

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT—GRANDPARENT GRIEF

Grandparents' Grief—Who Is Listening?

By Mary Lou Reed

If a grandparent/grandchild relationship is shattered by death, grandparents lose more than a cherished grandchild—they suffer a dual loss—simultaneously needing to mourn the death of their grandchild, while also grieving for their adult child's suffering.

A grandchild's death seems perverse, absurd and totally unnatural; it defies the natural order. Grandparents expect to predecease their children, and certainly, their grandchildren.

But, who is listening?

Parental bereavement has received extensive study, publications and publicity from the counseling and bereavement community in the past couple of decades, and rightly so. But, what about the grandparents? They, too, need support and resources that address their specific double loss.

A lack of societal and professional consideration for grandparents' grief may be attributed to the impression that since the death of a grandchild is one generation removed (i.e., it is "not *their* child that died!), grandparents, therefore, are immune to the intense pain of such a loss.

That is not true, of course.

Another common cultural assumption is that because grandparents are older than the parents of the deceased child, they have had more experience with death. Consequently, they will not need as much consideration and support as they will "know how" to cope with the death of their grandchild.

Many grandparents, unfortunately, have learned differently.

Following the death of my grandson in 1989, I searched through death and bereavement literature in a near futile attempt to find assistance with my debilitating grief. Literature dealing with the death of friends, and pet loss, showed up more frequently than grandparents' grief.

My research located mostly tangential references to the role and needs of grandparents. A short paragraph by Rando (1986) did note the duality of grandparents' grief, "They not only lose their grandchild, but they 'lose' their child as well, as they cannot rescue their child from bereaved-parent status." (pg. 37)

And yet, even today, not much has been written about the special needs of grandparents. Since Margaret Gerner (1990) wrote her excellent book, *For Bereaved Grandparents*, only a few other books (Kolf, 1995; Galinsky, 1999), including my own (Reed, 2000) have been published. This is "slim pickin's" for a large and growing segment of our society.

Although much has been written regarding grief, particularly parental grief (which is useful to grandparents), there remains a deficiency of specific information to assist grandparents survive an event they never believed they would live to experience.

Grandparents' Personal Grief from the Loss of a Beloved Grandchild

Most grandparents would gladly trade places with their dead grandchild—such a loss feels so devastating. Not often conscious of the enormous investment in their grandchildren as well as the strength of the attachment, grandparents are vulnerable to intense double pain on the death of a grandchild.

The development of a cherished grandparent/grandchild relationship often grows from the fact that, because grandparents are no longer responsible for the day-to-day care of the child, they are spared from the usual conflicts between generations. Also, grandparents often have more leisure time and disposable income than the parents, thus making it easier to develop a closer and sweeter relationship between grandparent and grandchild.

The hopes and dreams of the grandparent (sometimes even a namesake) are invested in a grandchild. Losing that child leaves grandparents struggling through a grieving process for what feels like a loss of part of themselves.

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Grandparents' Grief—Who Is Listening?

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A grandchild represents the grandparents' immortality—the bearer of the grandparents' legacy to the world, one generation extended—a powerful concept that brings deep grief when a grandchild dies.

A grandchild's death sends shock waves through the entire family. Rando (1986) mentions potential family relationship problems, the important role of grandparents and how difficult their role. Those difficulties extend far beyond the afore mentioned double mourning, as grandparents often are the ones a family looks to for strength, inspiration, understanding, and care.

Bearing Witness to Their Adult Child's Grief

Bearing witness to an adult child's grief is a process filled with *potholes*—a situation fraught with possible misunderstandings.

A major stumbling block can be the many cultural and family-learned grief customs on both sides of the family. Details such as how grief should be expressed, how death rituals should be handled, the right and wrong way to grieve, how long one should grieve, and idiosyncratic reactions to the loss can be a minefield for grandparents to maneuver while watching helplessly the anguish of their child's grief.

Communication with the adult child and his/her family (including in-laws) after such a devastating loss will depend in part on “the long history of your relationship with your child” (Galinsky, 1999, p. 51). There are no guarantees, however, that even in the best of relationships that there will not be confusion or misunderstandings. An example is Gerner's (1990) observation that, “one of the most talked-about subjects in groups of young bereaved parents is the lack of understanding from their parents.”

Grandparents cannot protect their child from, nor take away, the child's pain. Extreme effort is required to be available and helpful to their adult child and his/her family all the while watching their suffering. This puts an extraordinary demand on grandparents' love, understanding, knowledge, and abilities—not to mention stamina.

The extraordinary emotional and psychological effort grandparents experience trying to cope with a grandchild's death often seems to be a challenge far beyond what most grandparents believe they can endure. No one ever expects to have to fill this particular role in life and there aren't any training manuals!

The burden is a long-lasting one. Even grandparents who have found some feelings of “peace” about the death of their grandchild frequently mention that the pain they see in their own child over the years is a never-ending source of sorrow.

Helping Surviving Siblings (Other Grandchildren of the Same Family)

If there are other siblings in the same family where a grandchild has died, grandparents may be invaluable to those children and their parents at such a difficult time. Most grandparents will recognize the importance of being available to those children. Unfortunately, this is another area where grandparents may find it difficult to “help without hindering.” It is another burden for grandparents, especially those ill-prepared to recognize and deal with the special needs of surviving siblings.

Being Available to Other Family Members

Being the “strength” for the entire family is a difficult expectation for grandparents to handle—to “carry on” with grace and dignity—with little support from either society or bereavement professionals.

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In one way or another, the entire family will be affected by the death of a child, generating emotions that “rattle around, and bounce back,” unbalancing the family dynamics. Janice Nadeau (1998) uses a mobile to represent an extended family, demonstrating the “unbalancing” and instability that occurs in a family when a child dies. When the figure of a child is removed, the mobile swings wildly. I cannot think of a better image for a family grieving the death of a child.

Aunts, uncles, and cousins of the dead child have their own mourning to do also and often look to grandparents for assistance. A sibling of the parent who has lost a child, and who has children of his/her own, may go through tremendous fears for their own children. Their reactions to these fears may lead to confusion and distancing. “Why haven't (sister or brother's family) called, been to see us?” the grieving parents ask the grandparents. The grandparents are then put into the situation of being mediators for a family in grief—to be the peacemakers. What incredible demands the family may place on the already stretched physical, mental, emotional, and psychological strengths of the grandparents!

From Where Will Come Support and Validation?

I believe grandparents need and deserve an extensive examination of the depth and complexity of their grief—studies similar to those of parental loss.

Validating grandparents' grief through scholarly studies and development of educational materials could be a fertile field for bereavement educators and grief counselors. This subject will require more attention in coming years as the aging of our country's population means more grandparents are living longer—long enough to suffer the death of a grandchild.

While many grief groups and organizations encourage bereaved grandparents to attend their meetings, generally grandparents of today are reticent to speak of their pain in a group of non-peers. Providing grandparents with time to be heard in “a place of their own” will help answer the oft-heard need expressed by grieving grandparents—they want someone to talk to who has experienced the same type of grief. They want someone who will listen.

Grandparents' grief may present multiple challenges, but the simple act of listening, as we all know, is a powerful healer. ■

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Grandparent Grief: “Nipped In the Bud”

By Tom Easthope, CDE

As a Death Educator/Funeral Director working in a large funeral home setting for over thirty-five years, grandparent grief has become a familiar challenge. I use the word challenge because no two scenarios are exactly the same and yet there are some common threads that bind the weave within the mosaic of this unique group when it comes to loss.

The grandparent – grandchild relationship is capable of being like no other. Its chemistry is pure and unconditional. The arrival of a new grandchild can be like reliving spring in the autumn of your life.

When most of us pass the mid-life point, we usually incur more losses on a day to day basis. In the midst of degenerating health, downsizing homes, decreasing income, and the deaths of loved ones and dear friends, the presence of grandchildren with all their energy and vitality can provide a sense of new growth when everything else feels like it is dying.

Unfortunately, when a young life is extinguished in its infancy or prime, the grief that follows can be debilitating not only for the parents but also for the grandparents.

When a grandchild dies, grandparents must witness the agony of their own children. As grandparents they may have to parent their child again. In spite of feeling powerless, there can be an overwhelming need to remain strong.

When it comes to grandparent grief, I believe the funeral process, as in any other death, is comparable to a ‘double edged sword.’ The ‘funeral,’ for whatever it may be, has the potential of being a highly therapeutic vehicle. Used incorrectly however, it can compound our grief and exacerbate our pain.

I have seen well-meaning grandparents and parents create further heartache for one another under the guise of genuine caring.

As parents, most of us feel a need to protect our children. This can even apply to adult children when a grandchild dies. It’s like a knee-jerk reaction. We want to ease the burden or remove it completely, not realizing the consequences. I have seen many well-intentioned grandparents disenfranchise their children’s grief by taking over right from the get go. Making the funeral arrangements, paying for the funeral, ordering the family flowers and offering burial space in their own cemetery plots may sound wonderful, but is it?

On occasion, sets of grandparents consciously and unconsciously become competitive with one another aspiring to be the family ‘rescuers’ or ‘saviors’ to the detriment of all concerned. I often wonder if that action is sometimes fueled by ‘survivor guilt’ or recurring family dynamics?

On the other hand, adult children sometimes feel a need to protect their parents when a grandchild dies. Sometimes the thinking is that their parent’s are too old to face the loss. As a result, the grandparents feel isolated and invalidated. It is important to remember that over protection can be as bad as neglect.

At other times, because the heart-wrenching pain is so overwhelming when a grandchild dies, it is understandably hard for



family members to see beyond their own immediate needs. It is like me saying to you, “Stop having that heart attack you’re having and help the person over here with the stroke.”

There is also the gender gap. We know that grandmothers and grandfathers grieve differently. Women are more likely to express sadness and mourn openly. Yet many women have been trained to suppress explosive emotions. They are more apt to nurture other family members, while men are more action oriented.

Men are more inclined to publicize their anger, only to suppress more intimate feelings of attachment. It’s like grieving at sixes and sevens.

Used correctly, the funeral can honor our sorrow and fulfill the needs of the family as a whole. I believe that part of the therapy in the funeral process involves embracing the burden of decision-making as a family: parents, grandparents and siblings.

It is for that reason I do not like to see one family member making the decisions for everyone else who is in pain. Because family dynamics differ based on personalities, closeness, coping-mechanisms, beliefs and expectations, barriers can easily be created through the employment of emotional shorthand. As a funeral director, I think it is imperative to support grievors in clarifying their thoughts, feelings and needs, in an effort for the immediate family to work together as a whole.

I also believe the funeral director has a responsibility during the funeral consultation or arrangement to make the family aware of the many choices and alternatives available to them in the way of a funeral, as well as the ‘aftercare’ programs to follow. This way it becomes a ‘family affair.’ Everyone is involved in a positive way, can make informed decisions and, at the same time, be aware of everyone else’s needs. I refer to it as “Setting the Tone” and making this tragic loss a meaningful event.

I am reminded of a family I served many years ago. Their infant son had died at birth. The family had requested that their baby’s body be embalmed to allow for family viewing and a small service to follow.

When I took the family to their visitation room, they all stood before the little white lambskin casket. When I returned to the room moments later, they were still standing where I had left them. The expression in their eyes conveyed they somehow needed more. Looking at the mom, I asked, “Would you like to hold your baby?” With an uplifting voice she replied, “Could I?” Everyone in the room sat down as I lifted the baby from the tiny casket and placed him in his mother’s arms. When I walked by the room sometime later, I saw this little baby being passed from parent to grandparent to older sibling. When the mom held her infant son for the last time with everyone looking on, she began to sing to her child, “You Are My Sunshine.” Yes, there were a lot of tears shed and as strange as it may seem, there was also an unexplained joy present in that room that day. Sometimes what is easiest isn’t always best and some-

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times what is the most painful can also be very meaningful.

When it comes to grandparent grief, as individuals and as a nation we need to validate this overlooked and routinely unrecognized grief. Grandparents need empathetic listeners who will allow them to talk and reminisce when necessary. If they begin to cry, it is important to understand that you did not cause the tears. It is the loss that hurts, not the dialogue that follows. Sometimes tears just need to be shed. And do not be afraid to send grieving grandparents a note periodically (or on anniversary dates) to let them know that they are remembered and are still in your thoughts. Honor their sorrow as best you can, even if it means putting your own discomfort with their grief secondary to their pain.

Even though a green twig has been nipped in the bud, the scar on the soul of the family tree will always be a precious heartfelt reminder of what the family roots are capable of bearing and the broken promise of what could have been. The choice is ours as to whether we, as caregivers, allow grandparents to wither up in their grief or remain rooted in familiar nurturing soil and continue blooming where they are planted.

Postscript

Grandparent grief can take on many forms; it is not limited to the death of a grandchild. As a grandparent, you can grieve for the

challenges that a grandchild may have to endure as the result of parental divorce or death.

When I began writing this article, I was a professional spectator who had witnessed the assorted grief of so many grandparents who had walked that stretch of lonely beach canopied by sullen gray skies raining tears of heartbreak.

In the early morning hours of Sunday, September 29, 2002, my wife and I received the tragic news of our son-in-law's sudden death resulting from complications following routine surgery. He left his wife, our youngest daughter, and three beautiful children, ages 5, 8 and 12, our grandchildren.

The most dreadful task I have ever had to perform was to rob our three grandchildren of their innocence and inform them of their father's unexpected death. Not only are we grieving for our daughter but our hearts just ache for those three young lives.

Now I end this article as a participant sinking my feet into that chilling cold, wet sand on that lonely stretch of beach. ■

About the Author

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The Death of a Grandchild: A Complex Grief

By Nadine Galinsky

“Could you help me find a book for grieving grandparents?” That question, posed to me by my mother after my daughter’s stillbirth, was innocent enough. However, I discovered quickly what bereavement professionals already know: not much was available. As a result of my limited findings, I decided to seek out and interview bereaved grandparents for their perspectives, hoping to provide the level of support to my mother that I was getting as a bereaved parent. The result of this research became a book, *When a Grandchild Dies: What to Do, What to Say, How to Cope* (Galinsky, 1999).



Scope of Research

With my only experience being my own bereavement, I was unprepared for the complexity of the topic. Grandparents are a diverse group! My primary sample included nine individuals, all females, who ranged in age from 40 to 83 (men declined my request for an interview). I also spoke informally with several others.

The ages of the deceased grandchildren ranged from 28 weeks in utero to 18 years, and the time that had elapsed since the deaths ranged from two months to 17 years. Causes of death were varied and included heart defects, complications from spina bifida and cerebral palsy, SIDS, murder, and one unknown cause.

Seven grandparents were married, one was widowed, and one was divorced at the time of the interview. The group was evenly split between parents of bereaved daughters and sons.

I found interview subjects through a variety of methods: personal acquaintance, a newspaper story, and the Internet. Whenever possible, I met with them in person. To assist the others I prepared a questionnaire, the goal of which was to provoke detailed responses. In personal interviews I used the questionnaire only as a guide, preferring to create an environment that would allow grandparents to expand beyond my questions. This was useful early on, when one grandmother discussed problems with her daughter-in-law, because in-law problems just weren’t part of my personal experience.

One way my research differs from more objective, scientific research was my bias about the subject; my final product included my own observations and feelings, and I am sure my grief affected how I approached the interviews. I could relate more, for example, to newly bereaved grandparents because we were sharing similar experiences. However, I sought to keep my bias to a minimum by using open-ended questions, presenting all opinions whether or not I agreed with them personally, and seeking prepublication feedback to ensure there were no glaring problems.

Following are some selected observations from my conversations with grieving grandparents.

Funeral Services: Setting the Tone

Five of the grandmothers interviewed were heavily involved in funeral arrangements. In two of these cases, the bereaved parents specifically asked the grandparents to take over. I was particularly interested in this, because my own response was to plan the fu-

neral almost entirely on my own. It felt like the only act of parenting available to me; perhaps this is because my daughter was stillborn and I had no other opportunity to be her mother.

Handling the funeral arrangements seemed to set the tone for the quality of family communication later on. One grandmother, who was not involved in making the arrangements, was surprised when one of her favorite poems was read at the funeral. Its inclusion helped her feel involved and supported.

On the other hand, resentments at the funeral tended to snowball afterward. The most extreme example was one family whose relationship had deteriorated to the point where the grandparents had virtually no contact with the bereaved parents. In that instance, religious differences came into play at the funeral, and family members felt that only the mother’s wishes were considered.

The families that fared best were those who discussed family roles during funeral planning, whether or not the grandparents were involved in the details.

A Dual Loss

In addition to the death, which is “out of the order of things,” grandparents also feel helpless to console their children, the bereaved parents. Despite all their years of parenting experience, there is nothing a grandparent can do in this situation to make things better. One time I went to a memorial service, and I was called to the ladies restroom, where a grandmother was all alone, sobbing. She said, “I wanted to be so strong for my daughter on this day.” She felt ashamed for losing control, and uncomfortable about sharing her pain with anyone.

A common reaction among grandparents is to feel guilty for being the one who lived. So many said to me, “I’ve lived a long life. Why couldn’t it have been me who was taken?” Their desire to protect their children runs deep, and they believe their death would somehow make sense, instead of the senseless death of the grandchild.

Relationships and Support

Most of the grandparents I spoke with did not talk to their families about their grief. Only three reported receiving support within the family, though one grandmother acknowledged that her family would probably be receptive if she would allow them to see her need. Most of the married grandmothers, five out of seven, were able to receive support from spouses. The other two, however, reported an inability to speak with their husbands. To one grandmother, married nearly fifty years to her best friend, this was devastating.

Two respondents were counselors and, though they did not seek counseling themselves, they benefited from their training. One grandmother frequently visualized her grandchild sitting across from her so she could speak aloud all the things she longed to tell her grandchild. Two others turned to grief counselors for “a few”

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The Death of a Grandchild: A Complex Grief

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visits, mostly to validate that their experiences were normal. The remaining grandmothers had no interest in receiving counseling, and one grandmother was extremely hostile to the idea.

Three grandmothers found solace in churches, with one grandmother choosing a different religion based on how some of its members answered questions about death and the afterlife. Two others attended church services but felt their faith to be shaken. There did not seem to be a relationship between the length of time since the death and the level of faith. The most extraordinary story I heard was of the grandmother whose granddaughter had lived for 18 years with severe congenital defects. During that entire time, the church supported their family with calls, casseroles, and condolence!

Only one grandmother attended a support group, and she expressed discomfort at being the only grandmother there. In my own observation, having attended a support group that "welcomes" grandparents, separate groups for grandparents would appear to be a better idea. Both groups would benefit from being able to speak freely about family difficulties.

Several grandmothers were enthusiastic about support found on the Internet, and some had created memorial web sites for their grandchildren. This was a way for grandparents to find and connect with each other.

A common complaint was the lack of reading material for grandparents, which of course explains their enthusiasm to interview for a book. Part of my frustration in writing a book was having to be so general in my approach. One newly bereaved grandmother read the manuscript before it was published and was concerned I had not addressed the issue of widowed grandparents who carry the burden of trying to be both grandmother and grandfather. Another individual wanted to see more about cultural and racial differences in grief styles. In both cases, I chose to keep the manuscript "as is" because I felt that too much information would be overwhelming. My hope is that others will step forward and publish more on this subject, and I am grateful to see more information becoming available.

Epilogue

Four years have passed since I conducted my research. Since that time another book has been published (see References), and more support is available on the Internet. I have met grief counselors who are starting new support groups for grandparents, and I am pleased to see this change occurring.

Closer to home, my mother has the book she was looking for, in part because she provided feedback on my work while it was in progress. She felt she benefited most from reading others' stories so she felt less alone, and from learning to recognize that the silence of others does not connote a lack of caring.

Once during a talk I was giving, a counselor expressed a feeling of helplessness to respond to grandparents who wished they had died instead of their grandchildren. "How do I respond to that?" he asked. We certainly cannot take away their pain. In the midst of the complexity and uniqueness of grandparents' grief, however, lies a simplicity in what helps the most: listening, caring, and validation. By providing places for them to share their stories, whether in groups, books, or other venues, we can certainly offer them that. ■

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My Nicky

By Wannie Pawley

It's been 21 months since my grandson, Nicky, had to leave and everyday is a struggle still. Many days I feel like it all just happened yesterday. I had never really had to deal with death before, so I never knew what real pain was until I had to let him go that night. I am learning that, for me, I will never "get over it" as people say I will.

Nicky got sick on September 13, 2000, thought he had pneumonia. For 3 days, they all thought he had pneumonia until they found the tumor in his left lung. They said it took up three-fourths of his lung, so they had to take him to surgery and try to get it out. He was in there 5 hours. The doctor came out and told us it was too big to remove and it was malignant. I actually felt my heart stop. I couldn't breathe, couldn't think, couldn't believe what I was hearing. That was when I began to pull back from my family. I comforted my son and daughter-in-law as much as I could, but I was really too busy praying and trying to bargain with God to save my baby.

I stayed with Nicky day and night for six weeks, all the time "knowing" this was a mistake and he would wake up and reach for me. But they were never able to take him off the respirator, so I never got to see his brown eyes, his smile or hear him say "nana" again. I just sat holding his little hands, stroking his head, talking to him, begging him to wake up, telling him how much I loved him. I can still smell that hospital smell, that soap they use. I can still see him on that last night struggling to live, but he was so tired.

His parents made the decision to turn off the respirator as they were told that they could lessen his suffering that way. Or, they could wait and let the cancer take him. I see in my dreams (nightmares) the nurse's hand turning off the switch. I see him in his mother's arms. I held his hand and begged God to help him breathe. When I saw that wasn't working, I begged God to let me go with him.

I am still here. I can look back at my journal and see I have "gotten better" since that night Nicky died, but I am not healed by any means. I am still going through what they call the "stages" of grief. I have finally realized there is no "quick fix" and God will not take me until it is my time to go. I still cry and dream of Nicky. I have not had a good night's sleep in a very long time.

There are places I used to love to go where I can no longer bear to be—the zoo, the beach, anywhere there are too many children about 3 years old. I just can't do it anymore. Sometimes my sadness overwhelms me when I think of all the times we were going to share. Now it's all just gone, taken away too soon. Walking on the beach, feeding the seagulls, riding bikes together—we had only just begun.

I was raised going to church with my grandmother. I still ask God why this had to happen, knowing I am not supposed to know the answer yet. Sometimes there is no answer, only questions. My heart still breaks daily and the emptiness will never go away. I love my daughter very much and, after many years alone, I have met a wonderful man (who also suffered in this very way). He has helped me so much to cope. But you know, I would go this very minute if God told me I could be with my Angel, Nicky.

I wake up every day and breathe and work and try to do what I have to do. It is very hard to find the joy in life that I had before. I am trying, even though it seems like I take two steps forward and one step back a lot of the time. I don't know if I will ever get a chance to be a grandma again. If I do, I wonder if I can give my entire heart and all my love, or will fear make this impossible?

I suppose God will find a way to let me know as the days stretch on and on and on. Nicky was my Angel on earth, and now he is my Angel in heaven. I see him in the sunsets and the clouds over the ocean. My love for him will never change. ■

Always,
Nicky's Nana

About the Author

Wannie Pawley is a bereaved grandmother who lives in Raleigh, North Carolina.



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Upcoming Themes

If you would like to contribute an article to an issue with these upcoming themes, please contact Louis Gamino, Editor of *The Forum*. lgamino@swmail.sw.org

Topics under consideration:

Deaths attended by public servants
Grief and the Arts
HIV/AIDS

For Bereaved Grandparents

(an excerpt) By Margaret H. Gerner, MSW

I am powerlessness. I am helplessness. I am frustration.

I sit with her and I cry with her.

She cries for her daughter and I cry for mine.

I can't help her.

I can't reach inside her and take her broken heart.

I must watch her suffer day after day.

I listen to her tell me over and over how she misses Emily, how she wants her back.

I can't bring Emily back for her.

I can't buy her an even better Emily than she had, like I could buy her an even better toy when she was a child.

I can't kiss the hurt and make it go away.

I can't even kiss a small part of it away.

There's no bandaid large enough to cover her bleeding heart.

There was a time I could listen to her talk about a fickle boyfriend and tell her it would be okay, and know in my heart that in two weeks she wouldn't even think of him.

Can I tell her it'll be okay in two years when I know it will never be okay, that she will carry this pain of "what might have been" in her deepest heart for the rest of her life?

I see this young woman, my child, who was once carefree and fun-loving and bubbling with life, slumped in a chair with her eyes full of agony.

Where is my power now?

Where is my mother's bag of tricks that will make it all better?

Why can't I join her in the aloneness of her grief?

As tight as my arms wrap around her,

I can't reach that aloneness.

What can I give her to make her better?

A cold, wet cloth will ease the swelling of her crying eyes, but it won't stop the reason for her tears.

What treat will bring joy back to her?

What prize will bring that happy child back?

Where are the magic words to give her comfort?

What chapter in Dr. Spock tells me how to do this?

He has told me everything else I've needed to know.

Where are the answers?

I should have them.

I'm the mother.

I know that someday she'll find happiness again, that her life will have meaning again.

I can hold out hope for her someday, but what about now? this minute? this hour? this day?

I can give her my love and my prayers and my care and my concern.

I could give her my life.

But even that won't help. ■



Acknowledgement

This excerpt is the introduction to Margaret Gerner's book, *For Bereaved Grandparents*, published in 1990 by Centering Corporation, Omaha, Nebraska (ISBN #1-56123-002-2). It is reprinted with permission.

About the Author

Margaret Gerner is a bereaved parent and grandparent. In 1979, she founded the St. Louis Chapter of The Compassionate Friends. She continues to be active with Bereaved Parents of the USA. She holds a Master's Degree in Social Work and is a Certified Grief Counselor with the Chrysalis Center, a bereavement counseling and resource center for funeral directors located in St. Charles, Missouri.

President's Column

By Gordon Thornton

In October, I had the opportunity to visit three of our ADEC chapters: North Carolina, Central Florida and West Palm Beach. The chapter members were very gracious. As I listened at their board meetings, I felt right at home with fellow ADEC members.



Some of the time at the North Carolina chapter meeting was spent getting ready for their fall conference, a full day workshop presented by Jack LoCicero (an ADEC board member). Their president, Dean Carter, gave me the chapter's web address, www.ncadec.org. I was impressed by the web set up and the link to national ADEC. Central Florida's dinner board meeting and program was conducted by their president, Maureen Kramlinger. In fact, Maureen presented for approval two slight modifications I had suggested for their by-laws! After the West Palm Beach board meeting, their president, Linda Smith, introduced the educational program that described a children's grief camp.

The chapter members impressed me as dedicated and energetic. Although not all chapter members are members of national, the chapters are a strong force for furthering the ADEC mission and vision. It struck me that chapters face some of the same problems as national such as financial issues, recruitment of members and membership contribution to various committee tasks. Because the members expressed their desire for additional education in thana-

tology, I resurrected a list of volunteer speakers that Jack Jordan developed to share with the chapters. I believe that our support of chapters will strengthen our relationship.

These visits would not have been possible without the help of Jack LoCicero, Kathleen Moore and Joan Abess. And speaking of thanks, a very special one goes to Kevin Oltjenbruns, our retiring editor of *The Forum*. Unfortunately, there is no pension plan that accompanies the retirement. Kevin leaves *The Forum* a high quality publication and in the very capable hands of Louis Gamino.

In this issue of *The Forum*, Kathleen Foster-Morgan will share information on our October mid-year executive and board meetings and Catherine Johnson will discuss the latest developments in certification. The theme of this issue, Grandparent Grief, is very valuable for bereavement counselors. Ken Doka has written eloquently about disenfranchised grief. Grandparents have been referred to as forgotten grievers. This topic should help us validate their grief and make us aware of the broader family context that is impacted by a death.

Let me remind you of our annual conference, March 19-25, 2003, ***Dying, Death and Bereavement: The Circle of Life***. Howard Winokuer and Shannon Holt have organized an exceptional group of speakers. I hope to see you in Cincinnati! ■

Gordon Thornton

Minutes of Mid-Year ADEC Board Meeting

By Kathleen Foster-Morgan, Acting Secretary

President Gordon Thornton, and ADEC's executive committee (Kathleen Moore, Madeline Lambrecht, Donna Schuurman, Lois Sugarman, Kathleen Foster-Morgan), Sue Berry, and Helene Weston met in Hartford, Connecticut on October 11 and 12, 2002 to continue the "good work." This was the first executive mid-year board meeting in the history of ADEC. With the help of modern technology, 17 board members were linked by conference call to continue the work that supports the strategic plan.

Discussion was cohesive and attentive to issues that included certification, marketing, finance, membership, ADEC policy statements, ADEC letterhead and promotional materials, certification testing, conferences, nominations, supporting chapters, cookbooks and board leadership.

One prominent item concerned the best topic on which ADEC could issue a formal policy statement that may positively influence national debate. A motion was passed appointing the Director of Professional Affairs, Judith Stillion, to com-

mence drafting an initial policy statement on death education.

During discussion of 2003 and 2004 conference budgets, Gordon Thornton and Sue Berry informed board members of ADEC's affiliation with Conferon, a booking agent with the capacity to reap potential savings on ADEC conference expenses. Conferon was founded as a unified source for comprehensive meeting planning, site selection, hotel contract negotiating, registration, housing, and trade show sales/management. It is possible this affiliation may modify the resolution to rotate the annual meeting through the same tier of cities.

These are just a few of the items discussed.

Finally, despite a tight working schedule for the executive committee, there was time for relaxation and friendship at the home of Sue Berry. A special thanks is extended to Sue for the Hartford hospitality. The passion and sharing exchanged among executive committee members help build the foundation for our association. ■

ADEC Certification

ADEC is fortunate to have so many capable volunteers dedicated to the new certification project. Because of their expertise and commitment, the first pilot test was given November 9, 2002. Feedback from that test provided invaluable information not only about the exam, but also about the application process. The exam is now being fine-tuned to prepare for the May 17, 2003 test date.

To qualify to become **Certified in Thanatology: Death, Dying and Bereavement**, which is a foundation level certification, candidates must have:

- a Bachelor's degree and two years of experience in the field or a Master's degree (or higher) and one year of experience in the field;
- 60 contact hours of thanatology-related education;
- two letters of reference from a colleague or supervisor familiar with your work.

The cost is \$300 for ADEC members and \$425 for non-members.

There is a certification handbook and application available on the ADEC web site. The handbook explains the history and background of the test, provides a content outline of what will be covered on the exam, lists the references used to create the test (and thus, to prepare for it), and describes the requirements for recertification once certification expires. When an application and fee are received, applicants will be sent a self-study guide and copies of the journal articles used as supplemental references. (The major texts being used are *The Last Dance* by DeSpelder and Strickland, 6th edition, 2002 and *Death and Dying, Life and Living* by Corr, Nabe and Corr, 4th edition, 2003). Applicants are responsible for acquiring the location for the exam as well as someone to proctor it for them.

If you are not now ADEC certified and would like to be, you may access the handbook and application either on the web site (www.adec.org) or by accessing Fax On Demand at (860) 586-7533. ■

Certification and Grandfathering

Although the term "grandfathering" is outdated (and sexist), the concept is not. With current professional standards, the process is referred to as granting. Therefore, ADEC is offering a certification granting opportunity to recognize those who are established in the field and have many years of experience. Thus, for those who qualify and apply between January 1, 2003 and June 30, 2003, certification may be earned *without taking the exam*.

To qualify, applicants must have:

- a Bachelor's degree;
- at least 15 years of related experience in the field;
- 60 contact hours of thanatology-related education;
- two letters of recommendation from supervisors or colleagues familiar with the applicant's work.

If you would like an application, it may be accessed on the ADEC web site or by contacting Helene: hweston@adec.org or by accessing Fax On Demand at (860) 586-7533. Applications dated after June 30, 2003 will not be accepted. If you have additional questions, please contact Catherine Johnson: cathjohnson@earthlink.net or (360) 825-3548. ■

Editorial

By Louis A. Gamino

Ever stepped off the dock into a boat? The experience can be as safe and simple as going down a stair step if the boat is steadied. Or, it can be wildly uncertain and anxiety-provoking if the boat is rocking and untended.



Fortunately, my transition to Editor of *The Forum* has been more like the former than the latter.

Kevin Ann Oltjenbruns has completed her three-year tenure as Editor during which time she upgraded *The Forum* to a "journalette." Each issue now features several articles pertaining to a professional development theme aimed at promoting the continuing education of reader members. Of course, vital Association news and updates comprise the second major focus of this publication.

If "making a contribution" is defined as taking what you are given and transforming it into something even better, Kevin has certainly done that. On behalf of the entire Association, I wish to express gratitude to Kevin for a job done extremely well.

Also, after many years of indefatigable service to ADEC, LaVone Hazell is stepping down as coordinator of the Culture Concerns column, a regular feature of *The Forum*. Anyone who knows LaVone knows how much she has given to this organization and we all owe her a debt of appreciation.

I am pleased to introduce *The Forum's* new editorial team. Illene Noppe, Professor of Human Development, Psychology and Women's Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, is the incoming Associate Editor of *The Forum*. Illene will work with me over the next three years and assume Editorship of *The Forum* in 2006 when my term expires. Terrie Payne, a New York member who is Deputy Director of the Initiative to Improve Palliative Care for African-Americans (IIPCA) will assume leadership of diversity issues. Rev. Paul Metzler, Director of The Center for Living With Loss in Liverpool, New York, will continue to oversee books and media for the "What's New" feature.

Remember, *The Forum* is *your* ADEC newsletter. My vision of the Editor's role is to serve the membership by publishing stimulating articles on themes of professional interest as well as Association news. The professional development theme of this issue—Grandparent Grief—grew out of a paper session at the 2001 annual conference in Toronto. Please contact me with your ideas about possible future themes or articles.

I appreciate the confidence expressed by ADEC's Board of Directors in giving me this opportunity to edit *The Forum*. The boat is steady as I step into it and I plan to keep it that way. ■

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Hood College

By the Rev. Paul A. Metzler

Bucholz, Judie A. *Homicide Survivors. Misunderstood Grievors.* Amityville, NY: Baywood Publishing, Death, Value and Meaning Series, 2002. ISBN: 0-89503-268-6. Hardcover, 181 pages.

Drawing from her qualitative research with 13 homicide survivors, including her personal perspectives through losing her husband to a homicide, Bucholz sets out to understand "how homicide survivors define and process their experience of homicide bereavement." An "Introduction" chapter explores the range of grief theory. Then Part I, "Our Stories" details the experience of homicide survivors; Part II, "Reactions of Grieving Loved Ones" explores eleven themes she has identified in the homicide grievors; and Part III, "Summary and Suggestions for Comfort" offers guidance to those who seek to support and help homicide survivors. Three Appendices complete this helpful book.

Doka, Kenneth J., editor. *Disenfranchised Grief. New Directions, Challenges, and Strategies for Practice.* Champaign, IL: Research Press, 2002. ISBN: 0-87822-427-0. Softcover, 451 pages.

Doka and 23 contributors review and update the concept of "disenfranchised grief," first considered in Doka's 1989 book, *Disenfranchised Grief: Recognizing Hidden Sorrow*. This new volume embraces the additional conceptual developments which have enriched the concept and extended its usefulness in many unanticipated directions. Doka and his fellow authors have provided a remarkably helpful and thorough book underscoring the now crucial awareness of previously unseen grief.

Gamino, Louis A. and Ann Taylor Cooney. *When Your Baby Dies Through Miscarriage or Stillbirth.* Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2002. ISBN: 0-8066-4355-2. Softcover, 48 pages.

This brief book will bring comfort and insight to parents, siblings and grandparents of children lost to miscarriage, stillbirth or newborn death. Beginning with the acknowledgment that the "loss of a child hurts - terribly and deeply," Gamino and Cooney provide tender wisdom and conclude each chapter with useful "Points to Remember."

Magnussen, Christine Grace. *On Wings Of A Dove. Harp Music to Soothe the Soul.* Holistic Harmony (P.O. Box 560, Phoenix, OR. 97535), 2002. ISBN: 83707 39672. Compact Disk.

Magnussen, a medical social worker and harpist, believes that music can soothe, heal and strengthen people to transcend the struggles and sorrows of life. Her CD offers nearly an hour of the beautiful sound of a 31-Blevins folk harp as she shares 16 arrangements, ranging from contemporary to 12th century French compositions. She often performs for the infirm, the elderly and at risk youth, all of whom as well as others, may deeply value this CD.

Pickard, Cindy. *Turning Toward the Morning.* Rites of Passage (Box 226, Vanderpool, TX 78885), 2002. Videotape.

This video is focused on the experience of bereaved parents and will be useful in support groups, as well as educational settings. Music, text, and photographs of real stories make this an outstanding visual presentation of the profound depths of parental bereavement. It includes death from illness, accident and suicide, presenting the resiliency of "ordinary" grievors.

Straub, Sandra Helene. *Death 101. A Workbook for Educating and Healing.* Amityville, NY: Baywood Publishing, 2002. ISBN: 0-89503-274-0. Softcover, 258 pages.

Intended to complement academic and theoretical materials regarding dying, death and bereavement, Straub has compiled a wonderfully varied workbook of written exercises, poems, reflections and sharing from those who have journeyed on the path of loss and grief. The inclusion of cultural, ethical and legal issues assures this workbook will be useful to a wide audience. It concludes with an extended list of organizations, toll-free numbers, web sites, journals and newsletters, films and audio-visuals and bibliographic references.

"What's New" is a listing of educational materials written or produced by ADEC members. Each listing is run once and is intended to showcase contributions of our membership to the field of death, dying, and bereavement. Send an actual copy (not just an announcement) of recent materials (2000 to present) to: The Rev. Paul A. Metzler, D.Min., Director, The Center for Living With Loss, Hospice of Central New York, 990 Seventh North Street, Liverpool, New York 13088-6148; (315) 634-1100; (315) 634-1118 fax; metzler@hospicecny.org ■

WANTED!

Who:

ADEC members wanted for session conveners

What:

Session Conveners

- Introduce speakers
- Distribute and collect session evaluations
- Inform speakers when end of session is approaching
- Return session evaluations when session is over

When:

Friday, March 21

11:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.; 4:00 p.m.-5:30 p.m.

Saturday, March 22

2:45 p.m.-4:15 p.m.; 4:45 p.m.-6:15 p.m.

Sunday, March 23

9:00 a.m.-10:30 a.m.; 11:00 a.m.-12:30 p.m.

Where:

ADEC 25th Annual Conference

March 19-23, 2003

Cincinnati, OH

Contact

Lisa Serfass at laserfass@yahoo.com

or

Cindy Herzog at chertzog@frostburg.edu

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2003 Conference Update Cincinnati, OH • March 19-23, 2003

Come Early or Stay Late – Cincinnati Will Be the Place to Be

The 25th Annual ADEC conference that will be held in Cincinnati, March 19-23, 2003 will not only provide you with an opportunity to experience the arts, network with your professional family, and expand your knowledge base with programs from many of the leaders in the field of dying, death, and bereavement, it will also provide you with a chance to eat good food, shop for bargains, and visit the Queen City of Ohio!

The following list of places and events shows just a few of the opportunities Cincinnati and the surrounding region has to offer participants coming to the conference. Consider building time into your schedule to bring the family and take advantage of this wonderful opportunity to experience the natural beauty available in this historic river community in southwestern Ohio.

A Night at the ADEC Cafe **Friday, March 21, 8:00 pm – 11:00 pm**

Join us for a night of celebration! The evening will provide an opportunity for us to entertain and laugh at ourselves. If you dance, sing, tell jokes or have any other talent, hidden or not, we want you. Please contact Dan Fasko Jr., Ph.D., Professor of Educational Psychology, Chair, Educational Foundations & Inquiry, 550 Education Bldg, Bowling Green State University Bowling Green, OH 43403-0251, (419) 372-9184; e-mail: dfasko@bgnet.bgsu.edu. Food will be available as well as a cash bar. Join us for this night of fun and relaxation. Price for the evening is only \$10.

Optional Activities

- Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park, Marx Theatre
- Cincinnati Art Museum
- Cincinnati Museum Center at Union Terminal
- Cincinnati in Motion
- Ensemble Theatre of Cincinnati
- Cincinnati Zoo and Botanical Gardens



**Dying, Death &
Bereavement**
The circle of life

We look forward to seeing you in Cincinnati!