



SPRING 2022

BPUSA NATIONAL GATHERING CONFERENCE ♦ July 22–24, 2022

Volume XXVII No. 2

Helping grieving parents and their families rebuild their lives following the death of a child.

I AM MORE by Lexi Behrnt

You are not the struggles you have faced.
At least, that's what I've been trying to discover and teach my own heart. I am not the things I've seen, the things that have happened to me, the scars I wear. Trauma and loss and grief are such complex beasts that while I've experienced them, I am not going to even pretend to understand them. Our hearts weren't made to be splayed open, but they sometimes are, and it's our job to figure out how to carry our stories, bruises and breaks and all.



What I've learned is simple. No matter how many awkward conversations I've had, how many times I've had to share about myself with a new person, and I stumble around the conversation. No matter how many people may view me differently, no matter how differently I may view myself, the truth is this: I am more than all of that. I am more than the suffering, the grief, the pain. I am more than any circumstance. I am not defined by my struggle, though I am certainly shaped by it.

To free myself, I needed to learn that I am not those things.

I am not the pain I carry.

I am not the suffering I've endured.

I am not the shame that I feel sometimes at having a life that doesn't fit neatly in the lines.

I am not bitterness, anger, or woundedness — those things I'm currently healing from.

I am not the girl who X, Y, or Z. (Fill in the blank with any experience.)

I am not the strength it has taken me to get here.

I am not the seconds, minutes, hours, days, or years I've endured pain.

I am not my mistakes, my failures, or my shortcomings.

[The list could keep going.]

Why am I sharing this? Why is there a need to? Because I'm not the only one who forgets there is a heart behind the scars. I'm not the only one who is navigating the muck to free my heart from all the layers. I'm not the only one.

Last week, I spoke at a retreat with others who also had a child die. Every time I show up to speak somewhere, it never fails— my own inadequacy always hits because hello — I am not someone who has special knowledge or who understands life or who really knows what she is doing. So, I did the only thing

I could do — I shared my heart and I asked them to share theirs. We talked about identity. We talked about healing. We talked about dreaming and growing and purpose in life.

It's an awkward thing, navigating life when yours has been turned upside down, rediscovering who you are in the midst of it all, dreaming again and realizing that you have purpose even through the pain.

When we shared about our hoping and dreaming and wishing again, I was finally able to put into words this transformation that has happened in the midst of healing.

**I am not defined by my struggles. (I have to remind myself of this sometimes daily.)
I am also not defined by my goals, my accomplishments, or any other fleeting thing.**

My dream is this and the woman I want to be is this: a woman who, in whatever she does, is not marked by her scars, any bitterness or anger or pain, but who is marked by love, by grace, by deep, steady joy, no matter the circumstance.

I don't want to know myself as my struggles. I don't want others to know me as that either. I want them to know me and see a heart that loves deeply and purely, wherever it's at, whatever it's doing, in big ways and small.

I am not the struggles I have faced.

I am not a broken story.

I am marked by love, the love I've received from God, the love I have for the ones I hold so close, and the love that I want to wrap the world with.

And in that, I am being set free.

You are not the struggles you faced. You are more.

Who are you?



A BLESSING FOR YOU WHO LOST TOO MUCH TOO QUICKLY

By Kate Bowler

Blessed are you sitting among the shards of what could have been. It's broken now, that dream you loved and it spilled out all over the ground.

Blessed are you letting your eyes look and remember all the hope you once had. All the love, all the beauty, all the future selves. You could have been.

Blessed are you telling your tears they can flow, telling your anger, it can speak. Letting this loss speak all its terrible truth to your soul.

Blessed are you, when mourning is the holy work of the moment, for it speaks of what is real.

Blessed are we who mourn saying let me stay here in grief's cold winter for as long as it takes.

That morning might be, to our hearts, the gentlest springtime. Let the thaw come slowly as we learn to live here in what is possible today.

An excerpt from:

LIFE WISDOM TO ENRICH AND UPLIFT YOUR SOUL By Talia Hunter

*Sometimes in life
You hurt so you can heal
Lose so you can gain
And fall so that you can rise again
And things come to an end
So that you may start again.*

*Sometimes it takes experiencing sadness to appreciate joy
It takes feeling pain to appreciate peace and freedom
It takes experiencing heartbreak to understand love
And it takes making your way through the darkness
To discover the light that lies within you.*

*Throughout my life, I've loved and lost
Made mistakes and hurt
Trusted and been lied to, let down and betrayed
But I've grown stronger
And discovered
That some of the deepest lessons in life
Come from the greatest pain.*

*And while there will be moments where I fail and falter
Or feel incredibly let down or sad
These will not last forever.
While it can be challenging to deal with the past
To cope with a broken heart, painful memories
And heavy emotions
I can choose to no longer remain a prisoner of the past
And for these moments to not define me.*

*Sometimes we beat ourselves up over past events,
past experiences and past mistakes
What we didn't get done
What went wrong
And what we regret
There are days when past baggage, bad memories,
situations and broken hearts
Can make us feel down
There are moments when we can feel insecure,
unconfident and unworthy
And there are times when we can lose faith and
hope in the future*

*But it is a beautiful feeling
To be able to stand tall and claim
That you fell apart but you survived
And to make peace with what has made you, you.
To refuse to allow the past to weigh you down so
much that it impacts your future
But rather choose to let go of your past
Seek the courage to embrace the storms
And discover the passion to pursue the things that
make you feel alive*

*And the peace to move to greater heights and
embrace the smaller, simpler moments
When your soul feels comfortable and at home.
And to refuse to let the world make you cold
But rather choose to keep your fire alive*

*As crooked paths and broken roads
Can one day lead to where you are meant to be
And tough times and struggles that you are able to
overcome
Can help strengthen and empower you.*

*Sometimes things in our lives seem complicated,
challenging and difficult
And the positive moments don't occur as often as
we envision
But we may learn to heal the wounds we are
carrying from our past
And allow the past to make us better not bitter.*

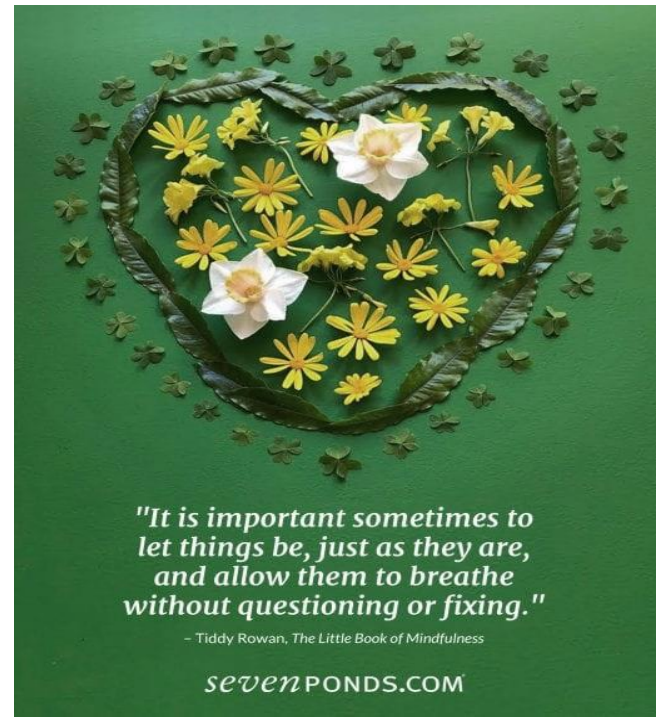
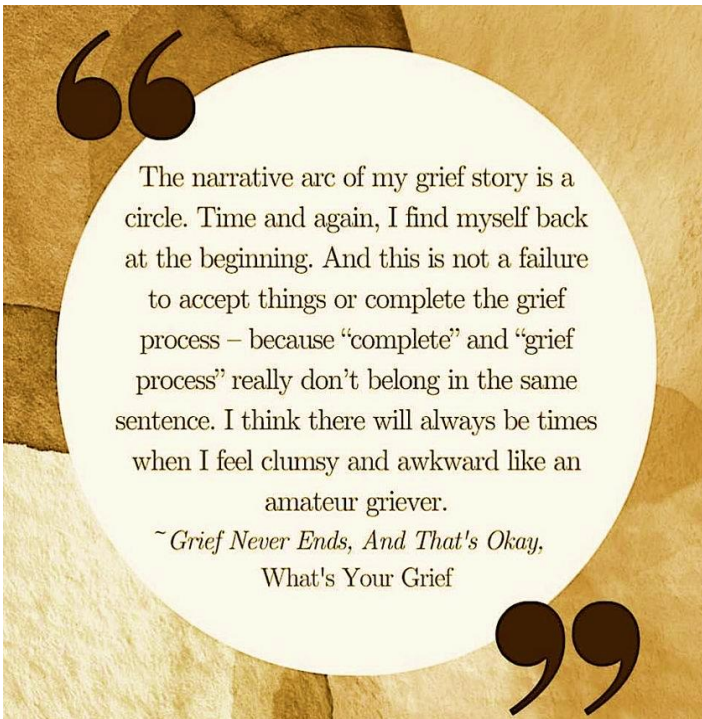
*There will be times when what we have worked to
build begins to collapse, break and unravel
Times full of difficulty and struggle
And times shrouded in darkness
When we feel weighed down by the stresses of life
and weary*

*But it is in these moments that we discover what it
means to rise
And to no longer feel shackled or chained to the
past
And that sometimes healing occurs in waves
You will float or sink
Swim freely or be carried by the tide*

*But regardless of the path you take
You will eventually reach your destination.
And you may learn to wash away past memories
Rather than drown in negative emotions
As when you spend so much energy
Contemplating the regrets of yesterday
You have nothing left for today.*

*When you love and celebrate yourself
You appreciate and honour the experiences that
have shaped you
While not allowing them to define you
And at any moment in time
You may choose to start living for today*

*Choose to let go of where you've previously been
Choose to tell those whom you care about that you
love them where possible
Choose to stand proud
And embrace who you are becoming
Choose to do what you desire and rediscover your
spark
And choose to step out of the shadows of your past
And no longer remain trapped in the dark.*



Dear Mom and Dad,

I am still here. I am here for you when desperation creeps in between the spaces of our new realities. I am not gone. Every tear you shed, I collect it. I gather the rain, and to each drop I give life to the memories you and I have shared. I step into your dreams when you least expect it, and if you look hard enough, you can find me there.

Say my name. Remember me in the quiet moments. They will sustain you when the world intrudes and tries to drown out the sound of the conversations that you still have with me when you think no one else is listening. I am still here.

Mom, my soul is quiet now. It no longer yearns for the things my physical body needed to survive this particular battle. It took everything from me, and I know it took everything from you; you will never realize what that did to my spirit when I passed from that life into this one.

I know that you feel like you are losing your mind some days, but when you hear a heartbeat where none should exist, know that it is mine, keeping time with yours.

I am still here. I did exist. I left my mark upon this world, and I am at peace now...

Love Your Child



From our beginning 27 years ago, Bereaved Parents of the USA has held an annual Gathering to provide an opportunity for parents and families to remember and celebrate the lives of their children, siblings, and grandchildren gone too soon. We offer support and hope to each other as we attend workshops, listen to keynote speakers, and appreciate each other's company, especially at mealtimes. Our goal is to offer education, encouragement, and hope with open hearts to all who attend.

To visit our Gathering Conference website, [CLICK HERE](#)

Please read the Registration Information Packet before registering! Register by June 1st to take advantage of the Early Registration rates. Book your hotel room using the BPUSA link to receive our special conference rate (\$129 per night plus tax) available until June 15.

We look forward to seeing you! ♥



NATIONAL GATHERING 2022



Bereaved Parents USA

JULY 22-24 ♥ ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI



Announcing Our Keynote Speakers

Beth D'Angelo ♥ Diane Bergeron ♥ Crystal Webster ♥ Angela Kennecke

WORKSHOP SNEAK PREVIEW!

Finding Peace Through the Page: Journaling for the Non-Journaler – Crystal Webster

Helping Children with Loss – Sadija Smiley

Increasing your Resilience - ways to enhance your life – Becky Russell

Surviving Loss from Drug Related Cause of Death – Justin Phillips

Men, the Invisible Griever? -- Bobby Morton

Survive Child Suicide. Yes You Can – Peggy Green

The Power of Pebbles & Angels! – Patti DiMiceli

Seasoned Grievors and Navigating Grief – Jimmy DeLoach

Struggling to Reclaim My Faith – Dennis Apple

HOW GRIEF GETS TRAPPED IN THE BODY

By Mark Fiveman www.body-psyche.com

My father died from a heart attack when I was eight. In a well-intentioned but disastrous move, my mother forbade me from attending his funeral. She thought that ‘keeping me cheery’ would be good for me.

As a result, I never got to mourn the loss of my dad when he died. Instead, I had to wait decades to release the pain that I had trapped inside my body. Denial: Short-Term Gain, Long-Term Cost.

My mother’s positive intention was to help me cope with the pain. She believed that avoiding the pain would somehow improve my life. She was wrong.

By following her coping strategy, I learned to suppress my emotions, becoming withdrawn and feeling hollow inside. My emotional life was impoverished as a result.

Her coping strategy is a common one. When loss and grief are too much to deal with, we stuff our feelings and get on with our lives – trying to live ‘normally’ on top of an underground lake of troubling emotions that never goes away.

Unfortunately, this kind of [denial](#) has a short-term benefit – feeling less pain in the moment, but a long term cost of never actually dealing with the pain. The more pain we avoid, the fuller that lake of unresolved feelings becomes. Living with unresolved pain has long-term negative effects on emotional and physical health.

Emotionally, we’re stuck in the past. Anchored to old feelings of heartache, we cannot experience new joys, loves and dreams. Everything is tarnished by our subterranean pain.

There’s also a physical cost. The body sites where pain is buried are more prone to injury, infection and degeneration because they carry more physical strain and are more likely to become inflamed. More about that in a moment.

Grief Trapped In The Body

In the article [How Emotions Get Trapped In The Body](#), I shared how we hide emotions from ourselves and trap them inside our bodies.

So, what are the specific body sites we use to trap sadness and grief?

Well, we *express* sadness and grief by crying. Crying involves the entire respiratory system. Our nose, throat, lungs, diaphragm and ribs all participate to produce cathartic sobs. We collapse our respiratory system to hold grief in.

Therefore, it makes sense in order to *suppress* those feelings, we have to close off those same body sites. That is exactly how we hide loss and grief in our bodies – we immobilize our respiratory system. You’ll recognize the very common posture of this young woman: she’s collapsing her respiratory system in an unconscious attempt to feel less sadness.

Do you recognize this body posture in loved ones when they’re feeling sad? Do you adopt this same posture on your ‘blue’ days? If you do, it’s an unconscious attempt to try to feel less pain, but it will also prevent you from processing your emotions in healthy ways.

There is one other site that can be affected by repressed grief: the skin. The skin is our largest sensory organ and is essential for our experience of connection with other people, especially when we’re very



young. As adults, we still need touch, and lack of connection through loving touch can affect can manifest as physical symptoms in the skin.

Physical Symptoms Of Suppressed Grief

Dr. Sheldon Cohen, professor of psychology at Carnegie Mellon University and others have shown that chronic psychological stress increases inflammation. The more unresolved emotions we carry, the more inflammatory responses we have in our immune system, hormonal system and body tissues.

When emotions get trapped in the body, they often lead to inflammation in the sites where the emotions are trapped. This is especially true of the 'softer' emotions like sadness and grief. Just think about it for a while – when you cry your eyes get puffy and your nose runs. These are inflammatory responses.

The respiratory system is the primary home of grief and sadness in the body.

As I described in my article on [allergies](#), chronic inflammation can fool the immune system into thinking there is a problem and trigger hyper-immune conditions. This commonly results in allergies, asthma, or chronic congestion and coughing.

In the skin, the most common physical symptom is eczema, a condition of hyper-inflammation. In the world of traditional Western medicine, eczema has no cure but symptomatic relief can sometimes be achieved with anti-inflammatory creams. Of course, a more effective, non-medical cure would be to release the emotional burden that causes the inflammation in the first place.

How To Heal Sadness And Grief

When you realize the long-term costs you've paid by suppressing sadness and grief, the natural response is to want to release and heal it.

I've put together this 20-minute guided meditation that will show you how to do just that: [How To Release Sadness And Grief](#). The process involves reconnecting with the body sites where the emotions were trapped, then using guided awareness to release and heal the pain. The guided meditation employs the healing power of your own heart to complete the healing process.

That sounds OK for the minor losses we experience in everyday life, but some grief seems unbearable. The death of a parent, child or loved one. Being left by a spouse or the love of your life. Having your dreams crushed. Knowing you've lost something that can never be replaced.

How can we release and heal those elephant-sized losses?

How Do You Eat An Elephant?

It's a time-honored question, "How do you eat an elephant?" with a simple answer: "One bite at a time."

When I finally got round to mourning my father's death, it would have been way too much pain to reconnect with and experience all at once. If I had, I would have ended up as an incoherent quivering blob of jelly on the floor.

Just like eating an elephant, the way to deal with unbearable grief is one bite at a time.

Free Yourself From Grief One Bite At A Time

I designed the guided meditation, [How To Release Sadness And Grief](#), to be used to heal a small amount of pain each time you follow it. It's intended to be used in bit-sized chunks.

For a small loss, a single sitting may suffice to release the buried emotion. For a larger loss like a relationship breakup, you might work through it in several sittings over the course of a few of weeks. For those truly unbearable losses – the ones that you think you could never confront and heal – it might take months of regular work.

However quickly or slowly you work through your reservoir of trapped pain, the payoff is the same: better physical health, more joy, and more freedom to love, connect and bond with people in the ways that are most important to you.

Once you understand how loss and grief get trapped in the body, you also have the key to release and heal those painful emotions.



For centuries, poets and writers have accurately found communion with winter during personal times of grief and sorrow, and it's easy to see why. It can feel as though there is poetic symbolism in grieving during winter – the sadness you feel seems reflected in the earthly world around you. The days shorten and the nights lengthen, the leaves fall from the trees and growth goes dormant, we spend time indoors.

There is no doubt, grief can feel like a long and bleak winter.

So, what do you do when spring starts to break and the season of darkness transforms to leave you behind and lonely with your grief? What do you do with your heartbreak as the flowers grow again and the rest of the world feels the joy of spring's promises? How do you cope when the cheerful and bright weather can feel like nature's cruel mockery?

While your grief will absolutely forever change you, it is ok to embrace the process of healing on your own timeline. While some people may not understand your experience in grief, there are some things you can do to care for your physical and emotional wellbeing during this season.

CARE FOR YOURSELF

Caring for yourself after loss can be difficult to do, but it is one of the best ways to give yourself the tools you need to process. It is very common to feel alone in the wake of loss, and purposefully seeking out someone who understands can be immensely helpful.

The help of a professional grief therapist can be beneficial. Each grief experience is unique, and talking through the nuances of your loss in a safe space can bring much healing. Many people often find that support groups (whether online or in person) to be a hugely helpful tool. They are almost always free and accessible.

Other ideas to care for your physical wellbeing includes gentle exercise. Many people in grief find that the focus of mindfulness that comes with yoga.

EMBRACE SMALL THINGS THAT BRING YOU JOY

Oftentimes, we think it is large sweeping changes that will help us cope with loss. But oftentimes, we begin the journey back to ourselves in the small moments. It can be helpful to create a list of small things that bring you joy and commit to doing one of them each day.

There are some activities that you can do in the spring that can be very helpful for your healing. Grow a memorial garden in memory of your loved one. Buy flowers in their honor and put them on your dining room table. Take a walk around your block and leave your phone at home. Sit outside and bird watch, looking for a special species that reminds you of your loved one. Spend time in nature. Journal outdoors with a warm cup of coffee. Be gentle with yourself and give yourself time and care to heal.

FIND NEW WAYS TO ENGAGE IN THE WORLD

Sometimes making new memories can also help you find a place for your grief as the seasons change. Music can be immensely therapeutic and there are many bloggers who have put together amazing playlists designed to help express feelings and deal with grief and loss. You can also spend time finding new musicians and listening to old favorites. Other people choose to learn a new skill, whether that is a new sport, learning how to make new crafts, cooking a new recipe, or perfecting an old favorite baked good.

You may feel like there is nothing fresh and living in you, and in those moments, I want to gently send you a message of hope – you are worth the journey, you are a treasure, and you are valued. With time, you have life waiting to blossom.

Spring will come.