



Choose To Adapt Andy McNiel



In his book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor Frankl recounts his time in Nazi concentration camps in Germany. As a prisoner in these death camps, he witnessed many terrible atrocities. Yet even in these tragic surroundings, he also witnessed things that had a positive impact on his outlook in life; most notably, the human ability to choose to adapt to our surroundings in order to survive

even the most difficult circumstances. Of this he wrote, "When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves." He taught that one of the key ingredients to survival is the ability to choose your own attitude even when you have little to no control of your circumstances. He believed that though you are facing a circumstance you cannot change, you can adapt by choosing an attitude that produces strength, resolve and hope while facing unavoidable suffering.

Although he observed that we have the ability to "push forward" while under great duress, he also observed that not everyone tapped into that capacity. There were some who chose not to survive. Dr. Frankl recounts that there were those in the death camps who simply "gave up". They quit eating and fell into a deep depression. They made themselves more susceptible to sickness and starvation and indeed they did not survive. While it is certainly true that many, who fought hard to survive, did not survive, because of the cruelty of their captives, it was also true that choosing an attitude of hope, and refusing to "give up" were necessary if one was going to have the chance of survival.

Examples of this ability to adapt are evident even in the animal kingdom. I read a National Geographic report recently about cave-dwelling creatures, blind salamanders, and eyeless spiders and fish. Without the presence of light, low oxygen levels and little to no food, they have had to adapt to their challenging surroundings. Who knows how these creatures ever found their way into these underground dwellings in the first place, but what is known is that some of the creatures have survived and adapted well to their surroundings. Over time they have developed super-slow metabolisms, which enable them to require less food and less oxygen. This has also increased the length of their lives, because they live

slowly, they live longer. Somehow these creatures found the ability to survive in conditions that seem incapable of sustaining life; yet survive, they have.

What Dr. Frankl's example and the example of these cave-dwelling creatures demonstrate is that the ability to adapt is an important element in our survival. Life is certainly unpredictable and will test us to our limit, but we still possess the ability to revise our perceptions and acclimate to our new situation. What is also evident in these examples is that survival quite often is a choice. We must insist that our circumstances not have free reign in our lives and find the resolve to continue living, hoping and connecting with others no matter how dire our circumstances might be.

When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.
— Dr. Viktor Frankl

Now, certainly difficulty in life does not come without a price. Dr. Frankl's entire family, with the exception of one sister died in the death camps. This was a heavy blow to Dr. Frankl and so many others who survived, to be sure. Quite often adapting to something new means changing some things about ourselves and accepting some things about our life that we may not want to accept. Dr. Frankl had to learn to adapt to life without so many of his beloved family members. Yet, even these circumstances did not destroy his resolve. He had to answer an important question, "Do I quit because of this?" Even those cave-dwelling creatures had to give up the use of their eyes, as well as regular meals as often as they had been used to, but for all they lost, they found a way to adapt and live.

Adapting is not easy. Grief after the death of a loved one can be overwhelming and exhausting. It can seem hopeless at times and rob us of our joy, even our motivation. Yet, we must find the resolve to press forward; the self-determination to keep living even though we feel like giving up and quitting. We must make the choice to change ourselves; to allow ourselves to adapt to life in the midst of grief. We must hold onto hope that joy, happiness, purpose and life are still possible for us, even though we are walking in the shadow of loss.



I was recently working with a young man about 12 years of age. He had recently lost his grandfather as a result of a heart attack. Now this was not just a grandfather. As is common in today's society, the grandfather was actually fulfilling the role of

father. They had a very special bond and my client was truly grieving the loss. We had worked on several different issues and were just playing in the sandbox when I began asking him about school. He told me his favorite subject was science and math. I asked him what he was studying in science and he told me he was learning about magnets. I asked him what it was about a magnet that interested him. He told me that he found it strange that magnets can pull towards each other or push each other away, depending on how the magnets were aligned. I asked him "what" does the pushing and pulling. He said something invisible. I commented how amazing it is that forces we cannot see can move or influence the objects around us. I then asked him if it were possible that his grandfa-

ther could still be a moving influence on him, even though he could no longer see him. His eyes seemed to sparkle as he began to realize that his grandfather was still able to provide a little push or pull in the right directions, even though his physical presence was no longer there.

As we progress on our grief journeys, it is important for each of us to remember that the loved ones in our life are still able to give us the push or pull in the right direction we may need. The critical factor is our alignment. Are we in a position to receive the gentle push or pull we need? Often times the invisible forces surrounding us are quite subtle. It may take the form of our conscience telling us what we should do. It may take the form of past advice from our loved ones who are no longer here. It may simply be the "gut feeling" we sometimes get when we know our loved one is close. I believe that death ends a life, not a relationship. I encourage each of you to keep those relationships open, even if it means putting our faith in things that can no longer be seen.

*When you are sorrowful look again in your heart,
and you shall see that in truth you are weeping
for that which has been your delight. -Kahlil Gibran*

*We must embrace pain and burn it as fuel for our journey.
- Kenji Miyazawa*

Rodgers' Ramblings

Brian Rodgers

This past Friday, we hosted our 4th Annual Spring Bereavement Workshop featuring educator Ted Bowman. The presentation was well-received and provided many wonderful visual images and concepts that will benefit the grieving children and families that attendees work with in their diverse settings.

I am a very visual learner and was particularly impressed with the image to the right that is adapted from McCormick's [Grieving: A Beginner's Guide](#). During intake sessions at The Amelia Center, I am often confronted with individuals whose pain is very fresh and raw and who are looking for ways to minimize this grief. Part of the challenge of the grief journey is coming to the realization that everything in our world is now different and we must re-learn how to interact with this almost foreign place. Part of this re-learning is coming to the realization that the grief itself does not actually shrink, but that we adapt our lives to walking with it amongst us. That is not to say that the pain does not decrease and become less acute. It is simply that until we are far enough down the road from that terrible time in our life, that we are unable to see the progress we have made and the potential for joy and happiness ahead of us- in spite of the grief being our companion on the journey.

So the challenge becomes to learn to grow our world and allow ourselves to experience the joys and pains that come with this. For it is through growing our world that the grief appears smaller. It relatively becomes a smaller part of our life, allowing the joy and happiness to surround the pain and soften the memories of that dark time. I think that I



From: [Grieving: A Beginner's Guide](#) (2006) Jerusha Hull McCormick

like this image because it validates the challenges I pose to my clients in session. These challenges include forcing themselves to surround themselves with joy at times, even when the inclination is to isolate one's self; to reach out, even in the pain, to help others and through service learn that their lives still have meaning and purpose, even if it is hard to see through the darkness; to get out of the house and nurture all parts of who they are- physically, mentally, socially, and spiritually.

For it is through challenging ourselves that our worlds grow and at the same time our grief appears smaller. Until we can come to terms with accepting this reality that our grief will not shrink, but rather our world will grow, we face the danger of experiencing frustration and despair on the journey toward healing. It is almost like we are trying to chip away at an impenetrable wall.

I hope that you find this image as hope-filled as I did and that you, too, might challenge yourself to grow your world today.

A Mother's Hope

Betty Lineberger

Bereaved Mother, Ocala, FL

When my son died I hoped it was a mistake. It was not.

I hoped it was a dream. It was not.

Before my son died, I hoped for enough time in that day to clean my house, provide my family with clean laundry, taxi service and healthy meals. I loved dinner time with my family. After my son died, I did not know what day it was, cleaning our home or doing laundry were things I no longer thought of. I did not cook. I did not shop for food. I did not eat.

I hoped he would come back. He did not.

I hoped I would gain understanding. I did not.

I could not understand how I could wake up on a perfectly normal morning and my son was gone from his room, gone from our home and gone from our lives.

I hoped for acceptance. I found none.

I hoped those around me would understand me. They did not.

How could my beautiful, vibrant, healthy son be gone?

I hoped for peace. I had none.

I hoped for sleep. I had none.

I hoped for courage to resume my daily life. My life was out of my control. The only thing I was sure of in the early days of my grief was that I knew my life would never be the same again. I hoped this empty feeling would go away. It did not.

I hoped that some day my family would be normal again. We were not.

I hoped I could stop looking for our son in every young man I saw that was tall, slim and had sandy colored curly hair. I could not.

I hoped I could become the parent to my surviving children that I knew they deserved. I could not.

I knew how much they were hurting but I could not help myself and I could not help my children. My younger son needed my comfort. My daughter, expecting her own child needed my comfort.

I was their mother but there was no comfort in me to give.

I hoped I could be a wife to my husband. I could not.

I never hoped for laughter. How could I laugh when my son was dead?

I hoped the feelings that consumed my every waking moment would somehow change so I did not feel as though I could never again be in a public place without

crying.

At 6 months after my son died, I hoped for a reprieve. I no longer could stand the pain and I saw my doctor. I knew he must have an answer to my question, "how long will I feel like this". He did not.

I had begun attending Bereaved Parents meetings and hardly spoke a word at the first meeting. I could not stop talking at the second meeting. I had found the glimmer of hope that I had been searching for. I hoped this all consuming grief would never again happen to my family. But it did! When my daughter-in-law was 6 months pregnant, my son told me their baby had died. How I grieved for my son. I knew what he was feeling. I hoped to be able to help him and his wife. I could not.

I then realized that all of the things I had hoped for had begun to come about but had taken a lot of time. I hoped my son and his wife could hold on long enough for time to help and heal. They have.

When my son died, I never hoped for joy. I could not imagine joy as part of our lives ever again, but there is joy.

When my son was a baby, a toddler, a young child, a teenager and a young man, I watched over him. I thought I would watch over him for my entire life. I was wrong. I hoped with all my heart that he is watching over me.

I now have the understanding I hoped for. I have peace. I finally sleep. I find joy every time I see a tall, slim young man with sandy colored curly hair. I do not cry as often.

So there is hope. We all have a future; we have memories. No matter how long our children were part of our lives, we have memories. The first time I realized that joy would one day be part of my life was the day I remembered a trick my son played on his little brother. He gave him a glass of buttermilk instead of regular milk and pretended it was a mistake. We have laughed so many times about this little story. I can still see the twinkle in his eye. I can hear my son and daughter as he made up names for her to tease her. Oh, how he loved to laugh. I remember the look on his face when I discovered the snake he put in my garden terrarium.

I know the joy I feel every time I think of my son, share a memory with someone or look at pictures of him will never change.

My hope as a Mother is that we all will find peace and cherish the joy our children have brought to our lives.

Reprinted from Bereaved Parents USA

Articles and Poems

http://www.bereavedparentsusa.org/images/Articles/A_Mothers_Hope.pdf

Helping a Father Through Father's Day

Father's Day has become a traditional holiday celebrated by many with gifts, cards, family gatherings, and perhaps even a special dinner out just for daddy. Stores begin advertising for Father's Day weeks in advance of the actual holiday. The scenes in advertisements and cards always depict a loving father with a child snuggled close to that special man called daddy.

Many fathers, however, have experienced the devastation of losing a child, and there seems to be an almost non-existent recognition of the fact that fathers suffer from feelings of lost dreams, loneliness, failure, and loss of identity when a child has died. Very rarely are comments of support made to the father in a family when a child has died. For some reason, our society seems to be more in tune to the feelings of the pain a mother experiences during child loss. Fathers are somehow expected to be stronger emotionally, and they are expected to heal much sooner.

What can be done to show support on Father's Day to a father who has experienced the deep pain of losing a child? Probably the most appreciated gesture of support would be to acknowledge the fact that the father is still a father even though his child is no longer living on this earth. Refer to him as a father, and express your genuine sorrow for his loss. Fathers who have lost a child as early as miscarriage should certainly be included among the group of grieving fathers. Often, fathers of miscarried babies are never given any recognition of being a father.

Finding a Father's Day card specifically for fathers who have lost a child can be next to impossible. If you cannot find a card with an appropriate verse, choose a blank card and write your own message from the heart. "Sharing in your sorrow this Father's Day" or "Blessings to you this Father's Day as God watches over your heavenly angel" will show a tremendous amount of compassion and support to a father who is grieving the loss of a child on Father's Day.

Recognize the fact that fathers go through emotional upheavals during the grief of child loss. Fathers grieve differently than mothers, so they might not want a lot of special treatment on Father's Day. Men are generally less apt to talk about their feelings of hurt and loss than women, but those feelings are still there and need to be recognized. Father's Day without a child can be just as emotionally heart-breaking for a father as Mother's Day is for a mother without her child. We need to be sensitive to the needs of fathers, too!

Special holidays stir up many different emotions for fathers, and Father's Day is a particularly difficult holiday to go through following the loss of a child. With help and support from family and friends, a father can move forward in his grief. By letting a father know that he has not been forgotten on Father's Day, you will validate his identity as a father, and you will allow him the special privilege of once again being called that most cherished name of all—daddy.

Finally, find some way to validate the fact that a father is still a father even though his child is not living. Fathers are by nature "fixers" and the loss of a child is one loss that cannot be fixed. This fact is often very hard for a man to accept. By giving a card and a personal word on Father's Day, you will help validate to the father that he is still honored among that special group of men called fathers on Father's Day. Validation of fatherhood on Father's Day is one more step forward in this process we call grief.

Written by Clara Hinton | Jun 08, 2003

Clara Hinton is the author of "Silent Grief", <http://www.silentgrief.com>

Bereavement in the Digital Age...

Over the almost ten years that I have been at Teh Amelia Center, I have noticed how technological shifts in society have led to interesting new challenges for grieving family members. On one hand, the Internet has allowed many individuals access to helpful grief support information and access to numerous books that can be purchased on the subject. On the other, I have had clients struggle with challenges such as: what to do with the deceased digital assets- their Facebook and MySpace accounts, their voicemail messages that many companies force you to purge from your cell phones after a certain period, your answering machine messages from your loved one, your loved one's email accounts the pictures that you have on your cell phone that you wish you could easily have printed out for safekeeping. All of these open the ethical questions of should these be maintained or even read and accessed after a loss. Considering these new challenges, I thought I would ask you the readers of this support newsletter for your experiences. What have you found helpful? What challenges have you found- some mentioned, some not? If you have any experiences that you would like to share, please email me at brian.rodgers@chsys.org. I would love to use these for the development of a future newsletter article.

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***

*Available Evenings

Yes, I would like to make a financial commitment to supporting the mission of The Amelia Center!

Your Name: _____

Your Address: _____

Phone: _____

Email: _____

This gift is: ___ in honor of ___ in memory of

(Name)

If your gift is in honor/ memory, please indicate whom you would like informed.

Memorials need to be received by the 12th of the month prior to publication.

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

___ I wish to remain anonymous ___ I would like to receive more information on The Amelia Center

Mail contribution to The Amelia Center| 1513 Fourth Avenue South | Birmingham, AL 35233

**Credit Cards
Contributions are
Gladly Accepted and
Can Be Setup To Make
Monthly Contributions
To Increase the Impact
of Your Giving.
Call our offices to
make a donation
today!
(205) 251.3430**

Gifts to Remember and Honor Those We Love

Gifts in Memory of

JEFF BAXTER

Nina Strickland

JOEY BREWER

Marie Smitherman, his grandmother

DR. JIM DEARTH

Bao Luo and Liu Zhu

AMELIA ELLIOTT, for her April 18th birthday

Helen Letchman

Carol and Smitty Smith

JACK CHRISTOPHER MATHEWS

Eddie and Beth Mathews

Charlie, Mary Claire and Joseph

TROY PAULMENO, for his May 23rd birthday

Love, Poppy and Grandma (John and Jessie Paulmeno)

STEVIE GLASS

Donald and Mary Glass

KENDRA HAUER

Kristi Beaird

MRS. HERB IRISH

Dan and Gay Caldwell

CHLOE MADISON

Skin Pathology Associates

NATHAN MIMS

B. E. and Eloise Mims

BRIAN FRANCIS NANOS, for his April 4th birthday

Gerald and Connie Nanos, his parents

ALANA ROSE O'QUINN, for her 28th Birthday on April 10th

Charley and Brenda O'Quinn, Shayla and Sarah

CHRIS ROMAN

Beth and Randy Thomas

LINDA ALAND SUSSBERG

Ellen and Jack Aland

CLEO TYSON, FOR EASTER

Helen Letchman

WILLIAM WALTER "LITTLE LIAM" WALL

William and Melanie Wall, his parents

HANNAH YEAGER

Erimi Young, her aunt

Contributions

THELMA BERNSTEIN

BIRMINGHAM OPTIMIST YOUTH FOUNDATION

MR. DONALD L. COOK

THE COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF GREATER BIRMINGHAM

DONALD AND MARY GLASS

ANNA HUGHES

GEORGE AND JUNE MALONE

PATSY NICHOLS

PRINCENA PRITCHETT

JORDAN SCOGGINS

BETTY SHEDD

LEE TAYLOR

BEVIN THOMPSON

STANLEY TURNER

CHARMISA WITHERSPOON

SHELIA WOODS

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/June Edition

June 12th July/Aug Edition

Aug 12th Sept/Oct Edition

Oct 12th Nov/Dec Edition

A suggested minimum donation
is \$10 per honoree.



**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:

May 11 & 25

June 8 & 22

www.thecompassionatefriends.org

Why We Do What We Do

My daughter has seemd to return to her old self again since coming to The Amelia Center. She will always miss her dad, but knows that is okay. She also knows that we will be okay and knows her Dad would be proud of us.

Hurting on Father's Day

As the day approaches I wonder how I will react—Am I still a father?

I will sit quietly never allowing friends and family to see how I feel.

I miss my son but I can't allow myself to "break".

I must remain strong and always be the "rock".

I wish I could just let someone know how much I miss my little angel.

How much I cry and how much I miss hearing, "Dad, I love you."

I am a father, but I wonder will I just pretend, as usual, that "it doesn't bother me?"

Remember me,
for I hurt, too,
on this Special Day.

TCF, Tampa, Florida from the internet

Providing a Place of Hope for Grieving Children, Parents and Families for Over Ten Years



CHILDREN'S
HOSPITAL®

The Amelia Center
1600 Fourth Avenue South
Birmingham, AL 35233

The Amelia Center is a department of Children's Hospital and publishes **Tears to Hope** six times throughout the year as a resource for bereaved persons. As a department of Children's Hospital, we are a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization supported by the generosity of the community. Special Program funding is provided by the **United Way of Central Alabama** and **A Little Hope**.

Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit # 4043
Birmingham, AL