

BFO - Toronto News

We have just finished four days of core volunteer training and we had an amazing group of forty, dedicated, future volunteers, coming from a diversity of backgrounds, cultures and bereavement experiences. The training team consisted of myself, three board members, Maureen Ford, Danny Anckle and Allison Amery, a young adult, volunteer Gilles Lavigne and of course, at the helm, was Betty Ann. The workshop facilitators included Yvette Perreault, Christine Leonard, Vic Hill, Agnes Struik and Blair Henry. Everyone, especially Betty Ann, worked very hard to make this training the best it could be, but it is the courage and compassion of the training participants that makes the training so special.

Our Community Connections Project – Phase II, a two-year project funded by the Federal Government, has now come to an end. We have hired the same consultants, Betsy Kappel and Zubeida Ramji, who conducted the environmental scan and program evaluation (Community connections – Phase I) in 2002, to complete this evaluation. They will be assessing if BFO-Toronto has become more accessible to bereaved people coming from different cultures and backgrounds, and if our programs are meeting their needs. The final report will be available at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) on June 15th. The Volunteer Appreciation Evening, in conjunction with the AGM, will be held in a different location this year. It will be at Trane Studio, in the Bathurst and Bloor area.

The Board has been working to develop a strategic plan. Another BFO volunteer, Laura Syron, who works for the Heart and Stroke Foundation, is helping us through this process and we intend to also present this at the AGM. Please complete the membership form if you would like to vote at the meeting.

Hincks Dellcrest, a mental health organization for children and youth, was provided with a half day of training and has asked for another two days of training. Many organizations, such as Hincks Dellcrest, are asking for this type of help as they realize how critical bereavement support is to individuals, families and communities who are dealing with the deaths of many young men, as a result of the gun violence.

Plans for Big Night Out are underway. It will take place at the Brandt House during the week of September 11th (exact date to be confirmed), which is the Film Festival week.

Take care everyone,
Janet Wilson, *Executive Director*

In Memory Wristbands

You've probably been seeing them everywhere... the yellow Livestrong wristbands, the pink ones in support of finding a cure for breast cancer, and many more. Now BFO-Toronto is pleased to offer these lovely wristbands in memory of your loved one who died. The wristbands are white with the words "In memory" engraved on them. They can be purchased at our office for a small donation.

If you would like to order a number of wristbands and have them mailed right to your door please contact our Communications and Special Events Coordinator at 416.440.0290 x.17 or via email at klopes@bfotoronto.ca to place an order.

This newsletter is produced for our members and supporters and is available by mail and on our website. We welcome submissions, please forward to info@bfotoronto.ca. We reserve the right to edit items submitted for publication. The opinions and ideas expressed by our members and other authors in this newsletter, represent their own unique experiences of grief and do not necessarily reflect the views of BFO-Toronto.

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JOURNEYS

A MEMBER SUPPORT NEWSLETTER

Bereaved Families of Ontario
Toronto
Founded in 1978



I Am Not Cheese *by Alice Wisler*

Recently I heard from one of my high school classmates. He now lives with his family in Nepal. Going to an international school in Japan — where I grew up — many of my now forty-something-years-old schoolmates lead exotic lives. You can find them scattered over the world doing really interesting things. And then here I am, settled comfortably after a season of traveling, safe now in North Carolina.

My friend commented (which was quite nice) on reading in the high school alumni newsletter that my son had died. He was so sorry and went on to say he had just returned from his mother's funeral. "So," he wrote, "I am going through the grieving process." It was good to hear from this high school friend, and nothing against him, but the phrase "the grieving process" which has become a cliché in itself, got to me.

So I pursued it further, trying to hit the nail on the head, so to speak, as to why this phrase has caused my skin to grow clammy ever since I joined this griever's path. Cheese is processed. Sausage, too. These are molded and made into products. In grief we are not processed as though a food item and then delivered as a final product to the shelves of the grocery store. We aren't put on an assembly line or a conveyor belt and pieced together.

Instead, I like to think that we are a growing creation, changing, due to the trauma and tragedy of losing a child or loved one. We were thrown into this rocky journey of darkness and pain against our will. We made the choice to survive. And we learn how to be bolder and more compassionate. We have new ideals.

Old phrases and expressions may bother us. Daniel was brain dead when we made the excruciating decision to take him off of the respirator. So for me to hear a person joke about being "brain dead," due to their slip-up or mistake, doesn't ever make me smile. I don't even like to use the word "deadline."

Sure, we've been told about the steps or stages of grief — shock and denial and finally, acceptance. With all due respect to Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, I will never have acceptance of the awful truth of his death. I do acknowledge his death. He is, after all, obviously, no

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OOPS! We neglected to list the author of the lead article in the last edition of Journeys. The author of the lead article "Feeling My Way Through Grief" is Betty Ann Rutledge, BFO-Toronto's Program Manager.

longer here. But I won't accept it as I would a birthday gift or an invitation to dinner.

It is a grieving life I've entered. It's a path of rocky trails, heavy with anguish. It's agonizing music that penetrates every fiber and the loud noise can take years to fade. It is not a path with "closure," another word that bristles my skin because it implies we will finish being affected by our loved one's death and move off the grieving path, never to feel sorrow again for the impact their death has made in our daily lives.

Grief is a zigzag of the soul. You never know when tears will be triggered or when a word or memory will take you back, way back, and you are lost in thought for moments. Parents who have buried their children decades ago still feel this zigzag in the depths of their beings.

I am not where I was when Daniel first died. Time, pounding out my anger and sorrow to God and constant support from close friends has helped. I have seen the sun shine again. I have used the tool of writing to bring healing. I have done, what they call "reinvesting in life" (a phrase I do like), and found my niche in volunteering, speaking, publishing and reaching out to those also on this journey.

Author John Alego says, "Like the growth rings of a tree, our vocabulary bears witness to our past." Therefore, because I became a griever over six years ago, I cannot sit well with the phrase "the grieving process."

We are becoming as we adapt to and deal with the many facets of grieving. And I think, becoming will take a lifetime.

So move over cheese. Although I enjoy your many varieties, I am not one of them.

The Pinecone Wreath: after a child dies

Instructed to collect pinecones	Watching a pair of orange butterflies
We carried baskets	I found Awe, Forgiveness and Hope
Deep into the forest where	Under the shadow of the mightiest oak
Becoming begins	I struggled with Acceptance of A New Life
Through mud puddles	The pinecone wreath I strung together
I picked up Sorrow and Despair	Is lopsided, a mixture of dark and light
Easing over an embankment	But it hangs
I added Fear, Doubt	It is as real
Soaking feet in a stream	As I am becoming.

Reprinted with kind permission from www.howtomakeafamily.com and author Alice J. Wisler. (Editor - Tributes, LARGO, Writing the Heartache, Daniel's House Publications, Down The Cereal Aisle - reviewed by The Midwest Book Review. Alice Wisler's website is www.geocities.com/griefhope/index.html) In her column "The Expanded Sky," Alice talks about the possibilities of living with grief, instead of building walls against it. For those who've experienced precious losses, her words and ideas will provide empowering structure. For those who've been as yet untouched by loss, understanding grief now can be eye-opening preparation.

Thank You

A very special thank you to volunteers Cameron Britt and Shevaun McGrath for their generous donation to BFO Toronto in memory of their infant son Patrick. Shevaun and Cam recently held their 3rd Annual St. Patrick's Day event with friends and families at a local pub, the proceeds of which were donated to help support our programs and services. Thank you for helping us to continue to "help the healing begin" for other bereaved families.

asset that we can gain some sense of stability and safety and dare to consciously connect with the grief.

In my observations of people grieving over the years I have noticed that people tend to have a variety of "strengths" in facilitating their conscious rituals. A person's strength is something they have been practicing for many years, something that they are so familiar with that it is a part of them, automatic. Often we take it for granted and assume everyone else has this same capacity until others alert us that we have this special strength. It seems so natural to us that we don't see it as "special."

Here are a few examples of some general strengths that people might have in connecting with their grief. Someone who's strength lies in their thinking and analyses will be drawn to heal their grief through study and reading whereas a person who's strength lies in their creativity will be more likely to use their artistic endeavors in their rituals. Someone who's strength was in their practicality might be more inclined to dedicate something in honor of the person who died while a person who found strength in interaction would probably prefer a verbal expression of the emotion. Just as there are gender differences in healing there are plenty of other ways we differ and one of the many ways to observe these differences is in gaining a greater understanding of our unique natures and unique strengths. Where is your strength? Where do you find safety? How can you connect your grief with your strength?

We will tend to connect with our grief in a wide variety of ways. You may find that you have a preferred mode of consciously connecting with your grief and this can lead you to identify your particular strength. It is not your only way to connect, just your preferred way. By knowing our strength we can more consciously facilitate a connection with our grief. (My book "Swallowed by a Snake" focuses on a wide variety of paths that people have used to connect with their grief.)

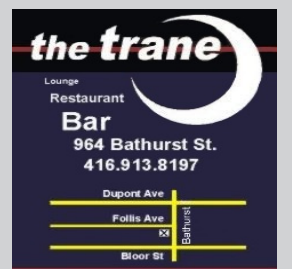
In part two of this column we will examine the opposite of ones' strength: one's least developed part. Just as one's strength is a vital aid in helping us connect to our grief in what feels like a safe way, our "worst" part is also instrumental and useful. In part two we will see how to use this undeveloped part as a healing tool for our grief. Tom Golden is a professional speaker, author, and psychotherapist whose area of specialization is healing from loss and trauma. Tom gives workshops across the country and in Canada on many aspects of this topic. His workshops are known to be both entertaining and informative. Contact Tom at the addresses below (email or snail mail) for inquiries about speaking or training for your group. You can also place secure orders on webhealing.com for Tom's book Swallowed by a Snake: The Gift of the Masculine Side of Healing. Tom Golden LCSW, 149 Little Quarry Mews, Gaithersburg, Maryland 20878, USA, 301 670-1027

VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION DINNER & ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Thursday, June 15th, 2006

6:30pm AGM, 7:30 dinner & Volunteer Awards

Trane Studio Jazz Lounge
964 Bathurst Street (north of Bloor)



A community event to celebrate our accomplishments and renew our sense of hope and commitment for the future. Volunteers will be recognized in the following areas:

- All first year facilitators and advisors trained in 2005
- Any volunteer who joined BFO-Toronto in 2005
- 5, 10 and 20-year volunteers
- and the very special Noah Thorek Award for outstanding and long-term volunteer contribution to BFO

RSVP to info@bfotoronto.ca or by calling 416-440-0290 ext. 12

Healing Through Our Strength / Knowing Our Weakness

Part one, *Tom Golden LCSW*

I gritted my teeth and slowly lowered my arm and hand into the murky water. I hadn't reached the bottom and the water was above my elbow. I couldn't see beyond a foot or so...then came the mucky, slimy, and smelly bottom. I groped around and found the object I was seeking. It was a small plastic action figure, which my son, Luke, had dropped into our small pond. I quickly pulled my arm and now smelly hand out of the water and handed Luke his treasure. I don't like sticking my arm into the muck. It's not infrequent though that something seems to accidentally slip in and I get my call to retrieve the booty.

This year as I performed this act I started to laugh. I realized that this action was a great metaphor for intentional and conscious grief rituals, those times when we purposefully connect with our grief. When we consciously practice grief rituals we are putting our "arm" into a space where we can't see the "bottom". By practicing a conscious grief ritual we deliberately place ourselves in the path of our grief. We open ourselves to our parts that are not particularly pretty. In short, these are places that most of us would rather avoid but because we feel it necessary we trudge forward and stick our hands down in the bottom of the pond.

So why do this at all? Why not avoid all of this unpleasantness and attempt to maintain a perpetual "happy" mood? The answer is that by sticking our hands into the pond we are slowly diminishing the levels of grief that reside within. By confronting our pain we chip away at it and slowly bring ourselves to a place of transformation. The amount of grief that resides within is not infinite. Each time we connect with and express our pain from either a conscious or unconscious source we are diminishing the amount of grief that resides within and moving ourselves closer towards healing. You can make an artificial division of grief by separating it into two groups: the conscious and the unconscious. The conscious grief is the ritual we are talking about. It is when we intentionally decide to "stick our hand in the pond." It could be simply pulling out a picture album and looking through the photographs. It could also be visiting the grave or talking with a friend about our grief. In these activities we purposefully move ourselves into a place where we can experience the pain. By looking through the pictures, visiting the grave, or talking with a friend we will most likely resonate our unfinished grief.

What is "unconscious" grief? This is the grief that comes bubbling up when we are least expecting it. It is when we suddenly realize that our hand is in the pond, covered by a wave of grief that hit us like a lightning bolt. That song on the radio that throws us into a state of grief or that product in the grocery store that reminds us of our loss or any of hundreds of events that can arise that involuntarily throw us into an unwanted state of grief. It is when grief confronts us unexpectedly and usually without our having requested its presence. Most of us find this difficult and want to minimize these states.

An interesting and little known secret is that the best way to diminish this "unconscious grief" is to find a way to consciously take samples of your grief on a regular basis. The action is something like a release valve on a steam engine. By doing regular conscious rituals we release the pressure from the unconscious parts and give ourselves a little more breathing room. By intentionally experiencing the pain the reservoir of our grief becomes less pressured and also less likely to erupt unexpectedly. This is less true in a powerful or acute grief where the eruptions are involuntary and often unstoppable but even in these circumstances conscious connection with our pain will reduce the potency of the eruptions by a bit. Conscious grief rituals are not quick fix cures for grief-- they are short term pressure releases with long term benefits.

"Unconscious grief" is unpredictable, difficult, and painful. As a therapist I have always been on the lookout for ways to minimize the power of these unconscious waves of grief. I'm sorry to say that there is no easy cure. The most direct way has already been mentioned, that being the regular practice of conscious rituals. By deliberately finding vent for our grief we take the pressure off of the unconscious contents.

We can maximize the effectiveness of our conscious rituals by becoming more aware of our "strengths." By knowing our strengths we are in a better position to use them consciously as a means to connect to our grief. Most of us will turn to our strongest ally when we are in trouble and grief is no exception. It is through our strongest

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FILM REVIEW

STRIKE ZONE by Cameron Duncan

Written, directed, and produced by 16 year old New Zealand filmmaker Cameron Duncan is an amazing short film Strike Zone about a teen facing his own death.

When Cameron found a lump in his knee and was diagnosed with Osteosarcoma (a bone forming cancer) his dreams of a softball career were over. Entering an agonizing chemo regimen he chose to express himself through film and created a number of brilliant shorts. One of which I am reviewing here.

The short Strike Zone was written during one of Cameron's bouts of chemo and was actually shot in between treatments. Using softball as the medium to tell his story, the film opens with a softball team on the field performing a traditional Maori warrior chant.

Narrated by and starring Cameron as himself, he shares with the audience how he would choose to live the last 2 months of his life: creating a winning softball team, in time to win the championship before his death. From his softball aspirations and wanting to accomplish something worthwhile before his death, to how he envisions his funeral, Cameron leads the viewer on an emotional and memorable journey.

With wisdom beyond his years, Cameron makes the audience face the reality of what he was facing and uses a medium that is familiar. As his narration states near the end of the film; "I hope I'll be missed and I want people to cry at my funeral. But one thing... I don't wanna be forgotten and I think I've done a pretty good job of that."

Strike Zone as well as a film on Cameron's life can be viewed on Disk 4 of the extended version of The Lord of the Rings: Return of the King.

Katrina Lopes, Special Events and Communications Coordinator

IN MEMORIAM

Paul Norman John Reddick

Todd Burley

Franz Rotmann

E. Marilyn Monk

Bruce Hutt

BFO-Toronto is *On the Move!*

We are very excited to let you know that after more than a year of searching, we have found a new home for BFO-Toronto! Barring any unforeseen circumstances, later this summer, we will be moving into a lovely old home on Madison Avenue just north of Bloor Street. It's about a two-minute walk from the Spadina subway station and while there is no free parking, there are plenty of lots and on street parking close by. We have signed a six-year lease and will begin the process of fixing the space up in July so that we can be settled in to start our fall programs in mid-September.

We think that this will be the perfect setting to continue the important healing work that BFO has done for over 25 years. Now, more than ever, we need the support of you, our community, to make this move happen.

Here is our wish list:

- Do you have a connection to a home improvement show? Someone that would like to feature BFO's new digs and decorate our new house?
- Do you have a connection to a furniture store/manufacturer? Both office furniture (like Steelcase) and sofas, tables, bookshelves etc. could be donated (a charitable tax receipt will be provided).
- Do you know someone from a security company like ADT who could arrange for a donation of a security system?
- Are you a contractor? There is some renovation work that needs to be done, along with a TON of painting – can you or someone you know, lend a hand?

Please contact our Executive Director, Janet Wilson, if you have any leads or if you'd like to be contacted to be part of our moving/painting crew!

8 SESSION COURSE ON MINDFULNESS MEDITATION

Presented by: Lou Carcasole

8 Saturdays, May 13 to June 24, 2006

8:15am to 10:00am

or

10:30am to 12:15pm *

No previous experience is needed.

Classes take place at BFO-Toronto offices 602-36 Eglinton Ave. W.

Mindfulness, which is over 2500 years old, has been described as ‘The Art of Living’. Increasingly, it is becoming recognized as one of the most powerful tools for improving the quality of one’s life. Professor Richard Davidson, a neuroscientist at the University of Wisconsin, who has been studying what happens inside a person’s brain as a result of practices such as Mindfulness, has found that the practice promotes flourishing (health, happiness, creativity, joy) and resilience (the ability to bounce back from difficult times). In a CBC documentary titled, ‘The Pursuit of Happiness’, he concludes that we should think of qualities like happiness as skills - not unlike motor skills like bicycle riding or skiing - skills which can be trained, and that who we are today is not who we have to be tomorrow. Anyone can improve the quality of our lives through this simple practice.

COST:

The cost of this course offered elsewhere in Toronto is upwards of \$500 per person. We are currently looking into private funding to be able to offer these courses on an ongoing basis to BFO-Toronto members. Until such time however, we are only able to offer the 8:15 class FREE OF CHARGE.

* The course being offered at 10:30 is for the facilitator’s paying clients, but BFO members who are able to afford part or all of the program fees are welcome to register for the later class.

Space is limited. RSVP to Betty Ann at 416-440-0290 ext. 11 or barutledge@bfotoronto.ca.

PRESENTER:

Lou Carcasole has been practicing Mindfulness since 1987. He has given many talks on Mindfulness and has conducted Mindfulness programs for staff of several hospitals, corporations, as well as on behalf of social and community service organizations. He has an undergraduate degree in science, and masters degrees in both business and in (adult) Education. Lou is able to present Mindfulness in interesting, clear, and down to earth ways that anyone can understand and benefit from. (For more information about Lou or Mindfulness visit www.radicalgrowth.com)

THE EDGE OF THE WORLD

I sat on the edge of the world and looked into the clouds. I watched as the sky expanded with pink and then collapsed. I could only feel the bench that I sat on.

The day was bright as we drove down the winding road that led to the old brickworks. This was the place where the pieces of the city had been constructed. But it was deconstruction that we were here for. We were looking for a kind of unity made possible by scattering.

It hadn’t been a plan to bring the small red backpack, but it proved a perfect size for the hand carved box that we carefully placed inside of it, just as it had once perfectly fit the small of our mother’s back. We set out on the trail that led into the woods. The trail broadened and the smell of nature that had become hard to find in the city caught us both by surprise. As we made our way silently further along the path we were passed by runners and dog walkers. We both could feel that this was the perfect place for what we were doing. We reached a hill that was overgrown with wild flowers and tall grass. We remembered plummeting down the hill from the park above as children, excited to explore the ponds and sand dunes down the trail. Our mother had come here almost every morning to run and walk; she had come in the wind, snow, rain, and mud.

We brought the knapsack to the top of the hill and sat for a moment. We could feel each other and knew that this was one of those moments. Time had stopped and all that remained was the two of us on that hill with the weight of the wooden box on our shoulders.

The bench floated. I waited for the earth to reform around me. My legs were dangling into darkness. I could see mist coming toward me, slowly brightening the surrounding darkness with its whiteness.

We unbuckled the backpack and took the top off of the box. Carefully we each reached in and grabbed a handful of the small, gritty, grey that had been a life. It was strange to reach into a man-made box and pick up a piece of humankind.

It was fun to throw into the air; the wind lifted it away so easily. I had imagined standing on the top of a hill and throwing the whole bunch into the air all at once, letting the wind breathe it all away. But instead, we sprinkled it, little gasps creating small showers of dust.

We could both feel her energy. Now released from the wooden hold, our mother’s ashes were allowed to grind into the sand and mud as we stepped over them, almost running. When there was little left we took the box out of the bag and took turns throwing the whole thing into the air. The box would turn and the ashes spiraled out, sometimes falling on us. When we looked up at each other we realized that there were grey speckles in our hair, on our faces, in our mouths. Our lives had come full circle.

The mist cleared and I looked down to see the grass sprouting around my feet. I could hear birds in the distance, faintly could see a tree forming out of the corner of my eye.

We stood and looked out over the trees, the ponds, the sprawling city. A jogger and his two dogs ran by, sweat dripping down his forehead. We headed back to the car. The backpack seemed heavier now that it was empty. Something had changed on the top of that hill. The taste in our mouths would never be the same. We had not lost anything by letting the wind take the ashes away.

When I opened my eyes for the last time the world was restored. Everything was fresh and new. As I sat on the edge of the world I watched my new life begin.

This article was submitted by Susie Jacobsen, a student at McGill. Susie’s mom died of cancer last May.

“Real grief is not healed by time... If time does anything, it deepens our grief. The longer we live, the more fully we become aware of who he/she was for us, and the more intimately we experience what their love meant to us. Real, deep love is, as you know, very unobtrusive, seemingly easy and obvious, and so present that we take it for granted. Therefore, it is often only in retrospect – or better, in memory – that we can fully realize its power and depth. Yes, indeed, love often makes itself visible in pain.” - *Henry Nouwen, Bereaved Father*