

- In This Newsletter: (1) Is being stoic healthy? Science weighs in; (2) Breathe, an award-winning, remarkable book; (3) Short video - Bring happiness to you; (4) The Birthday Of An Angel, A 10-year-old's special book about loss and love; (5) JOIN US - Friends of griefHaven Luncheon - November 10

the grief Haven

OCT 2015 - DEC 2015

Journey

a newsletter for griever and those who support them

THE SCIENCE OF LIFE

Being Stoic For Another's Sake Comes At A High Cost



Is Your Way of Grieving Working? Scientific Research Conducted At Utrecht University and VU University Amsterdam Gives Us A Look At A Specific Grief Process

Research results and article written by the Association for Psychological Science

In the wealth of studies about parental grief, [little attention has been paid to precisely how couples relate to each other as they struggle to come to terms with the death of a child](#). A new study addresses this gap in bereavement research by focusing on the way that couples together process the grief of losing a child.

[Among life's many tragedies, the death of a child](#) is one that is perhaps the greatest for parents. No matter what the age of the child or the cause of death, [the irrefutable fact of the loss is one that shatters the normal cycle of life, leaving parents traumatized and often incapacitated by grief](#).

Research on coping with bereavement has focused primarily on the individual, despite the fact that family and married relationships are all profoundly disrupted by the loss. [But in the wealth of studies about parental grief, little attention has been paid precisely to how couples relate to each other as they struggle to come to terms with the death of a child](#).

A [new research](#) article published in *Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, [addresses this gap](#) in bereavement research by focusing on the way that couples together process the grief of losing a child.

"Scientific literature focused on individual rather than interdependent processes in coping with bereavement, despite the fact that bereaved people do not grieve alone and the way one person grieves likely influences another," says psychological scientist Margaret Stroebe, who conducted the research with her colleagues at the Utrecht University and VU University Amsterdam.

In this study, the [researchers interviewed 219 couples that had lost a child](#). The parents were from [26 to 68 years old](#), and the [causes of their children's death ranged from stillbirth, to illness, accident, SIDS, suicide or homicide](#). They were asked to [rate how much they agreed with statements like](#), "I stay strong for my partner," "I hide my feelings for the sake of my partner," or "I try to spare my partner's feelings." The researchers collected the data at three different timepoints: six, thirteen and twenty months after the loss.

These questions examined a phenomenon they referred to as "[Partner-Oriented Self-Regulation](#)" (POSR), which captures the way in which couples either avoided discussion of their loss or attempted to remain strong for the sake of the partner. **Many husbands and wives believe that these two strategies help to alleviate grief**, but Stroebe and her colleagues [found that the strategies actually exacerbated the problems of grieving](#). **They found that POSR was not only associated with an increase in the person's own grief, but also with an increase in the partner's grief**. Moreover, these relationships persisted over time.

There is a paradox, Stroebe says, "[While parents seek to protect their partners through POSR, this effort has the opposite effect, and it is associated with worse adjustment over time](#). Surprisingly, our results suggest that POSR has costs, not benefits, and not only for the partner but also for the self."

These surprising results may be explained by the role of self-regulation in the grieving process. [Our ability to self-regulate is essential for dealing with the world](#), but exerting [excessive efforts to contain our emotions and regulate our feelings, thoughts, and behavior exact important interpersonal and individual costs](#). Like a muscle that becomes exhausted after exertion, [too much self-regulation actually depletes our ability to self-regulate](#) in various domains including physical health and goal accomplishment.

Ultimately, [these attempts at self-regulation may prevent partners from coping with the loss of their child](#). Suppressing emotions can have adverse effects on grief between couples. One partner may think that painful feelings aren't accepted, for example, or a partner might misinterpret no apparent grief as a lack of actual grief.

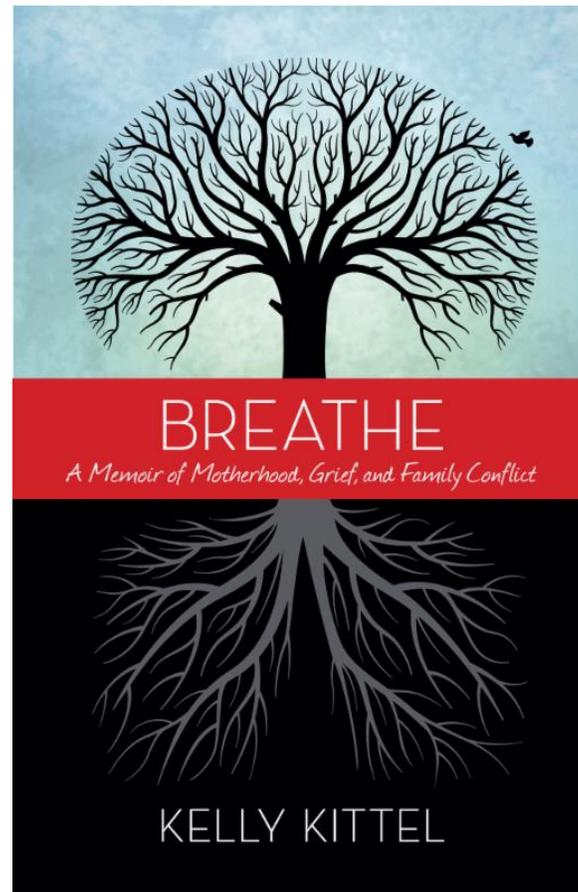
"One important implication of this research is that, when appropriate, parents can move

away from POSR and toward sharing their grief, thereby easing their suffering," Stroebe says.

Journal Reference:

1. M. Stroebe, C. Finkenauer, L. Wijngaards-de Meij, H. Schut, J. van den Bout, W. Stroebe. **Partner-Oriented Self-Regulation Among Bereaved Parents: The Costs of Holding in Grief for the Partner's Sake.** *Psychological Science*, 2013; DOI: [10.1177/0956797612457383](https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797612457383)

RECOMMENDED READ



Winner: IPNE Best Book of the Year/Best Narrative Nonfiction
Winner: Honorable Finalist Readers' Choice International Book Awards
#1 Amazon Best-Seller!

"Some have Maya Angelou. I have Kelly Kittel." - Cyndi Curtis, *Stuff Made Simple*

"The courtroom scenes are as riveting as any John Grisham novel,
but all this is true." - Diane LaRue, *Book Chick Di*

"Breathe is also an important book to be read
by anyone who has not lost a child." - Wendell Whitmore, VP, *griefHaven*

BREATHE

Reviewed by Wendell Whitmore, Vice President,
griefHaven, Erika's Dad

Woosh! I feel I can finally breathe again for the first time since I started this memoir--ironically titled, *Breathe*--four days ago! (I'm sure I would have been compelled to read through nonstop if I hadn't been interrupted by the need to help move my mother-in-law.) Now that I have my breath, let me just say this is an extraordinary book that takes



Kelly Kittel

you on a journey that you don't want to stop.

Despite Kelly's "Acknowledgements" notes, I feel I have just finished a family story of truly epic proportions. Being a high school English teacher, I have to explain that I say "epic" not only because it is tragic and of extended scope, but also because of its great depth and incalculable moment to all times and cultures, especially ours. When it comes to understanding grief, to realizing other's unpredictable reactions to grief, and, particularly, to preparing for idiosyncratic family reactions to grief, I simply cannot imagine a book of more importance than *Breathe*, a book which articulates these issues more clearly than any I have read. So lucid are Kelly's accounts, I kept having to remind myself this is not an artificially constructed novel, but a true-to-life

memoir!

My heart goes out to Kelly and her family for what they had to endure with Andy's family (Kelly's husband). I was repeatedly thunderstruck at how consistently Kelly attempted to remain open, loving, and kind when faced with such an onslaught. What a courageous soul she is! Families and friends betraying, even cruelly hurting, their purported loved ones is a theme, sadly, all too familiar to many who are grieving. For some reason, it seems



almost axiomatic that at least some family members will, upon the loss of a child, take the position of "I know better than you," even though they have no understanding of even the elementals of grief support. Such "knowing" friends and relatives reject feedback or attempts to give them information and often begin the defensive tact of then blaming the griever.

I believe such ignorance is a sign of our times, when many seem to believe the best approach to grief is to "hide it away" and "get over it" as quickly as possible. Such widely followed canards certainly belie an "advanced" modern culture. As to why family members seem to react negatively more than others, I can only assume that, from a higher perspective, difficult family members may be brought together to challenge our learning and to charge our growth-learning and growth that may, at times, feel less like sandpapering and more like chiseling.

Breathe is also an important book to be read by anyone who has not lost a child, since it articulates the depth and breadth of the grief process as few have. Selectively, *Breathe* serves as an educational physic to a society largely unenlightened in the way of grief. By selectively I mean that some newly grieving parents do not want to see a movie, watch a T.V. show, or read a book that involves the loss of a child. Others, further down the path of grief, will want to read the book and assuredly find much comfort, knowledge, and understanding therein. This is not a big deal--it only means that, in reviewing the book for this newsletter, I must caution parents upfront that, though the book contains much that can help them, Kelly describes in detail the pain and despair consequent to the loss of some of her children...and that newly grieving parents may elect not to read it at this time. The exception I might make to such a caution would be for parents who have lost a child to miscarriage or stillbirth, since

these losses are so often slighted, and this memoir makes it so very clear why they should not be.

I am in awe of anyone who takes an experience such as Kelly's and turns it into something written, but to do so with the depth and breadth Kelly has given us, the reader, in *Breathe* is paramount to the greatest writers out there. Yes. This book is a page turner because it is a classic that will, hopefully, live on as it continues enlightening people for generations to come.

To purchase or read more about *Breathe*: [Breathe](#)

SOMETHING TO CONSIDER...

Has the Joy and Happiness You Used to Experience Disappeared? Here's What You Can Do About It. It Works! by Susan Whitmore, Founder & President, Erika's Mom

When we lose someone we love, our grief can sometimes be so overwhelming that we no longer feel the joy and happiness that occurs naturally around us, and things that used to make us laugh or smile no longer do. This is a very normal grief reaction and, even if we did nothing at all, experiencing the joy and happiness life has to offer would eventually return.

Living every day without at least some semblance of moments of joy and happiness makes our grief journeys even harder. Fortunately, we don't have to live without it. Further, research shows that having moments of gratitude, a sense of awe, and even a real smile or chuckle helps us with our sorrow as we continue our grief journeys. We need as much help as we can get, right? So what can we do when it feels as if we have lost that ability to smile or laugh and truly feel it? Answer: discover what does it for you, and then go out and create it. Here's how.

In the beginning, you might not even know what makes you feel a moment of joy or puts a smile on your face, so you have to try different things. These do not have to be major projects or events, although you can certainly do that if you choose. Rather, they can be simple things. For instance, below you will see two things I discovered worked for me. You see, short bursts of joy or happiness are very powerful and remind us that life holds promise.

Idea 1: Looking at photos or watching videos of adorable or funny animals. Seriously. Did you know that one of the top five categories of You Tube videos people watch regularly involve animals just being cute or doing funny things? That is because cute and funny animals make us smile and laugh.

For instance...
OMG! Does it get more adorable than this?
**Are you smiling? Feeling happy? Experiencing a moment
of something positive inside?**



Just look at those little pink noses and mouths, bright blue eyes, and those funny curled ears. I know most of you feel something nice, even if just for a second. Just working on this article and seeing those little faces over and over again has made me chuckle so many times.

Okay, so what did I do to create that moment for you? I simply put this photo here for you to see. In fact, many people tell me that their cats or dogs saved them in the beginning of their grief. Plus, it's almost impossible to keep from at least smiling while looking at these kittens.

You see, because we are so used to experiencing joy and happiness as it occurs without us doing anything to create it, we forget that *we can actually create it ourselves*. We don't have to "wait" for that organic moment to simply "happen" on its own. Yet, throughout our lives, most of us have never thought of actually creating the very thing that we know will give us some joy, and that was even before our grief. Now doing so is paramount!

Idea 2: A picture is worth a thousand words, and so is a video. Here's something else I did to make me laugh, smile, and give me endless moments of entertainment as I sat on my deck.

Watch this short video to see what I did. It's SO easy to do.



Create Joy and Happiness This Way

And what about when birds land on our water fountain? That is really fun to sit and watch. Those little birds hop up and down, jumping into the fountain's water, flapping their wings to clean themselves, dunking their little heads under the water, then shaking their entire bodies to get the water off, and finish it off with a delicate sip of water to quench their thirst, turning their faces to the sky to swallow. Well...I can't help but have a huge smile on my face. Plus, birds can be hysterically funny!

So there you have it! Now, all you need to do is simply figure out something simple that gives you a moment here and there, then make it happen! Like what about buying some Milkweed and raising Monarch butterflies. We did, and the two that hatched still fly all over our garden.

Just remember that doing something is the key. It's about self-compassion (a topic for another time) and supporting yourself along the way. YOU are worth it!

A CHILD'S RECOMMENDED READ

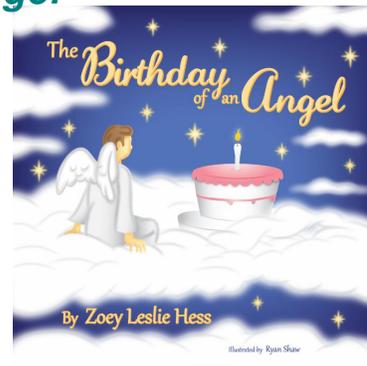
TEN-YEAR-OLD ZOEY FINDS SOLACE AFTER LOSING HER GRANDPA BY CREATING A BEAUTIFUL CHILDREN'S BOOK

THE BIRTHDAY OF AN ANGEL

About *The Birthday Of An Angel*

Written by 11-year-old Zoey Leslie Hess, *The Birthday of an Angel* is Zoey's inspirational journey of the everlasting relationship she has with her grandfather, affectionately known as her Papa. Zoey shares that our loved ones never die, but rather become our angels who are always with us.

The Birthday Of An Angel examines the loss of a loved one from the unique perspective of a child. Both children and adults can easily identify with this story and use the information to develop their own coping skills. If you're searching for a book about the loss of a loved one, this is a beautiful gift that is sure to resonate with readers of all ages.



About Zoey

Zoey Leslie Hess is an 11-year-old who attends Shlenker Elementary in Houston, Texas. Her favorite colors are blue, pink and purple. Her favorite class/subject is Language Arts. She loves to play volleyball, tennis, draw, as well as hanging out with her family and friends. When Zoey grows up, she wants to be a psychologist or maybe a lawyer.

With her Papa, Zoey always remembers playing in her toy kitchen and preparing and serving him all of his favorite foods. She wrote this book to share her own experience and to help people. "I lost Papa, who was extremely present and important in my life," she said. "I want *The Birthday of an Angel* to explain how you can still have connections with your loved ones when they pass away. I want to help other children find a positive way to heal and assist in finding those feelings and connections they shared with their own loved one."

Zoey also wrote this book for Papa. "It was a great way for me to share how great of a man he was and express how much he means to me." Zoey wants people to know that their loved one (their angel) will always be with them and that, when you feel alone or sad, believe that you are still connected--that they are always in your heart.

To purchase or read more about Zoey's special book: [The Birthday Of An Angel](#)

EVENTS

[Click Here To Learn More About Our 2015 Luncheon Event](#)



invites you to our

2015

"Live Your Best Life" Luncheon
November 10, 2015 10:30am-2:00pm
Luxe Hotel, Los Angeles

Featuring
WendiKnox

inspirational speaker - gifted writer - talented artist

After spending 25 successful years in the corporate advertising world, Wendy established her own line of inspirational products called Oh My Goddess. A life-changing event in her 50s led Wendi to begin the Dragonfly Movement to help encourage women to age exuberantly. Wendy is a successful author, blogger, and speaker whose mission is to uplift, inspire, and remind others that it's never too late to soar. Wendy's unique sense of humor and a message that speaks to the heart are sure to transform and inspire us all.



For more about Wendi: [Wendi Knox](#)

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