



where brothers and sisters are heard

THE SIBLING

VOICE

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adult sibling grief—the overlooked griever

by dr. t.j. wray

Three months after my brother died, I bumped into a friend I hadn't seen in about six weeks. When she asked how I was doing, I naturally assumed she was concerned about how I was handling my grief. (This particular friend sent me a lovely condolence letter a few days after my brother's death.) When I told her that I was "doing as well as could be expected, considering the circumstances," she looked confused. "What 'circumstances'?" she asked. Feeling somewhat confused myself, I reminded her that my brother died just three months earlier. She squeezed my arm and said, "Don't you think it's time to let go of all that stuff and get on with your life?" Having my grief reduced to a pile of "stuff" by someone I thought was a friend was almost more than I could bear; sadly, most grieving people are able to relate similar stories of insensitivity. This lack of compassion for the bereaved is especially commonplace in America, where our attitudes about death, dying, and grief mirror our hurry-up, drive-through-window culture.

There seems to be a preconceived timetable of grief in this country that tolerates mourning for about six weeks. After that, the message is clear: It's

time to move on. But my friend's thoughtless comment actually points to a more complex reality: Not only are we allotted a specific time period for grieving, but there also seems to be an unwritten pecking order of mourners. For example, the death of children, parents, or spouses are generally considered to be "major losses" (and they surely are!); while the deaths of grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, friends, and pets are often relegated to the minor leagues by non-grievers. I want to believe that this unspoken ranking system is unconscious, but experience has taught me otherwise. The truth is, all losses are relative to the mourner. For example, for one person the loss of a treasured grandparent may be more traumatic than the loss of a parent. The depth of our grief is directly proportional to the relationship and love we had for the deceased.



reading between the leaves

by susan whitmore

We have a hummingbird nest in the Ficus tree next to our front door. It has been amazing, week after week, watching the mother bird make the nest. Each day I have carefully approached the tree and gently peeked around the leaves, watching the mother bird nesting in her trance state. And then...this one day arrived when I peeked around the leaves, and there they were: two little beaks



Hummingbird outside the Whitmore's door

bobbing up and down from inside the nest (I took these photos, and this is exactly what I saw.) As I moved in just a teensy bit closer to ensure that my eyes were seeing correctly, the mother bird suddenly came screeching around the corner, her teeny little body hovering in the air, her wings fluttering so madly they sounded like giant fans moving at high speed. She began chirping and shrieking at me! "Oh my God, little mother bird," I said, "I know just how you feel." I apologized and moved away.

A mother hummingbird. A mother bear. A mother seal. A mother dog. A

continued on page 5

In the case of adult sibling grief, a split occurs. The death of a brother or sister in childhood brings condolence, support groups, and books in great abundance. The death of a brother or sister in adulthood, however, is entirely a different story. When an adult sibling dies, surviving siblings are usually cast into the role of caregiver rather than legitimate mourner. Condolences are reserved for the parents, spouse, and surviving children (if there are any), while surviving siblings are instead often assigned tasks. In lieu of sympathies, others admonish them to take care of their parents or to look after their deceased sibling's spouse or children. And, when a condolence is given, it's usually in the form of an inquiry about so-called "legitimate grievers." "Your brother/sister died? How awful! How are your parents?" Few condolers seem to recognize the fact that we've experienced a profound loss, too.

The sibling relationship is more complex than nearly any other, a mixture of affection and ambivalence, camaraderie and competition. Aside from our parents, there is no one else on earth that knows us better because, like our parents, our brothers and sisters have been beside us from the very beginning. Unlike our parents, however, our siblings are people we assume will be part of our lives for the rest of our lives. In terms of the span of time, the intimacy, and the shared experience of childhood, no other relationship rivals the connection we have with our adult brothers or sisters. From schoolyard bullies to teenage broken hearts, from careers to marriage to dreams unfulfilled, our siblings have been there through it all—life partners in our journey through time. They are the keepers of secrets, perennial rivals for our parents' affections, and a secure and familiar constant in an often precarious and uncertain world. Why, then, are surviving siblings often passed over and even ignored in the grief process, not only by condolers, but also by some (but certainly not all) of the so-called grief professionals?

As I began to speak more openly about this topic, I found that there were countless cases of unresolved grief among other surviving siblings. As one bereaved sibling put it, "How could I go into mourning when I had my brother's wife and children to take care of, not to mention my parents? I can't recall anyone ever asking me how I felt during that time." I soon reached the conclusion that adult sibling bereavement is what psychologists call a disenfranchised loss,

which, in simple terms, means that society fails to classify our mourning as a legitimate loss.

Since the publication of my book "Surviving the Death of a Sibling: Living Through Grief When an Adult Brother or Sister Dies," I have been honored to speak with thousands of bereaved brothers and sisters who have helped me to both understand and articulate this often-neglected type of grief. In many ways, I feel as if I have been drafted into a club no one would ever voluntarily join. My fellow club members—my brothers and sisters in grief—travel beside me down a path riddled with potholes and pitfalls. Some navigate the path better than others, for their path is well worn. And there are those who embark more tentatively, afraid and uncertain where their journey may take them. I have observed an odd solace and comfort in the company of the "liked bereaved," because we understand each other, often without saying a word.

Surviving siblings continue to encourage my

efforts to draw attention to this unique type of loss, and they have taught me to keep moving forward, even when I am weary from the effort. Indeed, in the midst of their own sorrow, they often take the time to send me a note to share their stories or to just say thanks. But more than anything, my kindred siblings have taught me that we, when we reach out to others, not only keep the memories of our precious siblings alive, but we also heal a little, too.

As we each seek out our own way forward, I offer thanks and gratitude for all the wonderful sibs who continue to grace my life with friendship and hope. I wish all of you peace.



V.J. and T.J.

About Dr. T.J. Wray

Dr. T.J. Wray is an adult sibling survivor and an Associate Professor of Religious and Theological Studies at Salve Regina University. She is the creator of

www.adultsiblinggrief.com and the author of the best-

Surviving the Death of a Sibling: Living Through Grief When an Adult Brother or Sister Dies, as well as many other books and articles. An inspirational,

dynamic public speaker, she has spoken before a variety of groups, both nationally and internationally. She has appeared on numerous radio talk shows across the country, including NPR, and has been featured on various television programs, including the History Channel. To learn more about Dr. Wray, please visit www.tjwray.com.



the award winning children's book, *Piggy Nation*, is now an off-broadway musical!

**griefHaven
RECOMMENDED
READ**



A Brief History

During the design process of the children's book *Piggy Nation: A Day At Work With Dad*, author Richard Rosser began reading his book to elementary school classes, which led to performing assemblies for large groups of students. The kids responded so positively that it inspired Rosser to adapt the story into a full-length musical. Expanding on the children's book, he added elements of romance and intrigue. With composer Alec Wells (theoutsidejoke.com), the two crafted a musical richly layered with blues, rock, rap, and gospel influences.

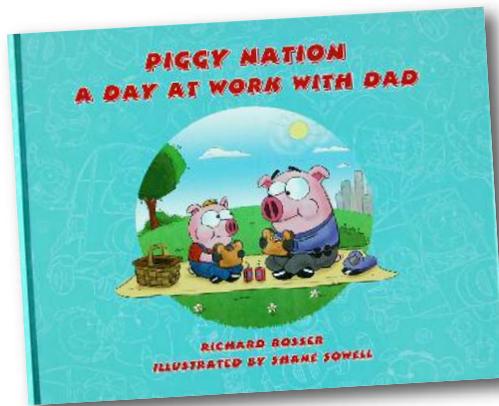


Richard Rosser signing a young fan's book!

Piggy Nation the Musical!

Piggy Nation is a delightful new musical featuring an original score with blues, rock, rap, and gospel influences. Full of lessons in thoughtfulness and consideration, it's an hour-long musical perfect for kids ages 3-10 and their parents and grandparents, too!

Sammy Hamhock, a little pig, is excited to be on summer vacation and follow his dad to work on Piggy Patrol, giving tickets for piggy behavior. But is his dad being a piggy too? Will Sammy lose the girl of his dreams, the lovely Lacey Leppard, because of his dad's piggy behavior? Can Sammy teach his dad not to be a piggy?



Piggy Previews! 3/13/13

Our first weekend of previews was a blast! Two great shows, fantastic audiences, and tons of fun!

After the show, kids got a chance to meet the characters, pose for photos, and get their books and programs signed by the cast! As a special treat, *Piggy Nation* creator Richard Rosser attended, chatting with everyone, answering questions, and signing books.

Performed at the
Snapple Theater Center
210 W. 50th Street at Broadway



RICHARD ROSSER is a children's author/playwright/cartoonist who lives with his wife, Stacey, daughter, Ali, and dogs, Rosco and Winnie, in Pacific Palisades, California. To purchase books and Piggy Nation items, visit www.piggynationa.com.

be loved pillow

by katey furgason

My husband Scot and I, both artists living in Santa Fe, New Mexico, designed the Be Loved Pillow. It is a comforting, huggable cotton denim pillow with a deep soft flannel interior to hold your cherished items. These items can be anything that fits inside and has meaning to you, such as memorabilia, photos, journals, letters, drawings, etc. If you can think of it, you can put it into your Be Loved Pillow. The Be Loved Pillow is a pillow that transforms objects and emotions into physical comfort when we need it.

The inspiration for designing the Be Loved Pillow came some years back when I volunteered at a workshop held for children who had experienced the death of someone very close to them. The weeks preceding the workshop, I spent my time researching the trauma of experiencing the death of a loved one and the long and unique grieving process that follows. I wanted to give something to the children that would both recognize and address the tremendous emotional loss and the aching pain of enduring a physical loss. The goal was to make something that would be emotionally cathartic and physically comforting.

The children needed a special, safe, and physically comforting place to express their vast array of changing, evolving, and, at times, overwhelming thoughts and feelings, whether written, drawn, or collected. It was at this point that the basic design of the Be Loved Pillow

emerged: a small soft pillow begging to be held and offering a nice safe place to put cherished things.

The day of the workshop arrived, and I handed out the first incarnation of the Be Loved Pillow to each of the children attending. I presented the pillow, very briefly, as a place they could put their special treasures, drawings, letters (anything they wanted), and it was completely up to them



Katey and Scot

when, whether or not, and with whom, they wanted to share the contents.

Their pillow was ALL theirs. ALL their feelings were welcome inside, and there were no right or wrong things to put/keep inside. The children loved their pillows and immediately started to talk about what they were going to put inside and why. The drawings and collages they made that day went directly inside the pillow, which they carried with them snugly in their arms.

Because of the way the children responded,

I decided I needed to make more. I made the next bunch of pillows for children and teens in a foster program, and they loved them too! For the foster kids it became a safe, warm, and reliable place to put their most cherished items during their

frequent times of transition.

When my father died last year, I made a pillow for my mother and me. I asked my mother recently what the pillow meant to her. This is what she said: "Since I was widowed a

year ago, my Be Loved Pillow has helped me cope with my loss. My husband and I were together for 52 years, so his physical absence from my life is devastating. My pillow is a tangible memory of him, which I hold close. I have written him letters and put them inside my pillow, and I keep letters and poems other people have sent to me when he died inside of it. I keep his reading glasses and his last address book inside my pillow. Sometimes the contents change. I add things. I exchange things. It evolves. Words are not adequate to describe the physical and emotional comfort this little pillow provides and the cherished memories it evokes—it moves with me through my grief—through my life."

The Be Loved Pillow is a reminder that the deep connection is never lost, even though we always miss them. Our grief and memories can also be comforting, and even though our hearts can break, they are also still full of love.

When I met Scot two years ago, I told him about the little pillow I made for the children and how meaningful it felt to provide the children with such a special gift—to see how much they loved their pillow. Scot helped me see that this pillow needed to be made for and available to the millions of others who would benefit from it. Scot improved and refined the design of the Be Loved Pillow and joined me in getting it launched into the public arena.

Years ago the Be Loved Pillow was a project born out of my heart. Now, fittingly so, it has been brought back because of loves' encouragement.

DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO FOR SOMEONE GRIEVING? Give them a Be Loved Pillow!



"The children loved their pillows and immediately started to talk about what they were going to put inside and why."

Be Loved Pillows may be ordered in the [griefHaven store](#) or by clicking [here](#) for a link to our online Etsy store.

mother anything! Get close to its offspring, and it will fiercely protect, even if it means its own death. Don't we all understand THAT mission?

Yesterday morning I peeked around the corner, and guess what? The nest was empty. All three birds had flown...just like that... somewhere...to begin their new lives. But while here, they gave me tremendous joy every time I saw them. And once again I was reminded that there are moments of true joy after our child dies. Many of them. Sometimes we have to look for them. Sometimes we have to recall what they were. But they are always there. Perhaps all we have to do is simply peek into the places where they might be—hidden, just waiting for someone to enjoy their wonder.



Mommy hummingbird and babies outside the Whitmore's door



“But while here, they gave me tremendous joy every time I saw them. And once again I was reminded that there are moments of true joy after our child dies. Many of them.”

griefHaven receives grant from the pacific palisades woman's club

by pam solomon

On March 5, 2013, griefHaven received a grant from the Pacific Palisades Woman's Club. The grant was in support of griefHaven's excellent grief support and in providing grief group counseling to parents and siblings.

Throughout the year, the Pacific Palisades Woman's Club raises money through its "Home Holiday Tour and Boutique" and distributes the funds to organizations the membership feels has made a significant impact in the community. This year the Club



Wendell and Susan Whitmore, Grant Award Evening

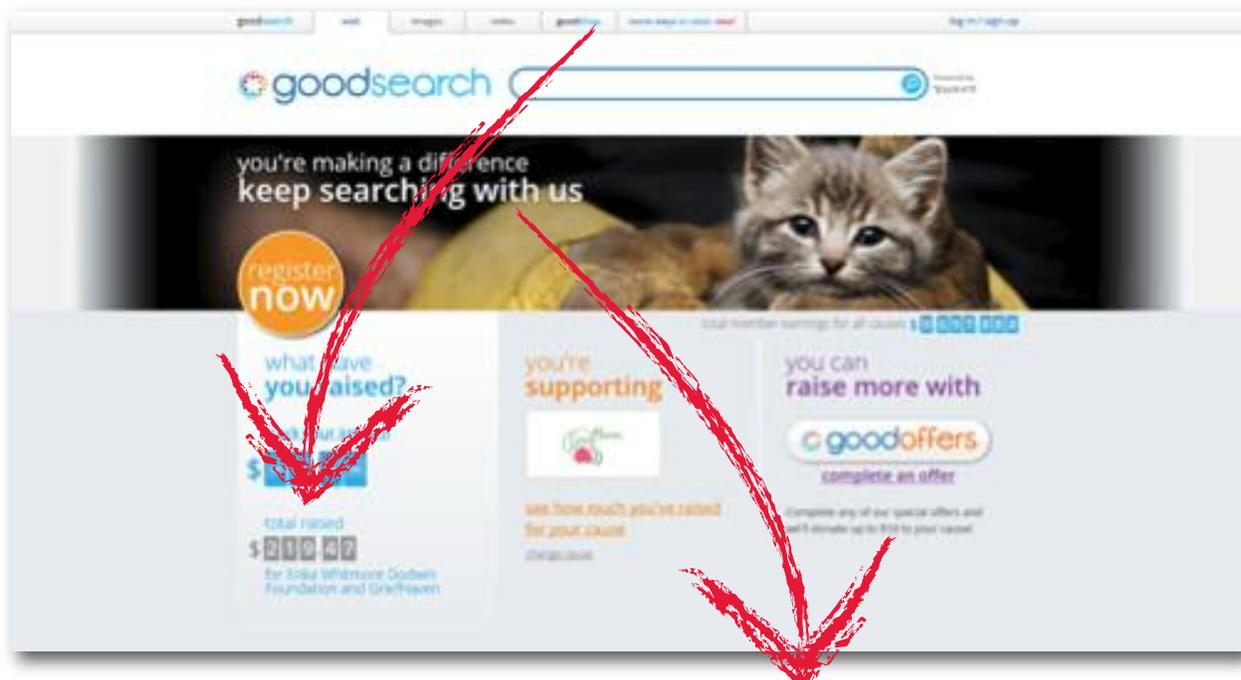
awarded grants totaling \$63,000 to 39 organizations.

The grant award evening was casual, warm, and often emotional as the various grant recipients talked about their nonprofit work and expressed gratitude to the Woman's Club for their financial support. Susan Whitmore accepted the grant award on behalf of griefHaven and shared with the group how important the grief groups continue to be in helping parents and siblings on their grief journeys.

This was the second year in a row that griefHaven has received a Woman's Club grant.

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Look below and see how much we have made since January!
\$219.47



It's SO easy. All you need to do is go to www.goodsearch.com, name griefHaven as your charity of choice, and the website will walk you through the rest!