

# Comforting Friends

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A NATIONAL OUTREACH & SUPPORT ORGANIZATION  
FOR THOSE AFFECTED BY A SUICIDE DEATH

2022

APRIL



## SPRING CLEANING

by Betty Stieglmeyer

As the seasons change and we become aware of the stirrings of nature, our thoughts turn to “spring cleaning.” It prepares us for the new season by getting our “house” in order.

Let’s dust off our memory chests, shake out and examine each item we have folded away in our heart and mind. Dig into the corners and bring light and air into the darkness. Deep in the closet we have accumulated all the things we could not face or needed time to think about. We must go through these. As we sort through, we will discard some unnecessary, unwanted

feelings, hurts, anger and other emotions.

Now we can count our treasures and carefully fold and put them back in fresh containers, smaller, easier to find, more in time with now, and in good order.

A day spent doing these tasks will no doubt leave you exhausted, but the effort will bring a deep sense of contentment. For me, it brought a special plus: special memories of joys of Jim and Scott.

Source: *The Compassionate Friends, Pikes Peak, Colorado*

**April:** Pause for a moment and look at the picture above. This is the Yosemite Valley. Pause for a moment and let your mind wander, listening to the birds, wind gently moving through the trees, the water flowing. Take a respite from the heaviness of what you may be experiencing at this moment, and breathe.

J. David Pincus generously donated his photography in this issue. David along with friend Rick Knapp, authored “*Sons of Suicide: A Memoir of Friendship*.” You can watch my webinar with David and Rick on our website under Upcoming, Webinars.

“Thank you, David, for your generosity in sharing these amazing and healing images.”

I encourage you to get out in nature and capture your own healing photographs or videos.

There is beauty all around us.



Marilyn Koenig  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## GROUP MEETINGS

Go to our website, click on **Upcoming > Meetings**. Find your virtual meeting date and time, click on **"Register."** On this same page, you can also check for updates regarding in-person meetings.

## VIRTUAL MEETINGS:

### Second Monday

April 11 @ 3pm PST / 6pm EST

### Third Wednesday

April 20 @ 4pm PST / 7pm EST

### Fourth Wednesday

April 27 @ 7pm PST / 10pm EST

### Grieving Moms Groups (2)

#1 April 7 @ 6:30pm PST / 9:30pm EST

#2 April 28 @ 3pm PST / 6pm EST

### Grieving Spouse & Partner

April 14 @ 6pm PST / 9pm EST

## IN-PERSON MEETINGS:

Due to health protocol, please call to confirm meetings. 916-392-0664 or 800-646-7322

### Cameron Park, CA

Tuesday, April 12 @ 6:30pm

Faith Episcopal Church

2200 Country Club Dr., Cameron Park CA

### Carmichael, CA

Tuesday, April 19 @ 7pm

Carmichael Presbyterian Church

5645 Marconi Ave., Sacramento, CA

### Jackson, CA

Tuesday, April 5 @ 3:30pm

Sierra Wind Wellness & Recovery Center

10354 Argonaut Lane, Jackson CA

### Lincoln, CA

Thursday, April 14 @ 6pm

Lincoln Public Library

485 Twelve Bridges Drive, Lincoln, CA

### Modesto, CA

Monday, April 18 @ 7pm

The Bridge Covenant Church (Riverbank)

2201 Morrill Road, Riverbank CA

### Legacy Survivors, UT

Wednesday, April 13 @ 6pm MST

Location TBD

# in a fog

by Lisa M. Shulman, MD, American Brain Foundation



Grief comes in many forms. Whether brought on by the death of a loved one, a serious illness or injury, divorce, abuse, or another cause, the brain interprets grief as emotional trauma or PTSD. Neurologist Lisa M. Shulman explains that the human brain handles emotional trauma and stress using the same set of processes.

"Traumatic loss is perceived as a threat to survival and defaults to protective survival and defense mechanisms," says Dr. Shulman. This response engages the fight or flight mechanism, which increases blood pressure and heart rate and releases specific hormones. Grief and loss affect the brain and body in many ways. They can cause changes in memory, sleep, and body function, affecting the immune system as well as the heart. It can also lead to cognitive effects, such as brain fog. The brain's goal? Survival.

"Grief is a normal protective process," says Dr. Shulman. "This process is an evolutionary adaptation to promote survival in the face of emotional trauma." Changes in brain function go largely undetected when an individual continues functioning normally, but these experiences still affect how the brain works.

In response to traumatic events, the brain creates connections between nerves and strengthens or weakens existing connections depending on the duration and degree of the emotional response. Neuroplasticity (the ability to alter neural connections) allows the brain to compensate for injury, loss, and other life-altering traumatic events by forming new neural connections based on these experiences. This helps an individual adapt to new situations or environments.

Low to moderate stress increases nerve growth and improves memory while reducing fear. However, chronic stress causes a reduction in nerve growth and memory and increases fear to help an individual focus on survival. This stress response can have a negative effect and the more it happens, the more it becomes hardwired. "When a circuit fires repeatedly," Dr. Shulman says, "it's reinforced and becomes a default setting." Over the long term, grief can disrupt the diverse cognitive domains of memory, decision-making, visuospatial function, attention, word fluency, and the speed of information processing. *Continued on next page...*

# healing the brain after loss

<https://www.americanbrainfoundation.org/how-tragedy-affects-the-brain/>

According to Dr. Shulman, even the effects of long-term chronic stress are reversible. She points to mindfulness and relaxation practices like journaling, cognitive behavior therapy, counseling, creativity, and meditation as outlets for post-traumatic growth. These strategies allow feelings of safety, security, and calmness to return so that one can move forward.

"If we don't work through the traumatic experiences that we have, they will continue to be an obstacle in our lives," says Dr. Shulman.

Learn more about how grief, loss, and tragedy affect the brain by reading Dr. Shulman's book, "*Before and After Loss: A Neurologist's Perspective on Loss, Grief and Our Brain.*"



In the spring, when all the world awakens, sometimes our loss seems most unbearable. New life is evident everywhere, a great stirring in the earth after the long, bleak winter. And us? The same dull fact of death lies heavy on our hearts, made even heavier by contrast with the beauty all around us - the first crocus, the daffodils, the fingered glory of redbud trees. Winter is more akin to our mood than this!

But is it? Can we try, even a little bit, to *believe* in spring? To believe in its witness to the economy of creation - that nothing is lost, nothing is wasted? And that our loved one, too, is transformed into new life? If we can believe that, then the abundance we see around us can give us courage and hope, as well as a nourishing feast for our senses, here and now. May each glimpse of the returning flowers in spring be like a conversation with my loved one.

Source: *Healing After Loss: Daily Meditations for Working Through Grief* by Martha Whitmore Hickman (April 17)  
Original photography courtesy of J. David Pincus of Glendalough, Ireland



# beauty in weeping

by Mary Gilzean

After we lost our son to suicide on Mother's Day weekend in 2019, we received several cards, flowers, and sweet gifts from caring family and friends. All were much appreciated. But one of the best gifts I got was a single turquoise tissue box with white polka dots. My friend handed it to me as she entered my home. No words were needed. The simple gesture spoke volumes. Basically, she was giving me permission to cry. In fact, tears weren't just permitted, they were expected. I can't tell you how comforting it was to be given the freedom to just let it all out with a friend who was okay with whatever happened.

When I was 13, my grandma Mary died of cancer. She was the only grandparent I'd ever had. I was her namesake. To say the loss was huge was an understatement. However, I didn't get a box of Kleenex that day. Instead, our stern father burst into the family room and announced, "Grandma died, your mom's very upset, so I don't want to hear any of you kids crying."

Not one of his best parenting moments!

Sometimes tears make other people uncomfortable, awkward, or outright mad. People feel so helpless. We don't know what to do. We don't know how to comfort or what to say. It's like, "Oh God, here she goes again. How do I make it stop?"

But here's the thing: if we're going to really heal from loss, tears are necessary. They're healthy. They're a much-needed release. In fact, if the good Lord didn't give us the capacity to let out our frustration, pain, and grief, we'd eventually implode.

Unfortunately, I think after my grandma died, I pretty much just stuffed my feelings. I sat stone faced at her funeral. My sister was blubbering; all I remember was watching her and feeling super guilty. "What's wrong with me?" I wondered.

Truth is, I was just trying to soldier on as if nothing happened. But the grief never went away. Two years ago, I scanned all of my grandma's photos, along with my mom's, and made a Shutterfly scrapbook for myself and my siblings. It was a daunting project. Believe me, as I scanned those photos, I blubbered like a baby. And it had been over 40 years since Grandma Mary had been gone! I remember meeting for coffee with a friend one Saturday after I'd been scanning. I just started sniffing and said, "I miss my grandma!"

It's like I'd stored away all the grief in some hidden place in my heart, and 40 years later, out it came like

a flood. Thankfully, I'm not stuffing my grief anymore. I'm so grateful for friends who hand me tissue boxes and just let me emote. According to Medical News Today, there are many benefits to crying, including stress relief. "Research has found that in addition to being self-soothing, shedding emotional tears releases oxytocin and endorphins (the feel-good hormones)." So, there you go. If it's on the internet, it must be true, right?

Right around the corner from my house sits a weeping willow tree overlooking a quiet pond. I always stop to admire it when I'm out on a walk. Apparently, weeping willows get their name because raindrops resemble tears when they fall on the drooping branches. In literature, they are often associated with sadness and grief, especially in Shakespeare.

They may appear sad, but I think they're absolutely stunning. Sharing our tears can be a beautiful thing, too. There is a passage in the Bible that says, "Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning" (Psalm 30:5). I think the reason the joy comes is because the pillowcase collected all the tears. The release was good for us. We wake up with those feel-good hormones. And best of all, we let some of the sadness out, instead of stuffing it.

If you've suffered a loss, whether it's losing a person you love, or a beloved pet, or your health, or a hope/dream that hasn't come to fruition, a relationship that's gone sour, or a job, financial security, whatever it is, get the Kleenex box out. It's okay.

I promise.



Photo courtesy of Mary Gilzean

# On May 5, please help us reach our fundraising goal of **\$20,000 this year**

by Marilyn Koenig

This will be our fourth year participating in **Big Day of Giving** and we are excited to be a part of our region's big day. The Sacramento Region Community Foundation's annual 24-hr giving challenge helps local non-profits raise funds to make a difference in the Sacramento region. It's the culmination of an entire year's worth of community-building and collaboration, made possible by donors like you and community partners.

Last year, our region raised \$13.3 million for local nonprofits during Big Day of Giving.



## HOW CAN YOU HELP?

**DONATE:** On Thursday, **May 5**, you can donate to **Friends for Survival** by visiting

<https://www.bigdayofgiving.org/organization/friendsforsurvival>

and making a gift with a credit or debit card. Donations as little as \$15 make a big difference, and your gifts can help us win some of the \$100,000 in prizes available.

Starting Thursday, **April 21**, you can schedule your gift in advance of Big Day of Giving, just so you don't forget!

**SHARE:** Let your networks know that you support our cause by sharing our posts on your social media accounts, or by creating and sharing a fundraising campaign. A good word from a donor like you is the most meaningful way for us to spread our mission...thank you in advance for your crucial support.

# Support

## RESOURCES

**Friends for Survival**  
[www.friendsforsurvival.org](http://www.friendsforsurvival.org)

Phone: (916) 392-0664

Toll Free: (800) 646-7322

If you are in crisis and need immediate help, call the 24-hour National Crisis Line:

**1-800-273-TALK (8255)**

### Alliance of Hope

Survivor services including a 24/7 on-line community forum  
[www.allianceofhope.org](http://www.allianceofhope.org)

### American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (AFSP)

Extensive lists of available meeting support [www.afsp.org/find-support](http://www.afsp.org/find-support)

### Bereaved Parents of the USA

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

### Suicide Awareness Voices of Education

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

### Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS)

For service members, veterans, and their families: [www.taps.org](http://www.taps.org)

### The Compassionate Friends

For bereaved parents of a deceased child: [www.compassionatefriends.org](http://www.compassionatefriends.org)

### The Nat'l Center for Grieving Children & Families

The Dougy Center  
[www.dougy.org/grief-resources](http://www.dougy.org/grief-resources)



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