

VOLUNTEER NEWS

CONGRATULATIONS

Our best wishes to Children's Group Facilitator Kristina Turner on the birth of her daughter, Sasha Jayne Turner, on March 28th. Many blessings to you and your family!

Congratulations to Heather Barnes, bereaved parent and former longtime volunteer with BFO-Toronto on the recent arrivals of her two granddaughters Rebecca and Sophia.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Volunteers Needed For Office Help

- answering phones
- general reception duties
- organizing papers, activities
- 2-3 hours per week

We offer:

- a comfortable environment
- warm & friendly people
- passion for our work
- a highly rewarding feeling

If you are interested, please contact:

Larry Konyu, Office Manager
 Phone 416 440 0290 ext 10
 Email lkonyu@bfotoronto.ca
 Fax 416 440 0304

We would like to acknowledge a donation you have made to honour the special occasions of your loved ones' birthdates, anniversaries, retirements, etc.

Please submit their names and the occasion to:

Larry Konyu at lkonyu@bfotoronto.ca
 or by phone 416 440 0290
 or by fax 416 440 0304
 or by mail 28 Madison Ave,
 Toronto, Ontario M5R 2S1

SPECIAL EVENTS



Grandparents and Grief

A volunteer recently sent us a link to an article on the web about the unique experience of being a bereaved grandparent. It is sometimes described as a "double whammy" of grief: mourning your own loss, as well as the pain of watching your child grieve. Here is the link to the online AARP magazine article for those who might be interested: http://www.aarpsegundajuventud.org/english/issues/2007-AM/07AM_grief.html

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

BFO-Toronto website design by Joli Design, www.jolidesign.ca
 Journey's Newsletter design by: Jenn Lawrence, www.jennlawrence.ca

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WHAT'S INSIDE

02

- BFO Toronto News

03

- Why We Tell Our Stories

04

- Why We Tell Our Stories continued

05

- Angels
- Surviving
- In Memoriam

06

- Share and Support Nights

07

- Support on the Web
- Weaving Threads of Memory

08

- Volunteer News
- Special Events
- Grandparents and Grief

Please Note our Email address & Website:
info@bfotoronto.ca
www.bfotoronto.ca
www.soul2soul.ca

Next Issue:
 July/August 2007
Submission Deadline:
 June 22, 2007
Mailing:
 July 3, 2007

JOURNEYS

A MEMBER SUPPORT NEWSLETTER

Bereaved Families of Ontario
 Toronto
 Founded in 1978



BFO-TORONTO IS PRESENTLY IN A FINANCIAL CRUNCH AND WE NEED YOUR HELP.

I could tell you about the successes that BFO-Toronto has experienced in the last few years - and there have been a lot of them - but you, as a BFO member, know better than anyone how vital our programs and services are.

Instead, I feel like it's more important for me to tell you the truth about our challenges as an organization. We are appealing to you, our community, to continue to (and even increase) your support and I want you to know why.

OUR EXPENSES

Our staffing costs have increased, and project grants cover the increase. In 2002 we completed an environmental scan and the Board approved a focused outreach to two underserved communities – Bereaved Youth and Bereaved Members of the Black/Caribbean Communities. In the past few years, governments, both Provincial and Municipal, have prioritized programs that: reduce the incidence of violence; support youth-based programs; support programs that strengthen community development and build community capacity.

Many of BFO-Toronto's programs are, therefore, perfectly aligned with many funding bodies, including corporations. However, this money is only for projects – short-term initiatives that have an end. We are delighted to receive project funding from Trillium, the Youth Challenge Fund, Service Canada, the City of Toronto's Community Safety Investment Program and an Anonymous Donor, which pay for our Child & Youth Program, In-School Program, Youth Outreach Program and Black Community Outreach Program, and these grants provide money for staff to coordinate the programs.

BUT these funds do not cover core administration costs, office and fundraising staff, nor bereaved parent, infant loss and adult grief programs, i.e. our core programs, with a total expense of \$200,000. The City of Toronto (our only core funding) funds approximately 20% of these costs. Please note that our fundraising and administrative expenses in 2006 amounted to only 29.6% of our total budget (unaudited).

In terms of spending we have been cautious and responsible. For almost two years we
Continued on pg. 2

went without any administrative support and we have sub-let office space at 28 Madison to bring in more income.

OUR REVENUE

Fundraising is challenging. It is becoming increasingly more difficult to obtain corporate and foundation donations. Even though our programs are matching the objectives of these potential donors, there are still many other worthy causes with whom we are competing for limited funds. The RBC Financial Group warns that 10 applications for funding are received by them for every hour of the business day. And again, these funding opportunities do not usually cover core administrative costs.

Revenues from Big Night Out, our auction fundraiser, are declining. For many years, this special event has been driven by the film and advertising industry: they have been the chief contributors to the revenue generated by this event. Unfortunately this generous contribution cannot be assured nor sustained, as the industry struggles with its own present challenges. **Bingo revenue has decreased by 40%.** The good news is that Bingo players cannot smoke in the hall; and the bad news is that fewer people now want to play Bingo in a hall.

We do have long-term plans and one of them is to talk to the Ministry of Health for core funding – we are already on George Smitherman’s waiting list for a meeting, but getting this type of funding takes time. We need money NOW. We know our unique, mutual support model helps bereaved people, like yourself, find hope and healing. Please, invest in our people; invest in our programs and invest in the services we provide. For those of you who have already given, whether it was to support our Power of One-Hundred campaign or because you wanted to offer a memorial donation in memory of your loved one or because you celebrated a special occasion and asked that gifts be sent to BFO-Toronto – *thank you so very much.*

We ask that you donate to BFO-Toronto and know that the money you give is an investment in our future!

Thank you and take care,

Janet Wilson, *Executive Director*

Maureen Ford, *Chair of the Board of Directors*

Why We Tell Our Stories By: Betty Ann Rutledge, Program Manager

I write this in the shadow of the massacre at Virginia Tech and in the wake of the death of June Callwood – two stories dominating our local and international news, two stories of loss and the many different ways we respond to grief as individuals, communities, societies and cultures.

What strikes me again and again is the response – almost a natural instinct - for grieving people to tell their stories in whatever way makes sense to them. Within hours of the school shooting, students turned to their generations’ means of storytelling: the Internet. Memorial websites, My Space & Facebook pages filling with personal accounts of the tragic events as they unfolded – and in the days (and surely months) following, providing a space for people to come together and remember those who died.

Here at home, one of the many ways the community chose to honour June Callwood was a candlelight procession through the streets of Toronto (beginning and ending at two charitable organizations she founded). For three solid days, people streamed in and out of Casey House Hospice

(for people with HIV/AIDS, named after June’s son who died as a result of drunk driver many years ago) to say their own goodbye in part by signing a condolence book. What is it that drives us to mark these experiences by naming, describing, sharing facts and details about who we have lost, what we have lived through and how we are trying to make sense of it?

Counsellor/facilitator/musician Gary Diggins wrote in the aftermath of the April 16th killings: *“There is a common urge to comprehend how this happened, how it was handled, or how future tragedy can be prevented. Nothing serves us better in this grieving or understanding process than STORY. Hearing the stories of others elevates us beyond parochial borders and helps us imagine the particulars of another. Story is the gateway to compassion.*

Human beings have never lost the practice of storytelling. We inform, inspire, or infuriate each other through our personal and collective tellings. What we are missing today, however, are intimate and safe contexts for “storycatching,” places

Support on the Web

My name is James. I lost my sister a year and a half ago. As part of my grieving process I realized that it was comforting to write messages to her even though she would not receive them. I then asked others who had lost loved ones what they thought of writing messages to the departed, and the vast majority thought it was a great idea and themselves wanted to write messages. I recently started a web site “Good Grief,” which is an open collection of messages that underline the fact that grief is good and necessary. Each post is a response to the following question:

“If you could send a message to a deceased loved one, what would you say?”

Writing messages to lost loved ones can be a comforting exercise that brings order to unresolved and confusing thoughts that have lingered since the time of a person’s death. This “letting it out” can be liberating. Reading messages written to lost loved ones can be equally comforting in the recognition of similar post-death feelings experienced by others. Dealing with death is an isolating process, and reading other people’s messages may help ease feelings of loneliness. Both writing and reading messages can be a starting point to the return of some kind of normality in life. <http://grief-is-good.blogspot.com/>

ARE YOU CONCERNED ABOUT GLOBAL WARMING?

We at Bereaved Families of Ontario – Toronto want to do our part to help save this planet. We were wondering how many of you would prefer to receive your newsletter via email (save paper & postage) instead of by regular mail. If you would prefer the electronic method, please email Larry Konyu at lkonyu@bfotoronto.ca and send him your email address. For those of you that prefer the paper copy, please do not worry or feel under any pressure to change. Your needs will gladly be met.

Thanks to all who submitted their email addresses to date. We appreciate your patience as we make the necessary changes to our computer systems. Hopefully, the next issue will be sent electronically.

WEAVING THREADS OF MEMORY

Call for Donations to Collecting Loss: Weaving Threads of Memory

BFO-Toronto volunteers, Karen Haffey & Esther Kalaba, introduce *Collecting Loss: Weaving Threads of Memory*. This community-based art project involves:

Collecting clothing that belonged to people who have died and Collecting the story this clothing evokes from those who loved them.

Donated clothing and stories will become part of a public art exhibit that will share, within a community setting, the often private experiences of losing someone we love.

We are in the gathering phase of Collecting Loss and

need the donation of your deceased loved one’s clothing and your story. Please contribute by June 30, 2007. Please be assured that all clothing and story will be received with love, respect and the recognition that you have entrusted us with something very precious.

This project is reliant on these contributions. Collecting Loss grows out of our personal experiences of loss and we wish to create a living, breathing public art memorial that honours those who have died and the living who loved them. All details are available at www.collectingloss.com, by emailing info@collectingloss.com or by calling 416-846-3909 (Karen) or 416-305-6440 (Esther).

With heartfelt gratitude, *Karen Haffey & Esther Kalaba*
This project is supported by The Canada Council for the Arts

SHARE AND SUPPORT NIGHTS

Come together with other bereaved people to share stories of coping with two very difficult holidays. Each evening will be facilitated by peer volunteers at our offices 28 Madison Ave. (Bloor & Spadina). Space is limited so please RSVP to Betty Ann at 416 440 0290 ext. 11 or barutledge@bfotoronto.ca

How to Handle Mother's Day Thursday, May 10th, 2007 | 7:00pm to 9:00pm

Whether you are someone whose dream of being a mother has been shattered, a parent whose child has died or a young adult or adult whose mother is no longer alive, Mother's Day can be a difficult time. Based on their own experiences, facilitators will share how they have handled Mother's Day and invite you to share your own story.

How to Handle Father's Day Thursday, June 7th, 2007 | 7:00pm to 9:00pm

Whether you are someone whose dream of being a father has been shattered, a parent whose child has died or a young adult or adult whose father is no longer alive, Father's Day can be a difficult time. Based on their own experiences, facilitators will share how they have handled Father's Day and invite you to share your own story.

Youth Drop In (for bereaved young people ages 13-19)

Every second Wednesday from 5:30pm to 7:00pm, bereaved youth are invited to attend a drop in here at the BFO offices. TTC tokens can be provided. For more information contact Sarah Henderson at 416 440 0290 ext. 13 or shenderson@bfotoronto.ca

Mutual Support Bereavement Groups

Closed groups of 8-10 people who have shared similar losses, meet once a week for 10 weeks:

Bereaved Parents who have experienced the death of a child of any age

Bereaved Parents who have experienced an infant/perinatal loss

Young Adults (18-30) who have experienced the death of a parent or sibling

Adults (over 30) who have experienced the death of a parent, sibling, spouse/partner

Children (ages 4-6, 7-9, 10-12) who have experienced the death of a parent/caregiver or sibling

The next full series of groups will begin in September. If enough people are interested/able to commit to a summer group, we will attempt to coordinate groups in July/August. Please call the office if you are interested.

The Dissonance of Spring

From: Healing after Loss, Daily Meditations for Working Through Grief by: Martha Whitmore Hickman

“Speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee.” - Job 12:8

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 we? 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.

where our tales are respectfully held or deeply heard. I believe many of us go to a therapist, a confidante, or a spiritual director to enter this sacred act of storytelling and storycatching.”

It is as if our yearning to tell our stories to one another mirrors the longing we feel for our loved ones who are gone. Telling the story – of their life and their death – is both a necessary task in mourning (Worden's four tasks of mourning* suggests the first is to “accept the reality of the loss”) and a way for us to eventually attempt to make meaning.

Kirsti A. Dyer says in “The Importance of Telling (and Listening to) the Story”: *“Stories help make sense of the insensible. Stories can help people explore other ways of doing, feeling, thinking and behaving. Storytelling can be regarded as one of the oldest healing arts; it has been used for centuries as a universal, useful way for the grieving person to cope with loss.”*

As bereaved people, we are charged with the monumental task of trying to figure out the “new normal” of our lives following the shattering death of a child, sibling, parent or spouse. At BFO, we have always described what we do as helping people “learn how to live with their grief”. One vital element of that learning process is telling our stories.

Kirsti Dyer goes on to say: *“To assimilate a major loss, the grieving person needs to create a private personal story and then confide that story to others. Developing a narrative allows a person to weave together their life changes into a new more cohesive story...Sharing stories of loss can help those grieving overcome the existential crisis that frequently occurs after experiencing loss, by understanding the new identity and accommodating to the life change.”*

I encounter, on a regular basis, that natural desire to confide one's loss story with someone – anyone - who will simply listen, with quiet compassion, respect and sensitivity. People in and outside the walls of BFO-Toronto have an almost urgent need to be received – authentically and in their full humanness – particularly as it relates to the loss experience. And who better to receive these stories than someone who has walked (and still is walking) down a similar road?

I can't tell you how many times I've been at a social gathering and as soon as I tell people where I work, out comes tumbling the precious bits and pieces of their story. It is a sacred space to occupy – this place of “storycatching” - and

I am constantly humbled by the capacity and complexity of people's relationship to grief and loss.

Some might assume that listening to stories of death, loss and grief leaves me feeling nothing but sad and drained. And to be honest, there are days that are harder than others to pick up that telephone - breath held, heart open, feet grounded - to receive the most recent tragic and painful unfolding in someone's life. At the same time, being a bereaved person myself, it is also incredibly affirming to connect with a fellow traveler and begin to weave the common threads of understanding that unite us.

That is our most important task in the BFO community: to be guides in this unfamiliar landscape and to hold the space for our fellow bereaved sisters and brothers as they begin learning to navigate the confusing, painful and relentlessly complex terrain of grief & loss. Forever mindful of the precious gift we are being given – the opportunity to bear witness to the raw authenticity of one of the most life-changing experiences that happens to people on this planet - we are, at the same time, blessed with the chance to continue reflecting on our own deep love for those we have lost and the ways in which our own lives have been irrevocably altered.

There are as many ways to tell our stories as there are stories to tell. Through writing, music, dance, visual arts, ritual – individually and collectively – with our voices & with our bodies – all over the world, we tell our stories of love, loss, surviving and thriving. In this issue of Journeys you will read about a few different mediums for telling your story. The Youth Soul2Soul Podcast project; Collecting Loss, a community-based arts project; and of course, our BFO tradition of mutual support bereavement groups.

Perhaps the summer months ahead will provide you with an opportunity to express your own personal, unique and precious narrative. May the sharing of your continuing grief experience – including the cherished memories of the love that you shared with those that you have had to learn to live without - bring you peace and a deeper understanding of the experience of being human. And may you always find safe spaces for your story to be heard.

*To read Kirsti A. Dyer's complete article on storytelling go to <http://journeyofhearts.org/kirstimd/tellstory.htm>. For more information about Gary Diggins, visit: www.garydiggins.com. *Worden, J.W., *Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy, Second Edition, Spring Publishing Co., NY, 1991**

SURVIVAL MAPS

My mom died when I was 15 years old and for years after she died, I couldn't stand acknowledging "Mother's Day". I focused instead on the evil institution of *Hallmark* who in collaboration with others, seemed bent on breaking my heart and forcing *the motherless* to find caves to crawl into where the calendar pages did not turn. It took me a long time to find a strategy that supports me while I stumble upon and through this day and while I do not have my mother to celebrate with on May 13th, I have moved beyond merely surviving the day to finding ways that I can celebrate her memory. And miraculously enough, there are times when this day now brings me comfort and connection to my mother rather than straight to the cave.

This is not to suggest that anyone needs to stand where I do in relation to these difficult "holidays" (Mother's Day, Father's Day and other difficult days), only that this is the emotional space that I currently inhabit on my journey (and at moments still slip from and return to). For others, especially youth who have recently lost parents, these looming dates are ominous and the mere thought of these calendar dates can threaten to collapse the fine balance that looks like "managing" when we are grieving. However, I wanted to share what has become one of the most helpful things I have learned on my own journey, and that is the importance of having a plan or a map for making it through those days and sharing it with those I care about- it is often the greatest gift we can give to ourselves. It gives us a chance to think about what we will find helpful and gives those who care about us some insight into how they can support us or remember not to take our frame of mind personally. So whether you find yourself needing to Distract and Forget, Release, Express, Connect or Celebrate... here are some ideas for surviving.

- Talk with someone you trust
- Ask family members and friends to tell you about the person who died
- Share personal memories about them with others
- Journal about your memories
- Create or work on a scrapbook
- Write them a letter
- Distract yourself with a game or activity you enjoy

- Participate in a spiritual or cultural ritual that is important to you
- Exercise is out (nothing like exhaustion to help you sleep!)
- Play the songs that make you cry
- Paint (with a brush, with your fingers, with your feet- it's the process not the product!)
- Read something
- Create a memorial page on My Space or Facebook
- Connect with other bereaved people on message boards (www.soul2soul.ca or www.bfotoronto.ca)
- Take something to the grave or memorial site
- Find a safe space to sit and "be present" – focus on the sounds, smells, sights to take you out of your grief and into your surroundings
- Engage in an activity that they would have enjoyed (a hike? A cooking class?)
- Go to a movie with friends (let them know why it's important to protect against feeling abandoned or bitter when friends may be celebrating with their own mothers or fathers)
- Breathe, Meditate, Pray
- Learn something about grief so that you know what you are experiencing

Sarah Henderson,
Child and Youth Program Coordinator

HAPPY 80th BIRTHDAY!
AUDREY WATSON

Thank you for your
many years of support
and wisdom.

Love your friends at BFO-Toronto



Angels

Imagine a night...
When you can fly
In your bed
Up to the moon
And dance...
All night long,
And when you
Come home
Angels are waiting
For only you.
And when you
Lie down it's like sleeping
On a cloud with
Angels dancing around you
And singing lullabies
All nightlong.

About a week before he died, 13-year old Jason Potts told his family of a dream he had -one in which he was flying, and all of his family were in the dream as well. He was so happy and delighted by this dream. After he died, Jason's then 10-year old sister Joanna wrote this poem.

Surviving

The veneer intact
soul shattering along fault lines continuedaily.
Taking precaution is futile -
where can one move
to avoid the earthquakes,
when all tremors are not predictable.
Since you moved,
I seem to be grasping at thin air,
the emptiness between my arms
is more painful than stabbings.
Doubling up with pain
how I wish the kick is from within.
A shadow, a smile, a sound
sprinkles water on my withering hope.
I join the long line
of women
who stay alive with hope
of seeing their child,
return,
denouncing evidence,
that points to death.
Sudharshana, October 24, 2006

My son Philip Paarthipan died suddenly as a result of an autoimmune disorder, a few months before his 23rd birthday on May 26th, 2006.

IN MEMORIAM

Jeremy Tucker
Lonnie Clemens

Paul Norman John Reddick
James Patrick Cummins

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 Office Manager, Larry Konyu at 416 440 0290 extension 10 or via email at lkonyu@bfotoronto.ca to place an order.