

SUDDEN UNEXPECTED DEATH OF A SPOUSE
BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT GROUP

Welcome
SPRING


sudS Spirit



Quarterly Newsletter

THIS ISSUE IS DEDICATED
IN LOVING MEMORY OF:

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SPRING 2016

Volume 8, Issue 3

Welcome *from the Editor*

Spring is upon us and we welcome this new season with a sense of hope, faith, and peace.

Shared in this issue for the first time is an experience of mine that took place this past January. As I have often shared on these pages, one knows when the time is right to do certain things. I felt that it was the right time for me to take a step even though there was some fear and a chance of high anxiety. Sometimes the risk is worth the improvement in oneself but you have to be *really prepared* to go through with it.

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, Etters, PA, Lebanon, 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.

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, and a poem. But that's not all. This issue includes an article about the editor's step toward healing. Ellen Perry Berkeley's take on "Friends who are no longer Friends" is shared. Some shorts on Voicemails, Widowlution, and Remembering.

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.**

I Can Still Remember: Revisiting a Memory with a Lost Loved One

By Elizabeth Sullivan

"A long, long time ago, I can still remember how that music used to make me smile..."
Flashback.

I am in second grade, sitting in the back seat of my dad's Volvo as he drives me home from my soccer game. My hair is getting tangled from the wind blowing through the car, but we love driving together with the windows down and music up.

My dad is telling me what a great game I played when the song comes on.

"Elizabeth," he asks, "Do you know this song?"

"Nope."

"It's my favorite!"

He starts singing along with Don McLean in his loudest voice, swaying his head to the music. The tempo picks up – he turns up the volume and starts drumming on the steering wheel. He looks at me in the rear view mirror as he continues to sing along. I melt into giggles in the back seat.

The song goes on and on and on and I can't believe he knows all the words! My seven year old body starts bopping and swaying to the music, I fling my arms open wide to join in on the chorus that I have now learned: "Byyye bye Miss American Pie!" My dad laughs and smiles to see me enjoying the song he loves.

The tempo slows and we both sing at the top of our lungs as the song ends. I start clapping, delighted. My dad reaches back for a high five. We turn the radio down and continue to talk about my soccer game for the rest of the drive home.

...I snap back to reality. I am in a different car, driven by a friend. I explain what I just experienced – that every time I hear that song, I become the little girl in the back seat.

A long, long time ago, I can still remember how that music used to make me smile...

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Dominic Murgido - Editor

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- Editor

*"How far you go
in life depends on
your being tender
with the young,
compassionate with
the aged, sympathetic
with the striving, and
tolerant of the weak
and strong. Because
someday in your life
you will have been
all of these"*

- George

Washington Carver

Together we can help each other heal



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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



Revisiting the Past to Find Closure

by Dominic Murgido

It was Martin Luther King's Day in January of 2006. I was in my office on a typical Monday afternoon. The phone rang as it usually did dozens of times a day but this phone call that came in at 2:40 PM would be the beginning of the end of my life as I knew it. As I answered the phone, I had no idea what was about to unfold in front of me.

The phone call alerted me that my wife didn't show up for her part time job. I took the usual steps of calling home and her cell phone with no answer followed by a visit to the house which appeared in order and her car not present.

Thinking that she had car problems and was in an area where there was no cell coverage, I proceeded to take the route she usually took to go to work thinking I would find her broken down somewhere. I did find her but she was the sole fatality in a horrific traffic accident involving a tractor trailer driver whom was speeding and ran a red light. The truck pushed her car into a building on one of the corners of that intersection. She just celebrated her 48th birthday three days ago. She died instantly. I died a little that day too.

I was in shock for what seemed like an eternity. The trauma of losing your spouse suddenly and unexpectedly took its toll on me and turned my life upside down. What was I to do now? Where was my life going without her? Why did this happen to me, to her? Everything in my life changed and I felt I had no future, no identity. Nothing mattered anymore.

I knew I needed help and searched for it. I went to a general bereavement support group for six weeks. I sought out and attended one on one counseling from a therapist for a number of years. I continued to seek out and attend bereavement support groups monthly. I read as many books as I could find on bereavement, grief, losing a spouse, etc. The librarian knew me by my first name. I began to journal. I cried...a lot. I also created a bereavement support group to help me help others in the same boat I was in.

I decided to retire from my career, not feeling part of the corporate world anymore, I sought out a new beginning for myself. I sold my house and relocated to another state where I bought a home and opened a business. The relocation helped me move forward emotionally in ways I didn't know I needed too. It was then that I decided to move back.

Throughout all this time without my wife and even with the many steps I took to help myself through this life changing event, there was one issue that I could not resolve. On that fateful day in 2006, I stumbled on the accident scene where my wife died. The scene before me was forever etched in my mind's eye. First Responder vehicles, police and

fire personnel, flashing emergency lights, caution tape and orange cones, fire police directing traffic, closed roads, twisted wreckage of vehicles, scents of oil, gas and metal, sounds of mumbled voices, a scene of chaos where you knew death was present. That was the last time I was at that intersection, with no desire to return to it ever again.

Finding out about the fate of my wife this way; my own discovery of her accident scene, I would not wish on anyone. This visual experience before me would haunt me every time I came across an accident scene from that point on...for the next ten years. I would shut down physically and emotionally and have to allow myself time to process the scene for about ten minutes before I felt comfortable enough to continue driving. I wondered at times if I would spend the rest of my life having to cope with this vision of the past tragedy that took my wife away from me.

Fast- Forward ten years to the day:
January 16, 2016.

My thoughts are that this is the final piece to that awful time of my life; the memory of how that scene looked

when I stumbled on it that day to realize that the love of my life was no more. The visual of that intersection and its surroundings with all the horror around it and how I revisited it in my mind every time I saw an accident scene needed to go away and I needed to find a way to heal from that nightmare.

I thought of this for years that the only way to find some kind of closure from the shocking sight of that accident scene was to revisit the scene someday as it appears normal. I never felt comfortable or ready to tackle this issue until now.

I asked a good friend of mine for a huge favor; to be available on January 16th and be willing to drive me to the site and be silent as I observe, walk, reflect, cry, and do whatever it is I had to do to find a sense of peace and comfort from an intersection that was in disarray ten years ago to one that was normal and functioning as it should be. I warned him that I didn't even know how I would react that day and everything was up in the air at this point but I felt the need and the desire to try. Worse case, he may have to drive me to a hospital should I become light headed or experience a severe anxiety attack.

I met my friend at a parking lot about 5 miles away from the intersection. I felt confident in myself after preparing for the last few weeks with meditation and de stressing techniques. Upon arrival at the location, I took in the view and everything around it; buildings, businesses, traffic, people walking around.

Continued on Page 3



The Friends Who Are No Longer Friends *by Ellen Perry Berkeley*

Before I sound off about the friends I no longer consider friends, let us first thank the friends who have only become better friends. These latter people are the Good Guys, spending time with us, listening to us, and giving us the help we need to survive our loss.

So who are the ones I'm calling the Bad Guys? For me, they belong to three groups. Surely, though, these experiences are not mine alone, so perhaps you'll add a few more groups to those that follow.

ONE. These people – fortunately not many – don't want to go anywhere with me alone, although they were often eager to join the two of us. These are folks who attended the celebration of Roy's life. They hugged me there and perhaps wept at remarks made during that lovely afternoon. But they've vanished now. I'm thinking of a lively couple with whom we enjoyed an occasional dinner out, in a town near us both. Despite my recent suggestions that we revisit this appealing restaurant, my emails and phone messages have gone unanswered. Earlier, soon after Roy died, we were a threesome at dinner, and later I wondered whether the wife was worried that if she went off to the ladies room, her husband and I would be making plans for a steamy affair. (He and I went to rest rooms. She did not.) It isn't that Roy was their friend and I was not. Or that her husband and I were flirting, then or now. No, I think it's all about my new label: I'm suddenly "unattached."

Revisiting the Past

Continued from Page 2

I exited the vehicle and walked around two corners of the intersection just observing the normal functioning of the intersection hearing muffled conversations of people and the sound of traffic moving and stopping at the traffic signal. I watched as the scene in front of me had no trauma or sadness, no fatalities or closed roads, no flashing lights or uniformed first responders and I took a deep breath and closed my eyes capturing the moment.

I felt good, positive, warm and comforted. I felt like a weight was lifted off my shoulders. I walked back to the car and joined my friend. I spoke about how I felt and how this visit seemed to help me. He drove me back to my car.

It's never too late to try to better yourself with your grief journey. You will know when it is time to take another step. Trust your instincts. I knew I could never re visit that intersection until I was ready. It took me ten years to be ready and doing this on the same day of the accident many years later made it even more worthwhile to me. This was a life changing moment for me. Facing my fear and winning. I experienced a kind of closure from doing this. I am at peace in that respect...finally.

TWO. More common are several old friends who seem uncomfortable to hear me mention Roy in any way whatsoever. It's as if he never existed. I keep him with me longer, though, when I can casually mention a favorite expression he had, or a joke he loved, or a place we visited. But these seem to scare away some former friends. They do not smile with me. Instead, they change the subject. Why do they need to put this distance between us?

THREE. Still another person – no longer the friend we once knew – is someone who seems to regard my being alone as my having nobody to give me important advice. The intervention of these Bad Guys can, astonishingly, be about something they know nothing about. Like grieving: "Who ever told you that it's OK to keep doing XXX?" OR, "Will you ever get to doing YYY?" OR, "Believe me, you'd be far better off if you turned your energies toward doing ZZZ." Such advice is rather like the comments from a bossy mother-in-law about how to clean a house – this, after she has just arrived at the place you've spent two hours tidying. Why is it assumed that we know nothing, that we relied on our beloved for any and all answers, and that this friend can supply the knowledge we are too dumb even to ask for?

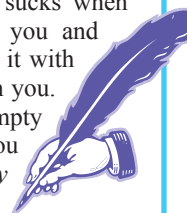
We know what we need – and what we don't need. We don't need any of the above. Instead, we need the true caring that comes from true friends.

Recently, I had lunch with a woman I hadn't known well. Her husband died this past year. We were the only ones in this quiet restaurant, and we talked delightedly about our men – their loving ways, their accomplishments, their skills, their humor – and what all of this meant to us. It was a remarkable lunchtime. I now consider this woman to be a true friend. As for the Bad Guys above, let us not be bothered by their lack of compassion. What causes them to be the way they are? Roy would undoubtedly smile, and simply say, "It is what it is." (Incidentally, that was a favorite expression of his.) If a friendship has changed, so be it. We have wonderful things from other long-time friends. And we have wonderful new friends. Let's just say no to the people who are saying no to us.



An Entry From My Journal

"As I write I realize that it sucks when something great happens to you and there's no loved one to share it with you or be happy about it with you. It's just you, alone, in an empty house and for a moment you wonder if something *really* great did happen" *-Editor*



sudSSpirit
Bereavement Support
Group
currently meets monthly
in the following locations:

Berks Chapter,
Reading, PA.
4th Wed. of the month 6 PM
Exeter Library

Cumberland Chapter,
Etters, PA.
2nd Thurs. of the month 7
PM
Fishing Creek
Salem U.M. Church

Bennington Chapter,
Bennington, VT
4th Tues. of the month 6 PM
Bennington Library

Lebanon Chapter,
Richland, PA
3rd Tues. of the month 6 PM
Richland Library

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

sudsspirit@gmail.com
- Berks, Cumberland,
and Lebanon, PA

sudsspirit.vt@gmail.com
- Bennington, VT

or phone:

717-866-2401
Berks, Lebanon, PA

717-938-1928
- Cumberland, PA

802-441-5562
- Bennington, VT

- Editor





The Widowlution ~ Join Us in the Army!

Submitted by Mary Lee Robinson

It is my considered opinion, based on conversations with hundreds of widows, that the world isn't very kind to us, when we need kindness more than any other time. I've talked about the "shunning" to unwidowed friends, and they look at me like I have two heads, but it's real. I saw more evidence of it in the days after Thanksgiving and Christmas in posts and comments. I know one widow friend who moved away from her home state to get away from that unpleasant treatment. I've heard of many more.

We're excluded, no doubt about it. Old friends fall off the face of the earth. Invitations cease to come, just when we need them most. And dinner and party invitations? Forget those. We've become radioactive, or maybe contagious. We've become "The Lunch Ladies". Occasionally, someone will ask us to go to lunch.

I think it continues to happen because, like playground bully victims, we tend to get pounded and shunned when we are at our weakest. We're made to feel as though there is something wrong with us...when all we are doing is having a normal reaction to a cycle-of-life event. The saddest part is that our bullies don't even realize what they are doing. But they will; when it's their turn.

I don't know about you...but while I take full responsibility for my own moods and happiness, and being good company...I'm mad as hell and I'm not going to take it anymore. No more quietly tolerating the shunning and the unkind remarks. It's just wrong. I'm going to make 2016 a year of speaking up and speaking out about it.

Edited for space: Editor

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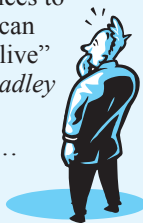
Thoughts to Ponder

- Editor

"Our greatness lies not so much in being able to remake the world...as in being able to remake ourselves" - Gandhi

"We can wait for circumstances to make up their minds, or we can decide to act, and in acting, live" - Omar Bradley

"The human spirit is never finished when it is defeated... it is finished when it surrenders" - Ben Stein



Book Review - Editor The Widow or Widower Next Door

by Mary Lee Robinson

Most everyone knows that losing a mate to death is a painful experience. Those who have not had such a loss of someone very close, seldom realize the depth and breadth of that pain.

The Widow or Widower Next Door is a gentle, yet stark collection of stories shared by twenty-five men and women who have lost a spouse to death. The collection is equally raw and intimate and is compiled in such a way as to offer the newly bereaved opportunity to experience that they are not alone in small, digestible bites while at the same time affording those who have sat with grief a while to absorb growth and healing.

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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Voicemails

By Alisha Krukowski

I remember a night a few years ago, when one of my good friends asked his wife, (also my good friend) how many saved voicemails she had in her cell phone. She had about a dozen, while he apparently had only two or three. At any given moment, I probably have between 11 and 22. Right now, I have 16.

Each time my Dad, or my husband, or a close friend leaves a voicemail, I save it. I'll continue to re-save it until that person leaves another voicemail. It doesn't really matter what the message is, and I have saved more "I'm on my way home, see you soon" messages from my husband than I can count. I need to know I have at least one message saved from each person I love.

My friend, with the large stash of saved voicemails, lost her brother just a few months after I lost Mom. I didn't ask, but I'm pretty sure she does it for the same reason I do.

After my Mom died, it took me a while to recognize all of the things that I lost when I lost her. There are the obvious things, like not having someone to send a card to on Mother's Day. There were the less obvious things, like no longer having someone who would always understand and empathize with the fact that it wasn't fair that I could still get pimples when I was starting to get wrinkles around my eyes.

And then there are the things no one can possibly tell you. Like the fact that no one would ever care as much as she would have how pretty my hair looked on my wedding day. And the realization that no matter how many photos I had (a lot) or how many pieces of her jewelry I wore to work each week (more than reasonable) there were some things that were just gone forever.

I don't have any recording of Mom's voice. Not one of the hundreds of voicemails she left to tell me she loved me, or ask where I wanted to eat when I came to visit. Not a single poor-quality VHS tape of her singing Happy Birthday to me or my brother. Nothing.

I would give anything to hear her say my name, or ask for a glass of water, or yell at the cat for knocking something over. No one ever tells you how much value a voice holds, and that there is nothing that will fill the void that it leaves.

So I save too many voicemails now. They are my security blanket. Because if I have them, those people can't leave me entirely, no matter what. I will always have a little tiny something to hold onto.

And sometimes a little tiny something can be the thing that keeps you sane.

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