

THE PARENT

Journey

a *griefHaven* newsletter for grieving parents and those who support them

april - june 2014

no grief, no relief: why grieving is the price of healing

by arleah shechtman

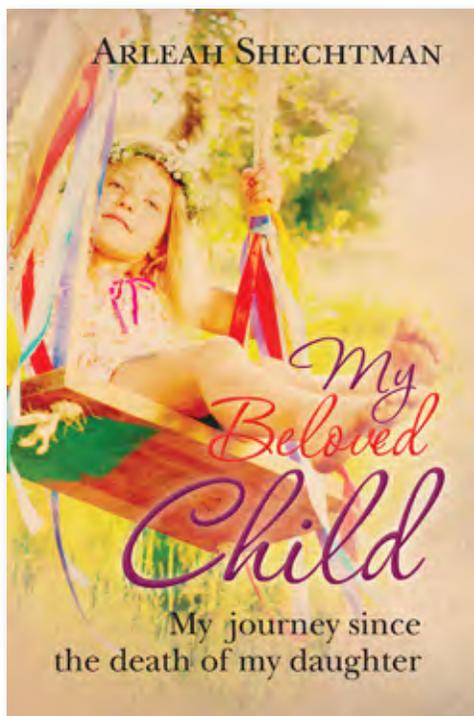
**griefHaven
RECOMMENDED
READ**

The loss of a loved one is terrible, and it can be tempting to do anything in your power to avoid the pain. However, says Arleah Shechtman, you must choose to feel and face your grief. Only then will you truly begin to heal.

If you've ever lost someone you deeply loved, you know the truth: Our culture doesn't believe in grief. Sure, people will come to the funeral, give awkward hugs, and send flowers, but let a few weeks pass, and you're expected to "move on" and to get (or at least act) "back to normal." For this reason—and because it's so painful to face the full brunt of our loss—many of us lock our grief away. We distract ourselves with work, numb ourselves with drugs (prescribed or otherwise), or maybe just trudge through the day in a dull state of stoicism.

It's understandable. Grief sucks. No one wants to acknowledge—and certainly not feel firsthand—the raw, primal, out-of-control emotions that come along with great loss. But psychotherapist and executive coach Arleah Shechtman says that without grief there can be no healing.

"My fifteen-year-old daughter Sharon died nearly thirty-five years ago of a drug overdose, and in the decades since, I have learned that grief is an ongoing, never-ending process," says Shechtman, author of the new book *My Beloved Child: My journey since the death of my*



where hope resides

Resurrection - griefHaven on the *Good Morning America* show ([click here](#))

Inspired by the new TV show, *Resurrection*, the producer from *Good Morning America* contacted me to see if I would address the question, "What if someone you loved really could come back?" Interestingly, I had already done my own little research project, asking griefHaven parents this question: "If you were given the option to have your child back for one day and then leave again, would you take it?" I thought for sure almost everyone would say, "No way. I could never go through that pain twice." Yet, you surprised me, since 62% of you said you would do it in a heartbeat, even if it meant going through the initial pain again. The rest said, "No way!"

Thanks to Arleah Shechtman for her insightful and meaningful article about why we need to grieve. This article is filled with poignant truths that will help everyone. I urge you to share it.

Alice Wisler discovered that memorializing our children can be "carved in memory," as she shares what led her and her husband to creating special plaques doing just that.

You'll see that we have a new section in our newsletters entitled Friends of griefHaven: *Now You Know™* where we keep you abreast of what our Friends are doing and all that griefHaven has been and will be up to.

By the way, I will be in St. Augustine, Florida June 27, 28, and 29 giving the keynote presentation for the TJ Coughlin Jay Fund Foundation. If you are interested in having me do something for your group while I am there, please contact our office.

Last, check out the details of our new TV show by watching this two-minute explanation. [Click here.](#)



~ Susan Whitmore
founder & president

daughter (Fifth Wave Leadership Publications, 2012, ISBN: 978-1-4750469-9-1, \$13.95). “And I’ve also discovered that you have to make the choice to grieve—not just at the beginning, but again and again as the years go by. Unfortunately, society discourages us from making that choice.”

Grieving is messy, nonlinear, and unpredictable. In a society that values “bucking up,” moving on, bringing order out of chaos, and finding salvation through hard work, this is downright inconvenient. Plus, as Shechtman has discovered from counseling patients, people are afraid if they fully experience the crushing pain of loss, they’ll be totally swamped with unmanageable feelings for the rest of their lives.

“Grief can be delayed through various tactics, but it can’t be denied altogether,” Shechtman warns. “However, exerting that much control over your emotions, thoughts, and body is very stressful and will impact your physical health. Even more dire is the emotional and spiritual stagnation that a suppression of grief causes. When you choose not to grieve, you will be unable to rebuild a meaningful, fulfilling, and loving life—which I promise is possible, even though you will never ‘complete’ the grieving process.”

Shechtman’s book describes in brutal and powerful detail what it’s like to make the

choice to grieve—over and over again. Each chapter describes her experiences during a given five-year time block, ranging from the first five years to thirty-five years after the loss. The book is interspersed with her raw, moving, and beautiful poems, which played a large role in her healing process. And while it’s written from the perspective of a parent who has lost a child, its lessons will be invaluable to anyone who has experienced a loss.

Here, Shechtman offers advice on how to view and handle grief, and insight as to how facing it can ultimately help you to heal.

Don’t squelch your grief. It’s okay if you make other people uncomfortable. Grief isn’t something we learn. It’s instinctive and primal, and expressing it isn’t something that you can plan, script, or tone down—nor should you attempt to. The emotions you are feeling go beyond words, concepts, or thoughts. And only by fully expressing them can you begin to heal.

“Cry, scream, and allow yourself to ride the waves you’re feeling,” urges Shechtman. “I remember wailing, keening, and crying many times after losing Sharon. Years after her death, I found myself screaming and jumping up and down in anger while visiting her grave. All of these behaviors transgress the boundaries of ‘polite’ and even ‘acceptable’ behavior, but believe me, they are necessary—and society’s unwritten rules about the expression of grief are unhealthy and wrong. Trust your process.”

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Grief comes in waves. Let them happen. They will pass. These waves, which surface at unpredictable times, are relatively short in duration but may be very intense. When you ride the waves to the crest and express whatever is there, the wave will ebb, and you will be able to go on living for awhile. And over time, the waves of grief happen further apart and are less intense and devastating. Realize, though, that if you ignore your feelings, you will never experience “normal,” because your intense emotions will always be trying to escape. The magic of having your feelings is that there is a beginning, a middle, and an end, and then you can go on to something else. Not having them, they lay there like a sour stomach, never quite resolving themselves.

Don’t expect to ever “get over it.” It’s true that the way you feel and express grief will change over time, but you will never reach a point where you say to yourself, “I’m finished grieving.”

Don’t listen when people try to silence you with a Valium or prayer. The expression of grief is often deeply uncomfortable for others to witness.



Sharon as a teenager

And after weathering the initial shock of losing a loved one, as Shechtman has pointed out, others want the bereaved to “move on,” to adopt a stoic attitude, or to medicate themselves—anything to avoid being reminded of and upset by fears they themselves don’t dare to contemplate.

Allow yourself to feel anger. It doesn’t make you a bad person.

When Shechtman insists on the importance of expressing your grief, she means anger, too. This is often an especially thorny emotion to process because it involves the need to place blame, which can sometimes fall on the dead person and/or on the bereaved. These expressions of anger are seen as inappropriate and elicit protests such as, “It’s not fair,” “The dead aren’t here to defend themselves,” “They didn’t die on purpose,” “You’re being selfish,” etc.

Visit the gravesite as often as you need to. Gravesites, shrines, and other meaningful locations are critical to the grieving process. Just as funerals help us say a final good-bye and make the loss real, gravesites give us a physical place to remember and grieve. If your loved one was cremated and the ashes scattered, you may want to create a memory garden or perhaps a “shrine” in your home with the person’s photo, a memento that reminds you of her, and perhaps a candle or religious symbol.

Don’t be afraid to ask for help. As Shechtman has acknowledged, it’s all too easy to sink into a private, quiet, internal place that feels safe. The false bargain you’re making with yourself is, “If I don’t think about her or talk about her, then she won’t be so gone.” Asking for and accepting help is another conscious choice you will need to make. And the support of other people really does make a difference, says Shechtman. While she isn’t conventionally religious, she says she felt a persistent sense of being “held up” by all the prayers, good wishes, and positive vibes sent her way.



Sharon’s brother, David, her dad and Sharon



David and Sharon

“Consciously choosing to lift my eyes, to see joy and possibilities, to build relationships, and to live instead of dying with my child have resulted in some of the happiest years of my life.”

Loving in the midst of grief may feel like a risk. It is. Take it anyway. After experiencing loss, it’s natural to want to do anything and everything in your power to avoid feeling such bitter pain again. You may want to wall yourself off from life, love, and relationships of all sorts. However strong the temptation is, though, please don’t make this mistake. Despite the guilt, anguish, and self-doubt you may feel, make the choice to risk loving again.

“Best—and most surprising—of all was the aftermath of choosing to love again,” she reveals. “Consciously choosing to lift my eyes, to see joy and possibilities, to build relationships, and to live instead of dying with my child have resulted in some of the happiest years of my life. And because I have been in both places—isolation and community—the contrast is startling.”

Allow new values and priorities to emerge, even if they don’t reflect the “old” you. As you begin to move on and heal from your loss, you will view, experience, and interact with the world in a different way. Shechtman remembers not understanding why she couldn’t be “like everyone else.” “I kept getting pushback for being too harsh or too blunt,” she explains. “I no longer had any tolerance for political correctness, and I considered my relationships to be more precious. I found myself more open with people I cared about, as well as more confrontational and demanding, since I didn’t want to leave anything unsaid or undone ever again. Essentially, I was choosing my values of growth and honesty over comfort. I decided that perfection was no longer a goal; being honest and authentic was.”

Do something meaningful to memorialize your lost loved one.

Grief is a process, and according to Shechtman, an important part of the process is “in memoriam.” It’s the need to do something creative, useful, and meaningful as a result of an event that once seemed (and

might still seem) meaningless, needless, and/or absurd. For example, you might create a foundation or support group.

Stay open to the possibility of joy. It will come. While it may be difficult to believe or understand immediately following the loss of a loved one, there is a silver lining to grief. Keeping current with sorrow (i.e., allowing yourself to grieve naturally and whenever you need to) gives you new depths of appreciation for life, joy in small delights, and a richness in relationships you may not have known was possible.

call 'living from the gut.' This is the payoff for choosing to allow yourself to grieve: After experiencing the lowest of lows, your soul and your psyche can also stretch to experience greater highs because the psyche stretches in all directions, much like a balloon."

"While I cannot give you a lesson plan for grieving, I can share my own experiences and assure you that there can still be hope, healing, and happiness in your life," Shechtman concludes. "I know it will be painful, but I hope you will make the choice to fully and naturally grieve the loss of those you love. It might comfort you to realize that

The biggest surprise I've had after Sharon's death is that my grieving has opened me up to all that is beautiful and wonderful about this world. My appreciation for others and their struggles is greater, and I stop to smell the roses more often—something I call 'living from the gut.'"

"The biggest surprise I've had after Sharon's death is that my grieving has opened me up to all that is beautiful and wonderful about this world," Shechtman says. "My appreciation for others and their struggles is greater, and I stop to smell the roses more often—something I

the life you build from this point on wouldn't have been possible without the love you felt—and still feel—for your loved one. In a very real way, he or she is still a vital part of who you are.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Arleah Shechtman, M.S.W., A.C.S.W., is the author of *My Beloved Child: My journey since the death of my daughter*. She is a recognized expert on the impact of the death of a child on marriages, families, and individual survivors. For over thirty years, she has helped parents, siblings, grandparents, and extended family grieve the loss of children and guided them on their journeys of recovery. In addition, she has consulted with healthcare professionals whose practices involve working with clients who have lost children through illnesses, accidents, suicide, and acts of crime.

Arleah began her own journey of recovery thirty-four years ago after the death of her fifteen-year-old daughter. She has transformed her own tragedy into a personal and professional mission to create places and resources where those struggling with the death of a child can find solace, support, and understanding of their irreparable loss.



ABOUT THE BOOK:

My Beloved Child: My journey since the death of my daughter

(Fifth Wave Leadership Publications, 2012, ISBN: 978-1-4750469-9-1, \$13.95) is available at Amazon.com, the Amazon Kindle Store, and at www.mybelovedchild.net.

carved in memory

by alice wisler

One night after my son Daniel died, I was out on our deck, thinking of him. When wasn't I thinking of him? Who is going to remember this little four-year-old who ran outside naked to pick tomatoes from the garden? I wondered who, besides me, would recall his laughter and kisses—his life had been too short. Then the words, almost as though brought to me from Heaven herself, came: "Who will remember those who no longer sing on earth? We, who hear their songs from Heaven."

The verse was first placed on glossy postcards with stars and shared with those who had also had children die, and it expanded to anyone who had lost a loved one. A woman was sent a Songs From Heaven card when her husband died, and, to this day, she keeps it on her fridge door because it brings her solace.

Years later, when my husband and I opened our Carved By Heart shop, we created a plaque with those words I had heard so long ago, realizing how meaningful

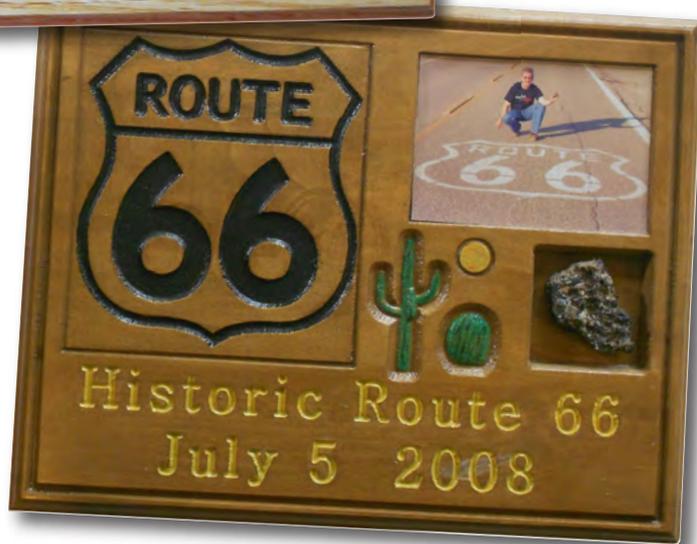
it would be if people could add the name of their loved one under the verse that meant so much to me and to others. The plaque could be for either indoor or outdoor display, in a garden, or anywhere a person wanted to put it. As orders came in, we were grateful to be able to offer the plaques to everyone with holes in their hearts.

We also thought of a plaque that could encase a personal memento (a shell from a beach trip, a trinket from a vacation in the mountains, or anything else you can think of), as well as a color photo of a loved

one. The plaques could tell the story of a special day or a week, and so our Story of a Memory plaque was designed.

Our memorial plaques are made of solid red Oak, carved with love. We want to encourage others to recall their memories, whether they were many or few—it is important to remember with love.

Stop by our shop to see the remembrance items we have for you. Email us with ideas you'd like to see on a plaque. Our slogan is, "If you think it; we carve it." We enjoy working with customers to create something memorable and fresh.



Daniel

I wondered who, besides me, would recall (Daniel's) laughter and kisses—his life had been too short."



Alice J. Wisler, author of *Getting Out of Bed in the Morning: Reflections of Comfort in Heartache*, speaker, writing instructor, blogger, and mom to Daniel (August 25, 1992-February 2, 1997).

<https://www.etsy.com/shop/CarvedByHeart>

Friends of griefHaven Now You Know™

Friends of griefHaven continues spreading the word that griefHaven is here with new grief tools and knowledge – online, in person, to everyone in need

2014 CURE Childhood Cancer Event, Atlanta, GA

Susan Whitmore, Founder & President of griefHaven - Keynote Speaker and Presenter

Little did I know that the morning of January 25, 2014, would see the beginning of a life-changing experience for me. You see, it was the first time with all of the speaking engagements I had conducted that I was in front of a room filled with parents, grandparents, and siblings whose children had all died from cancer. As you know, cancer is what ended Erika's life.



Karen McCarthy, Lisa Branch, Wendell & Susan Whitmore, Sharon Bryan, Rhetta Ascari

There were 130 people present, and I gave a PowerPoint presentation that included new information about grief, as well as the latest on the grieving brain. On Saturday, I facilitated two workshops, and Sunday morning I was honored to give the final, inspirational presentation that ended with a special song, *Sing: A Song to My Mom*—a song inspired by Erika and, for the first time, dedicated to all mothers and fathers around the world. At the end of the video of *Sing*, the cohesion and love amongst everyone was palpable, and we emerged into a big, hugging, beating heart of love, filled with tears and appreciation for each other.

Thank you to the amazing CURE staff for everything they do every day to support the families in need of hope and love by allowing me to be a part of one of the most amazing weekends of my life!

Pacific Palisades Women's Center

On March 4, griefHaven received a grant to be used to subsidize grief counseling and to pay for 30 free packets of hope to families in need.

The PPWC works hard every year to raise funds through its annual Home and Garden Tours, where it then uses those funds to award grants to community organizations. Thank you PPWC for your ongoing support!

Upcoming Events

 Susan Whitmore, Founder & President of griefHaven, will be in St. Augustine, Florida, June 27, 28, and 29 as the Keynote Presenter for the incredible TJ Coughlin Jay Fund Organization. If you are interested in Susan doing something in close proximity while she is there, please contact our office.

 FOGH Council members are now working on the logistics for the 2014 Live Your Best Life luncheon AND the 2015 gala awards dinner to be held in Los Angeles. More about upcoming events soon!

 griefHaven has been intimately involved with Dr. Mary-Francis O'Connor and her research regarding the grieving brain. As many of you know, we are very passionate about this project. We hope to be able to raise the \$90,000 needed to do the third portion of the research project which will be using fMRIs (functional MRIs) to look into the brains of parents whose children have died. The results of this project will help millions of people all over the world. If you would like to know more about donating to this important research project, please contact Susan Whitmore directly. Your donations will literally change lives and the way the world approaches grief.

Fancy Feet "Gift of Light" Dance Event

On Saturday, March 15, the talented children from the Fancy Feet Dance Studio of



Pacific Palisades danced their little tails off for a spectacular griefHaven fundraising event. Through the generosity of owner Emily Kay/Tillman, the entire proceeds, \$7,611, was given to support griefHaven's important work in this world. ([To see the Fancy Feet page, click here](#)). A big thank-you goes out to Emily, Patty, and the amazing staff! griefHaven will support so many families with this generous donation.

Good Morning America TV Show

Did you miss it? If you did, no problem! Watch griefHaven on the *Good Morning America* show ([click here to watch](#)) talking about the new TV show *Resurrection*, with comments that griefHaven parents gave about how they would feel if their child really were to return.

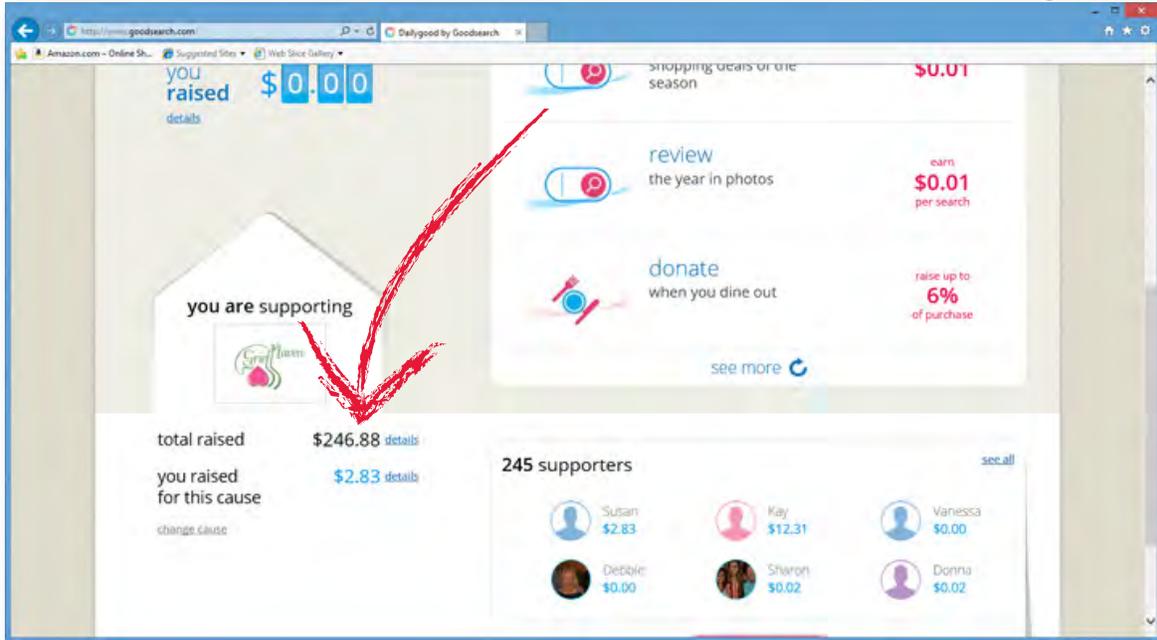
Now You Know™ Television and Educational Shows

Exciting news! griefHaven is going to start an online TV show and short educational videos covering a variety of topics that will help educate the world about grief. The actual TV show is entitled *Now You Know™* and will cover topics other than just grief. The short educational videos, also *Now You Know™*, will cover various grief topics. [Click here to watch.](#)

SAY WHAT?

Did we say you can earn money by simply surfing the Net? YOU BET!

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And help so many other families in need find us!

