



## Lost in Translation Andy McNiel



Words can never fully define grief. That is because grief is an experience and is not completely comprehended until it is lived. Grief quite often gets “lost in translation” when we attempt to share with others exactly what grief is like. For this reason grief can be a lonely journey, even when others are around. We fear bringing up our pain or even talking about it because we really

do not know what to say or we reason that others must be tired of hearing us whine anyway.

Although it can be difficult to share what grief is like to others, it is still worthwhile. No, everyone will not want to be invited along and you will be able to determine who to invite. Certainly there will be those who avoid you or change the subject or even give poor advice, but there will also be those who listen and learn. New friendships can be formed and old ones rekindled when we attempt to share what grief is like with others, no matter how difficult that might be. One way we can share what grief is like is to relate our grief to something others can understand by using similes and metaphors.

“No one ever told me that grief felt so much like fear.” C.S. Lewis penned these words in his personal memoir, *A Grief Observed*, which he published under the pseudonym N.W. Clark following his wife’s death. C.S. Lewis uses this simile to compare grief to the experience of fear. I can just imagine that Mr. Lewis was feeling the intense feelings of grief and wanted to put this experience into words that others could understand. Perhaps after some thought, he was able to pen these words and capture some of the experience of grief in this simple association. For although those not encountering the death of a loved one cannot fully understand grief, they can relate to the feeling of being afraid, a universal experience we all share.

“Grief is a bad dream. One you cannot wake up from no matter how hard you fight.” “Grief is like being at the bottom of the ocean, you are all alone.” “Grief feels like an elephant standing on your chest.” “Grief is a lonely journey. No one can walk the road for you.”

These are just some of the metaphors and similes I have heard from bereaved people over the years. Relating our grief to something others can understand is one way we can attempt to capture some of the images that make up our grief. These are communication tools we can use to bring others along with us as we walk the road of grief. How would you describe your grief? What metaphors or similes can you think of that would help others understand you?

If you are grieving and do not feel understood by those significant in your life, take heart that you are not alone in the fact that you are misunderstood. Grief is hard to explain to someone who is not living our same reality. Make attempts to share insights to your family and friends using metaphors and similes that might increase their understanding, but also recognize that grief must be lived to be fully understood. It is difficult to hold someone accountable to understand what you are going through when most of the time words fall short of describing your situation. Though it is frustrating at times, continue to reach out to your family and friends. Take them up on the help they offer and hold fast to their friendship; most of the time you will be grateful you did.

If you are someone who has not had a significant loss and you are trying to be a friend to someone in grief, offer your presence, love and patience. Quite often our advice is not well received, because we are attempting to advise someone about a situation for which we have no context. Instead, listen to their descriptions and attempt to understand what they are saying to gain better insight. Do not give up on them and do not distance yourself just because you do not understand them or do not know what to say. On the contrary, spend time with your friend and you will discover opportunities to encourage them, to lift them up and to hold fast for them as they experience the indescribable profundity we call grief.

No one ever told  
me that grief felt  
so much like fear.  
C.S. Lewis

# Time Heals All Wounds? Robert Smith



We've all heard it. From our first broken heart, we have been told this one truth of the universe. "Don't worry, time heals all wounds." I am sure each of you, no matter where you are on your grief journey, has already been told this same thing. It is therefore with great reluctance that I must bring you

bad news... Time heals nothing. Don't get me wrong, Time is of utmost importance. Time is necessary in all healing, the problem is Time is not sufficient. The way it has always been told, if I have a broken heart, all I must do in order to get better is just wait. If I wait long enough, something magical will happen and Time will take away all of my sadness. How many of you have been waiting?

Time is necessary, but not sufficient. Let me give you an example of this. I live about 30 minutes from The Amelia Center. Imagine one afternoon I get off work and walk to my car. I get in, crank the engine, turn on the radio, and just sit there for 30 minutes with out ever putting the car in gear. Am I home? NO... I'm sitting in the parking lot at work. Why? I put in the required time. What I did not do during that time is put in the required

work. Time and work go hand in hand. Work without time is just as useless. I can not drive my car fast enough to be home in 10 minutes. The law says I can not. That's the law of physics by the way, not the criminal code! Grief is the same way. No matter how hard you work at grief, it does not go away immediately. It takes time.

So, what does heal wounds? Time and Work. But how do you work at grief? There are many correct answers to this question. Talking to people you trust, reading books, writing in a journal, actively seeking new experiences in life, remembering the person who has died and honoring their life, and maybe even by seeing a counselor. As a counselor, I encourage all of my clients to work on accomplishing William Worden's *Four Tasks of Mourning*. If you do not know what these are, ask your counselor to teach them to you. My point is... you must make good choices in order to heal and one of those choices must be to work everyday at getting better. No one can do it for you and waiting on Time will only leave you older and still hurting. You and you alone are responsible for making the decision to work at getting better.

**I have learned two lessons in my life: first, there are no sufficient literary, psychological, or historical answers to human tragedy, only moral ones. Second, just as despair can come to one another only from other human beings, hope, too, can be given to one only by other human beings.**  
-Elie Wiesel

**I believe that imagination is stronger than knowledge -- myth is more potent than history -- dreams are more powerful than facts -- hope always triumphs over experience -- laughter is the cure for grief -- love is stronger than death.** -Robert Fulghum

# The Gap

By Michael Crelinsten TCF, Victoria, British Columbia

Our daughter, Alexis, died six months ago, at the age of nine. A rare medical anomaly, in a heart-rending wrench of our innermost spirit, stole her from us in barely more than a moment. Recently, I was at the beach near our home with what remains of my soul – my son, Ethan. Our new puppy romped with us. Beautiful weather, fresh salt air, gentle clear water and sea lions barking in the distance. Perfect. Walking back, I saw a sharp, rusted metal rod and thought to get it out of the way. As I tossed it aside, it caught my thumb and cut me. Perfect. Every moment of peace we have, cuts. Everything that is, hones what is not.

The gap between those who have lost children and those who have not is profoundly difficult to bridge. No one, whose children are well and intact can be expected to understand what parents who have lost children have absorbed, what they bear. Our daughter now comes to us through every blade of grass, every crack in the sidewalk, every bowl of breakfast cereal, every kid on a scooter. We seek contact with her atoms – her hairbrush, her toothbrush, her clothing. We reach for what was integrally woven into the fabric of our lives, now torn and shredded. What we had wanted, when she so suddenly took ill, was for her to be treated. We wanted her to be annoyed that her head had been shaved for surgery. We would have shaved ours and then watched her smile as we recovered together, whatever the nature of that recovery. “Recover” is no longer a part of our vocabulary. Now we simply walk through the noise and debris of our personal ground zero.

A black hole has been blown through our souls and, indeed, it often does not allow the light to escape. It is a difficult place. For us to enter there is to be cut deeply, and torn anew, each time we go there, by the jagged edges of our loss. Yet we return, again and again, for that is where she now resides. This will be so for years to come and it will change us, profoundly. At some point in the distant future the edges of that hole will have tempered and softened but the empty space will remain – a life sentence. It is not unlike a dog who, suddenly hit by a car, survives. The impact is devastating and leaves the animal in shock, confusion, and despair. In time the animal recovers adequately to spend the remainder of its life on three legs. It is not that he is unable, eventually, to function or even to laugh and play. The reality, however, is that on three legs from here on, every step he takes, every action, virtually every breath reminds him of what he has lost. We are that animal.

Our community of friends will change through this. There is no avoiding it. We grieve for our daughter, in part, through talking about her and our feelings for having lost her. Some go there with us, others cannot and, through their denial add a further measure, however unwittingly, to an already heavy burden. This was not a sprained ankle or major surgery that we suffered. Assuming that we may be feeling “better” six months later is simply “to not get it.” The excruciating and isolating reality that bereaved parents feel is hermetically sealed from the nature of any other human experience. Thus it is a trap – those whose compassion and insight we most need

are those for whom we abhor the experience that would allow them that sensitivity and capacity. And, yet, somehow, there are those, each in their own fashion, who have found a way to reach us and stay, to our immeasurable comfort. They have understood, again each in their own way, that Alexis remains our daughter through our memory of her. Her memory is sustained through speaking about her and our feelings about her death. Deny her life and you have no place in ours. That’s the equation. How different people have responded to our loss, or not, transcends a range of attitudes and personal histories. It is teaching us much about human capacity and experience, albeit at a searing price. Parents’ memories of a lost child sustain that life. It should be the other way around.

We recognize that we have removed to an emotional place where it is often very difficult to reach us. Our attempts to be normal are painful and the day to day carries a silent, screaming anguish that accompanies us, sometimes from moment to moment. Were we to give it its own voice we fear we would become truly unreachable, and so we remain “strong” for a host of reasons even as the strength saps our energy and drains our will. Were we to act out our true feelings we would be impossible to be with. We resent having to act normal, yet we dare not do otherwise. People who understand this dynamic are our gold standard. Working our way through this over the years will change us as does every experience – and extreme experience changes one extremely. We know we will have recovered when, as we read, it is not longer so painful to be normal. We do not know who we will be at that point or who will still be with us.

There will come a time, quite some number of years down the road, when the balance between the desperate awareness of what we have lost when our daughter died will be somewhat balanced by the warm and joyful memories of what we had with her when she lived. I neither long for nor cringe from that time. It will simply come. We will recognize it – though now it is beyond us.

So, yes, our beloved daughter is gone – a light in our lives gone out leaving blackness for us, left behind, to stumble through. And, while we understand and deeply feel the meaning of our phrase “Now we are lit by her only from within,” we hope, desperately, that she is wherever the light is. We are trying to understand what this means, as we seek our own way, for the remainder of our lives, to some kind of light. We love our son and are trying to breathe.

We have read that the gap is so difficult that, often, bereaved parents must attempt to reach out to friends and relatives or risk losing them. This is our attempt. For those untarnished by such events, who wish to know in some way what they, thankfully, do not know, read this. It may provide a window that is helpful for both sides of the gap.

# Facilitating Healing in the “Happy Times” Brendt Blanks



Children’s grief can be expressed in many different ways. Taking the definition of grief as being “a natural reaction to loss” in one’s life, one could conclude that these natural reactions could include all sorts of emotions, behaviors, and thoughts. So then, what happens when the reaction is a smile; like when the child’s face lights up when he sees the playground where he and his daddy used to play before his daddy died? Do you see

this as a grief reaction...as their “grief?” Is it on the same scale of importance to you as when your child is crying? Do these moments of memory connections get your child the same amount of attention as their crying times?

At any age, after someone dies, one tries to figure out how the deceased loved one will continue to be connected with them, in a new and different type of relationship. Not being able to see that person physically concludes that this new relationship with their loved one is more emotionally and cognitively focused. So, as a child is grieving, they are constantly trying to figure out what this means in their life and how this person remains connected to them forever. I am not saying that they will ever forget the person, but what does this relationship look like now? Part of this then, is encouraging these moments where a child is “energized” by the memory of their loved one.



How can we facilitate healing during those times when they become alert, and glowing, and excited? It is important that we are supportive and nurturing during the times when they are truly connecting with the person who died in their life and developing this new relationship.

Do we encourage them to share more with us? Do we ask them to show us pictures and tell the stories about them? Do we turn up the music when they hear a song that lights up their face because it reminds them of their loved one or dance to the song with them? Or are these moments not named and just another part of the day? Then, later on that night when the child punches his pillow and yells out in anger, then do we sit down and focus on their grief? Both ends of this spectrum need attention; not just the times when things seem “heavy” on the child. But even more so when their grief is “lightened”, and it appears in the form of a laugh as they remember a joke their dad used to tell.

Be encouraged that a child’s grief does not have to be limited to their tears, anger, or physical outbursts, but that grief encompasses the child’s ability to react positively to the memory and legacy that the person has forever imprinted on their heart. The next time your child or a child you know becomes increasingly “energized” by the memory of their loved one, pour your attention into that moment, just as you would if they were crying.

## Survive One Hour at a Time

I distinctly remember being given sound advice from my younger sister, Debbie, who is a nurse practitioner and has worked with terminally ill cancer patients that were children. She told me to get through one hour at a time. As the first day wore on, I recall realizing that I somehow managed to cope with just one hour at a time, because time needed to be experienced through smaller increments, whereas it seemed unbearably impossible to try to go on living without my son for weeks, months or years at a time. As each hour passed, I began to feel comforted that I had survived one hour without going completely mad.

Each hour, I began to realize that I could actually go to the bathroom alone, refill my own coffee cup, eat a few bites of food placed before me, and even walk through one room of my house without falling apart. The pain that succumbs you is so overwhelming that everything that has to do with survival has to be broken down into tiny, manageable increments. Before you know it, a whole day has gone by and you have managed to survive.

Article by Roe Ziccarello of Sound Feelings Publishing, Tarzana, California.  
[http://www.soundfeelings.com/free/grief\\_steps.htm](http://www.soundfeelings.com/free/grief_steps.htm)

# Bad Luck, Good Luck, Who's to Say?

An elderly Chinese peasant farmer had a horse that he loved very much and depended on for almost everything. In the spring when it was time to plant, the farmer would hitch a plow to the horse and break the land. When the fall harvest would come in, the farmer would hitch the horse to a wagon and take his produce to the market to sell. Whenever the farmer had a distance to travel, he would put a saddle on the horse and ride it. Every day in one way or another, this beloved horse was a big and dramatic part of the farmer's life.

Then one afternoon a bee stung the horse on its neck; the horse went into a panic and ran away. The farmer ran after the horse as it ran off into the hills, but, of course, the farmer couldn't catch up with the frightened animal. So at sunset, the farmer had to trudge back home and tell his wife that his beloved horse had run away.

Now, they lived in a small provincial village; and so, quickly the word spread that the farmer had lost his horse. For the next several days, whenever the farmer met any of his neighbors, they would say, "Sure sorry to hear about your bad luck in losing your horse," and he would just shrug his shoulders and say, "Bad luck, good luck, who's to say?"

Well, lo and behold, six days later his horse returned from the mountains with five wild horses that it had met. The farmer was able to corral all six of the horses and, of course, word spread quickly throughout the village. For the next several days, whenever he met anybody, they say, "Sure glad to hear about your good luck getting all those horses." The farmer would just shrug his shoulders and respond, "Good luck, bad luck, who's to say?"

The farmer's son was excited about their new horses. He quickly began to try to break them so that his family could sell them for a big profit. But one of the horses bucked him off, and the son's leg was broken in three places. Word spread through the little village; and so for the next several days, they would say, "Sure sorry to hear about your bad luck, your boy getting hurt." Again, the farmer would just shrug his shoulders and respond, "Bad luck, good luck; who's to say?"

Two weeks later, a war broke out between the city states of interior China. The army came through conscripting every able-bodied male under the age of fifty to go and fight, and, of course, the farmer's son would have been in that category had the accident not happened. Because he had a broken leg, he didn't have to go, and that turned out to be very fortuitous because every villager who was conscripted wound up being killed in the war. And the old farmer said, "Good luck, bad luck, who's to say?"

I like that story so much because it reminds us that there are so many things we do not know. There are so many times in life when God can take something that seems so bad and, by the miracle of God's grace, turn it into something good. The story reminds us that sometimes what looks like our worst day can turn out to be our best day. ~ author unknown

## Memorial and Honoraria Gifts

Gifts made in honor or memory of a loved one are a special way to celebrate someone while making a tangible difference in the lives of others. All donations help support the counseling services at The Amelia Center.

The deadline for inclusion in Tears to Hope is the 12th of the month prior to publication. Please remember that the deadlines for future editions will be earlier due to the new bi-monthly format.

### DEADLINES

Dec 12th ..... Jan/Feb Edition  
Feb 12th ..... Mar/Apr Edition  
April 12th ..... May/Jun Edition  
June 12th ..... July/Aug Edition  
Aug 12th ..... Sept/Oct Edition  
Oct 12th ..... Nov/Dec Edition

A suggested minimum donation is \$10 per honoree.

# Hopelines

Sometimes you just need to talk with someone who knows what grief feels like...

**Mary Bailey**, brother, 46, illness; daughter, auto accident **560-0419\***

**Mary Ellen Capps**, son, accidental overdose **822-1162**

**Anita Colburn**, daughter, seizure disorder/accident **256-236-9747**

**Millie Gillespie**, daughter, auto accident **841-7783**

**Pam & David Hagan**, daughter, 18, auto accident **566-4026\* or 664-8008\***

**Carolyn Hudson**, daughter, 15, suicide **991-9186**

**Debbie Johnson**, son, 17, accident **664-0822\***

**Terry Johnson**, wife, cancer **664-0822\***

**Sandra Essex**, daughter, murdered, **426-1657\***

**Cynthia Joyner**, son, murdered, **682-8837\***

**Brenda Parker**, son, 32, AIDS **822-7150**

**Mary Sahawneh**, son, 16, shot **853-6769\***

**Eileen Klyce**, miscarriage; son, accidental alcohol overdose; son, drowning; daughter, died after a heart transplant **967-2374**

\* Available Evenings

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## WHEN YOU SEE A BUTTERFLY

By: Brytani Russell  
Tampa, FL

When you see a butterfly  
**Think of me.**

When you see a shadow  
Don't be afraid.

When you see a light,  
Think of good things.

But when you see a butterfly  
**Think of me.**

When you see a cloud,  
Don't be afraid to try and grab it.

When you see a raindrop,  
Open your mouth and let it fall in.

When you see a hand touch you,  
Don't jump away.

When you get all tingly,  
Let the feeling last.

When you feel loved  
Cherish it forever.

But when you see a butterfly,  
**Think of me.**

When you feel like no one is there,  
Make sure you know I am.

When you feel like I am gone forever,  
Make sure you feel like I am there.

When you think you have grieved too much,  
I know there is always another tear,

**Think of me.**

For you know I am always with you,  
in every way, shape and form.

I am always there to protect you,  
Even through dangerous storms.

Know that I am right behind you,  
In whatever fate decides to put you through.

For I may be gone,  
But I am around,

So when you see a butterfly,  
**Know I am always there.**

Note: A 15 year old Brytani Russell wrote the above  
for her grandmother after the death  
of Brytani's mother, her grandmother's daughter.

From <http://www.bereavedparentsusa.org>

# *Gifts to Remember and Honor Those We Love*

## *Gifts in Memory of*

### **JON BELCHER**

Tina Belcher, his mother

### **ZACH CAREY**

Gary and Margaret Brown  
Ruth and Mike Flemming

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Kay LeCroy

### **LARRY CROWDER**

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Lynn Gerald

Terry Hooks

Wayne and Ella Howell and Family

UAB Lung Health Center

### **BRANDON GIBSON**

Kay LeCroy, his mother

### **ERIC LAWSON**

Leigh Ward

### **ROBIN ELLEN MAZER, on her February 23rd birthday**

Lynette and J. B. Mazer

### **KENNY MCKEE**

Kay LeCroy

### **NATHAN MIMS**

B. E. and Eloise Mims

### **ELEANOR SHARRON**

Kay LeCroy, her daughter

### **BRIAN FRANCIS NANOS, for his April 4th birthday**

Gerald and Connie Nanos, his parents

### **BRYANT SHEPPARD**

Terry and Sandy Stephens

## *Gifts in Honor of*

### **ANDY MCNIEL**

Donna Stone

## *Contributions*

### **THELMA BERNSTEIN**

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### **MELISSA ROGERS**

### **UNITED WAY OF ETOWAH COUNTY**



**THE  
COMPASSIONATE  
FRIENDS**

## **Support Group Meetings**

The Compassionate Friends Support Group is open to any parent grieving the loss of a child. The group meets for a light meal before the group (5:45-6:30p.m.) after which the group meets from 6:30-8:00p.m. **Meetings are held on the 2nd and 4th Mondays of each month at The Amelia Center.**

Upcoming meeting dates:

March 9th & 23rd

April 13th & 27th

[www.thecompassionatefriends.org](http://www.thecompassionatefriends.org)

## Why We Do What We Do

*I am so grateful for the support of  
The Amelia Center. I would not be  
where I am today had I not had their  
help after my father died when I was 14.  
~ A client who is now 22 years old*

The Amelia Center is pleased  
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