with permission: Huffington Post. January 25, 2015**



## Book Review

- Editor

### In Lieu of Flowers, A Conversation for the Living

by Nancy Cobb

Nancy Cobb's book allows one to explore death rather than avoid it. From the introduction that defines the "divine intersections" where the living meet the dying to how crucial it is to say good-bye to your loved one.

Nancy proclaims how much death is a part of our lives. The author shares moments of her own mourning and is able to communicate about the topic that we, as a society, avoid more than we should. She shares that what depresses us can also enlighten us.