

**Bereaved Families of Ontario
Kingston Region**

#104-993 Princess Street, Kingston, ON, K7L 1H3

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 @BFOKingston

 www.facebook.com/bfokingston

March, April & May 2016



The Journey

H.E.L.P. After Suicide

A New Name for Our Suicide Support Group

Hope—That which is desired or anticipated.

However a loss due to death occurs, but particularly in situations involving suicide, we need to have hope that the pain of that loss will diminish somehow, some way, sometime. We realize that there is no way to know or predict the timeframe of that outcome. But hope is something for which the human mind is programmed. We at Bereaved Families of Ontario-Kingston offer the gift of hope through the experience of others in group meetings (as well as one-on-one sessions) that will help facilitate the process of healing and working through grief.

Empathy—Intellectual or imaginative apprehension of another's condition or state of mind without actually experiencing the feelings of the other.

Those of us who have lost loved ones to suicide can relate to people who have likewise been affected, but none of us can truly say, "I know how you feel." I can relate how I personally felt when my sister took her own life and how my grieving progressed through the hours, weeks, months and years following her death. Yet, every individual's experiences are unique and must be considered and dealt with as such.

Love—A deep devotion or affection for another person or persons.

In communicating our stories with other victims of suicide, we can find an intense connection, an understanding of the anger, guilt, denial, anguish, depression and other emotions that ebb and flow. Sharing these deeply felt emotions with fellow victims of suicide is a demonstration of love and of human kindness, in a process that benefits us all.

Patience—The state, quality, or fact of being patient.

Patient— Possessing or demonstrating endurance under distress or annoyance; long-suffering. Capable of tranquilly awaiting results or outcomes.

As we strive for the hope we desire, and offer empathy and love to each other, the act of being patient is critical in helping each other as victims of the act of suicide. We often blame ourselves or others, and this includes the person who inflicted the indignity of suicide upon us (i.e. the loved one who took her or his own life). Others may attempt to place blame of some sort or another on us. We work to foster an understanding that much of the guilt we feel is misplaced, overblown, unwarranted, or imagined. We work to understand how suicide has affected our lives -- past, present and future.

BFO-Kingston's support group for people who have lost loved ones to suicide now has a new name, but our goal has not changed. We offer hope, empathy, love and patience to anyone in need of our services. Please join us. You are not alone.

Thank you and help us spread the word.

Sandy Mortensen—Facilitator

(Definitions from Funk & Wagnall's Standard College Dictionary, 1968 edition.)

SUPPORT GROUPS

**Our Group Support Programs
are drop-in and do not
require pre-registration.**

**The following will be held at our
office at #104– 993 Princess Street,
beginning at 6:30PM:**

Mother's Night: This group meets the **2nd Tuesday** of each month and is for any mother who has experienced the death of a child, or suffered a miscarriage, stillbirth, or death of a newborn.

March 8, April 12 & May 10

Spousal/Partner Night: This group meets the **2nd Thursday** of each month, and is for anyone who has lost his or her partner or spouse to death.

March 10, April 14 & May 12

Family Night: This group meets the **3rd Tuesday** of each month and is for anyone who has lost someone of special importance in their life, regardless of the relationship.

March 15 , April 19 & May 17

H.E.L.P. After Suicide (Hope, Empathy, Love, Patience): This group meets the **4th Tuesday** of each month and is for anyone who has lost a loved one to suicide.

March 22, April 26 & May 24

**The following will be held upstairs
in the Trillium Room at Gordon F.
Tompkins Funeral Home—
Township Chapel 435 Davis Drive):**

Mourning Coffee (10-11am): This group meets the **4th Tuesday** of each month and is for anyone who would like to get together with other bereaved individuals for casual coffee chat.

March 22, April 26 & May 24

GRIEF THIS EASTER—REMEMBERING LOVED ONES

(from www.whatsyourgrief.com)



Anything creeping up when you are grieving can be a disaster. Holidays, even when they don't creep up, can be a disaster. When every day feels impossible, holidays feel even more impossible, and facing this Easter may seem unbearable.

For me Easter isn't the holiday that first comes to mind when we talk about how hard grief can be on the holidays or special days. And yet crawling out of winter, filled with dark and cold, into Easter and spring, filled with bunnies and baskets and pink, it can be a jarring as those Christmas carols that seem to start play-

ing in November. The hardest holidays are different for all of us, with different meanings and memories. Easter can be a tough one, especially with all the talk of spring, rebirth, and new life. Others may be excited and you may be . . . well, not excited. So what can you do, other than crawl under the covers and hide? **For all special days there are two things we try to do every time – plan and find ways to remember.** Sounds easy enough, right? Well, it may actually take a bit of work. But it will hopefully make the day a little more bearable if you spend the time to get ready for it.

Planning Suggestions:

- 1. Identify which individuals you will be spending the holidays with. Who will be present for events, traditions, and celebrations?**
- 2. If you decide to involve family and friends in making a plan, talk in advance.**
 - Call, email or talk in person, even if just the day before, to make a plan for the day.
 - Discuss any specific anxieties, things people want to do for the day, and things they don't want to do.
 - Don't overlook the children. Even the youngest family members need to have a chance to express feelings and concerns. It's also important for children to feel heard.
- 3. Decide what to do about tradition.**
 - Identify the rituals and traditions that will be the hardest.
 - Allow each member of the group to discuss what will be hardest about these identified moments.
 - Brainstorm ways to make these elements of the holidays easier. In the end you may decide to keep the event or tradition the same, change it, or skip it until next year.
- 4. Communicate with children affected by the loss.**
 - The holidays are hard for children because, although they are sad about the loss, they still may be excited for the same reasons we all were as children. Let them know they don't need to feel guilty about enjoying themselves. Ask them to let you know if they start to feel sad. Make a special code word they can use if they need a break or some space.
- 6. If you haven't already, take time to think about you and how you will take care of yourself.**
 - Make a plan for how you will cope when things get really tough. Will you take a walk, journal, listen to music; get some space, exercise, etc.
 - Give yourself permission to cry. This may be an especially tough day – there will probably be some tears and that's okay.
 - Set aside time for decompression and self-care after the day.
- 8. Find ways to incorporate your love one in the holidays.**
 - This is the best way to feel close to your loved one and fill their absence.

Remembering: The idea of remembering may seem painful, but sharing happy memories can actually fill a tiny bit of that empty space left by those we have lost. One idea is to create a "remembering basket".

- **What you need:** A basket; plastic Easter eggs; paper; markers; stickers or other decorations.
- **What you do:** Set up a small table with all the items. Throughout the day encourage everyone who is comfortable to write down a memory, something they miss about the person, or anything else on a piece of paper and place in an egg. At an appropriate time, open the eggs and share all the memories. Some people may not want their memories shared or added to the basket. That is fine too. Encourage them to write down a memory, place it in an egg, and keep it. Keep in mind with activities like this that you never want to push people to do something they aren't comfortable with.

HOW TO HONOUR A BEREAVED MOTHER ON MOTHER'S DAY

(from <http://www.todayparent.com/blogs/on-our-minds/honour-bereaved-mother-mothers-day/>)

It is without a doubt that Mother's Day will be a challenging time for many mothers without their children—mothers like me.

My second child, Zachary, died of a random genetic abnormality in 2010, just moments after he was born. Since then, I've approached Mother's Day with mixed emotions. At first, the day made me feel like a failure as I asked myself, "What did I do wrong?" Then, as the years passed and I had another baby, Mother's Day regained some degree of joy. Still, four years later my heart continues to ache for my second born. Mother's Day is a challenging celebration for any woman who has experienced the death of her child. She may feel isolated, sorrowful and even confused about her claim to motherhood. Mother's Day is one of many "triggers" that will remind her of her (child) and the milestones and future that will never be. A trigger can be anything that causes the bereaved to reflect on their loss; a name, location, smell, anniversary, article of clothing—or even a bunch of balloons that boast, "MOM," in colorful letters.

While Mother's Day may be a painful trigger for bereaved moms, it is also an opportunity to celebrate these women and their children. Here are some ideas to honour them this Mother's Day:

1. Affirm her identity as a mother.

A woman's love for her deceased child never dies, nor does her motherhood. Celebrate the mom who carried her baby, no matter how briefly, and is strong enough to wake up each day and keep going after the death of that child. Recognize her by wishing her a "Happy Mother's Day;" she is a mother and deserves happiness. Let her know you are thinking of her.

2. Celebrate her child.

Talk about the (child) that died and use the child's name. Look at pictures and discuss the experience. Bereaved mothers will generally commemorate the anniversaries of the baby's birth and death, but Mother's Day provides another cherished opportunity for remembrance.

3. Spend quality time together.

On a day that is likely to be lonely for the bereaved mom, instead of a card in the mail, give the gift of time. Your attention and friendship will create a lasting impact. The mother may wish to visit her child's gravesite, light a candle or scrapbook the baby's footprints or funeral program. Doing these activities with the bereaved mother will be quality time she will greatly treasure. In the case that the mother wishes to be alone, suggest another time to do something meaningful together.

4. Give thoughtful gifts.

Or you could make a donation to a hospital, bereavement program or charity in the child's or mother's name. Even a thoughtful letter may be the perfect way to show you care.

5. Ask how she is doing and listen.

Ask the mother how she is coping and welcome her vulnerability. The best approach is to let her do the talking. Know that you do not need to solve the event or fix the emotions; these things need to be experienced and expressed and this is often helpful in itself. If the mother is struggling, encourage her to take good care of herself and find support.

A woman never stops being her child's mom, whether her baby is with her or not.
Bereaved mothers have survived excruciating pain and yet carry on.

Upcoming Events



BFO KINGSTON CELEBRITY SERVE FUNDRAISER

We hope you're able to join us at Boston Pizza (755 Gardiners Road) on **Wednesday, March 16th** for a fundraiser in which 10% of all food sales between **5:00pm and 8:00pm** will be donated to our organization.

You'll have a chance to mingle with Garry "Big G" McColman from Country 93.5, Disney characters Elsa and Olaf (costumes by Shelva Gordon - Dream a Theme), KingsTown Tenors, and Kingston City Councillor Jeff McLaren.

Help support the work of our organization by purchasing raffle tickets (\$10/ticket) which you can buy the night of our event, or order by phone (613-634-1230) or email (bfo@kingston.net). Winners will be drawn at 8:00pm and will be contacted by phone if not in attendance.

You could win:

- 1st Prize: Boston Pizza—Pizza for a Year
- 2nd Prize: Hedley Concert Tickets for 2
- 3rd & 4th Prize: Boston Pizza & Cineplex Gift Cards



R.S.V.P.

If you are able to join us, Boston Pizza requests that you book a dinner reservation by calling **613-634-6670** so they have plenty of staff on hand for this event.

WINGS OF SERENITY BUTTERFLY RELEASE

The butterfly is a symbol of grief, new beginnings, celebrations, transitions...

A metaphor for the seasons and journeys we experience in life.

- When:** Saturday, May 28th
- Where:** Hospice Gardens in City Park (at the corner of West and Bagot Streets)
- Time:** Registration & Butterfly Distribution: 12:00-12:45pm
Welcome & Group Butterfly Release: 12:45pm
- Cost:** \$25/butterfly (purchased no later than May 13th)
- Payment Options:** Cash or Cheque (Made Payable to BFO Kingston or Hospice Kingston)
PayPal (online at www.bfo-kingston.ca)
(Tax receipts will not be issued for butterfly purchases.)

All proceeds to BFO Kingston and Hospice Kingston Grief and Bereavement Programs

Each butterfly released will represent something unique and personal to each of us. Some will gather in honour and memory of a loved one, some to mark a celebration, and some to commemorate a new beginning or life transition.

Some will come alone to reflect and some will bring family and friends.

Many will bring mementos of their loved ones.

Some will "plant" their butterfly stakes in the garden as a tribute and loving reminder.

All are welcome.





SHARING OUR STORIES

If you would like to share your story or an article or poem you find especially moving or helpful, email or mail it to me. Contributions other than your own must include the author and source. It's our hope that sharing will help all of us navigate our way through life with loss.

In this edition, we feature stories from Harvey Reed and Robert Mundle.

HARVEY'S STORY

In the 1960's people didn't talk openly about death, especially with children. They didn't talk about it nor did anyone really know how to deal with death...of a child, a parent or of a sibling. In October of 1967 death got very personal with my family, when my older brother Vincent, died from a head injury, as the result of a fall from an apartment house in Toronto. He had just graduated from George Brown College. He was 21, a month away from his 22nd birthday, and he was an artist. Grief was a learning process for everyone involved. No one in my family or those trying to help, handled this very well. It was all trial and error.... a lot of error I might add. I had seen my dad cry openly, as well as my brothers and sisters but I had never seen my mother shed a tear. She had to stay strong for the rest of the family, as she put it. As the weeks went on and everyone tried to pick up the pieces of their lives, it was apparent that this was not going to be easy. My parents couldn't talk to each other without arguing and I wouldn't talk about my brother with my mother when she brought his name into conversations. I was not very kind to my mother during this period. I was dealing with my grief and no one else's mattered. My brothers and sisters had their own issues at school in dealing with his death. I was not around much as I was finished school at the time and working. A lot of issues with his death never got resolved..... and life went on.

Fast forward 36 years and I am now married and the proud father of 2 boys, Nicholas and Jordan. Life was good for 15 years. I loved being a dad! My dad had passed away in 1988 and my mother in 1998. Then on December 23 2003, life, as my wife and I knew it changed forever. Our oldest son Nick (as he was now called) was killed by a train, not far from our home in Collins Bay. He was 15, a month away from his 16th birthday, and like his uncle, my brother Vincent, he was an artist. All of a sudden I was taken back to the events of 1967, only now I was looking at it through the eyes of a father. And as with the death of my brother, this was not an easy time. Like everyone else who has lost a child, the kindness of friends, family and even strangers help to get you through those dark days after the funeral. And as the weeks and months went on, you hear everyone laughing again and going on with their lives. How were we going to get through this? I didn't want to live in a sad house anymore.

I knew that I could not get through this without help, as I had seen how grief had shattered my parents lives. I came to Bereaved Families of Ontario—Kingston Region in the spring of 2004 and found the help that I needed to help me deal with Nick's death. I found there a group of people, who, like me, had lost a son or a daughter, and who were trying to put the pieces of their lives together again. We shared our stories, our thoughts and our experiences in dealing with grief in an effort to help each other. It didn't get better overnight. Grief is a long drawn out process. My wife went through this in her own way, choosing not to come with me to BFO.... we all grieve differently. This was what I needed to do to survive, and to go on with my life. In time I became a volunteer, in an effort to give back to this organization that had done so much for me. Giving back, for me, was part of the healing process.

I look back at times and wish I could have said I was sorry to my mother and that I would have listened to her when she wanted to talk about Vincent. Only after Nick was gone did I really understand how she felt. She had this need to talk about her son, who was no longer here. The reality of that hit me so hard! I can't change that now, but what I can do is share this story with everyone who doesn't quite get it when a bereaved parent wants to talk about their child. For me, it's always magic when someone mentions Nick's name. It may bring a tear to my eye at times, still, but it is magic! My mother just wanted to share in that magic.

ROBERT'S STORY

Last November I attended Hospice/BFO Kingston's *O Holy Night* where I had the privilege of offering a brief reflection on grief and the challenges it imposes, especially around Christmas. For me, grief evokes the importance of stories and story-telling. Yet little did I know on that night how profoundly my own story was about to change.

My father died one week later. My Dad had suffered with dementia for 6 years, and so his death wasn't a complete surprise to me and my sisters. We had lost him gradually, excruciatingly slowly over the last six years, but his death did come quite suddenly with a final bout of pneumonia, likely due to an aspiration. He died on December 3rd around 1 am, with me and my two sisters and one brother-in-law at his bedside. We tried to comfort him as he lost consciousness. Then we focused on being present to him emotionally and spiritually, each of us feeling the intensity of our own silent thoughts and prayers. We were attuned to the sound of his breathing, his cycles of breathing and different breathing sounds, feeling every breath in and out, until very gradually and peacefully, he died, much like a leaf floating very lightly to the ground and resting there.

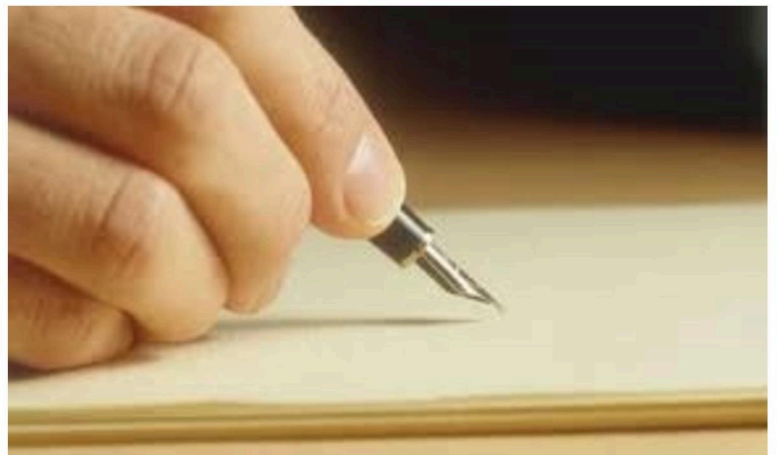
In his prime, my father was a practical, hands-on "Doer-Dad". Out in the garage or down in his basement workshop, he was always working on something and could fix anything. His grandson, my son, called him a "real worker man". Emotional? - not so much. And listening was not one of his gifts. Unfortunately, that's what I so often needed the most from my Dad—for him to listen to me.

In compensation, I became a "Listener-Dad" to my son. Handy-man? – hardly. I was terrible at doing anything practical around the house; I had no patience for it. Even the most basic tasks would just make me feel angry, usually to the soundtrack of my Dad's voice in my head as a rather harsh critic. Most often I'd lose my temper, and give up.

All that changed with my father's death. I feel his spirit with me now in a surprisingly supportive way, particularly when I have some practical task to do, like assembling my son's new hockey net, or taking down the Christmas tree and lights. I talk to him and ask him questions about how he was able to do all the things he did; how he was able to be so patient. I hear now my Dad's voice in my head as a comforting presence. He talks me through once aggravating tasks and I feel myself becoming more patient, kinder, and gentler—more complete and whole.

I always felt that the day my Dad died would be the day I finally grew up. Strange that I'm almost 50 years old and could still feel that way, but it turned out to be true. And I learned that this isn't such an unusual experience for other men. In the book *Father Loss: How Sons of All Ages Come to Terms with the Deaths of Their Dads*, by Neil Chethik, I found the following quote by actor Matthew McConaughey: "I became a man the day my father died. Nothing in my life gave me more clarity and a stronger sense of responsibility. I've become a better lover, a closer friend and a kinder stranger." I feel the same way.

The best part for me is the continuing relationship I have with my Dad. I feel that he is at peace, freed from all that inhibited him in life. And that being free he has given me his blessing—one that he wasn't able to give me and that I wasn't able to appreciate when he was alive. By my experience of my father's death I have, paradoxically, encountered my Dad's best self and true spirit, and received clearer vision, a fuller way of being, and new life.



In
**Loving
Memory**

**WE WOULD LIKE TO TAKE A MOMENT TO REMEMBER ALL OF THE LOVED ONES
WE HAVE LOST IN THE MONTHS OF
MARCH, APRIL & MAY**

MARCH

Jessie Arthur
Linda Barkley
Jennifer Blair
Gordon A. Cameron
Christopher Case
Bradley Lawrence Chambers
Mark Collins
Aaron Cunningham
David Davidson
Debra Davidson
Bethany Sara Doig
Peter Dowling
David Bruce Duffus
Kathleen Fredricks
Brent Gordon
Michael Hammer
Paul Hilditch
Richard D. Holden
Beth Howden
Gerry Huurnam
Jean Kerr
Kyle Lake
Evan Lawrence

MARCH

Doug Martin
Wendy Mayoff
Gregory McKean
Sally Miller
Harold Mitchell
Jessy Nichols
Michel Vincent Pitre
Hank John Pople
Jessica Prettie
Jack Rafter
Mabel Roach
Ursula Roch-Desmarais
Phillip Saunders
Dawn Sorbensen
Nora Spence
Waleed Sulieman
Tony VanSeggelen
Katherine Wagner
Kathleen Waller
Ted Waller
Samuel Wannemacher
Shane Patrick Whalen
Brent Williams

APRIL

George Ambury
Robert Bedwell Sr.
Arianna Bouchard
Nancy Cartwright
Cassandra Cooper
Tayler Farrow Costa
Emme Marie Faith Gwalchmai
Kailey Marie Hall
Bryan Halladay
Rodney Harten
Edward Heidrick
Julie Kane
Samuel Eugene Knapp
Robert Lacombe
Chantel Lauzon
Candi Dawn Lawrence
Allen Leduc
Kevin Lodge
Alexander Reed McArthur
James Edward Lawrence Meikle
Royce Miller
Bev Montague
Michael Nair
Sharon Oliver
Linda F. Pacheco
Bobby Parish
Taylor Michaela Rafferty
David Read
Ewan Alexander Ritchie
Harold C. Rogers
Jerry Stapley
Linda VanCoughnett
Adam Shane White
James W. Wilson
Kay Wolstenholme

MAY

Brandon Alexander Alarie
Gerry Banks
Cam Baxter
Jerry Beaubien
Debbie Chamberlain
Linda Clark
Susie Collier
Bernice Cossitt
Lou Duguay
Christopher Garrett
Kimberley Hamilton
Gord Howden
Anthony Stuart Jones
Robert Keates
Geraerd "Jerry" Kelly
Nora Kerr
Gregory MacFarlane
Emma MacMullin
Jordon William Martin
Shawn Martin
Lisa G. Martin-Le-Saux
Richard Miller
James Thomas Joseph Poulin
Elise Stokes
Julie Strassburger
Eva M. VanAlstine
Orville Villeneuve
Tristan Webb
David Worton

