

GriefHaven

where hope resides



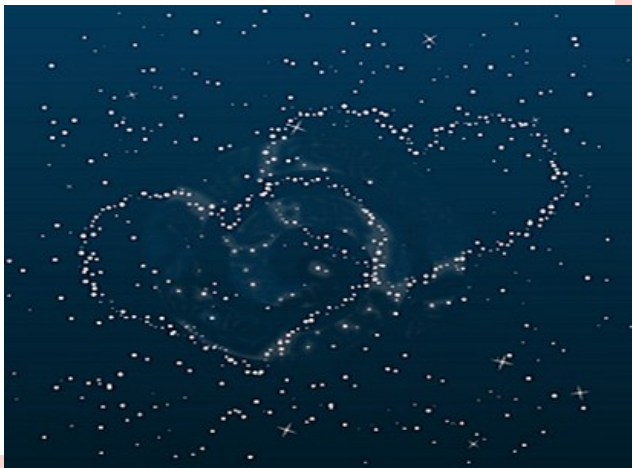
E-Haven™ Newsletter
Fall 2010

www.griefHaven.org

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" . . . and What About God?"



Message From Our President and Founder, Susan Whitmore:



Hi, everyone.

We have always avoided writing about anything of a religious or spiritual nature. That is because, when *griefHaven* first began, it became clear that we would be supporting parents, siblings, and others around the world who embrace a variety of different religious and spiritual

beliefs and practices.

Our goal is to bring you tools and support that will assist you on your grief journey, yet not delve into areas that might otherwise offend or upset you, and the area of religion and spirituality can be a very sensitive one. However, after all of these years of working with bereaved parents, we have decided to make an exception to that guideline. Here is why.

Since *griefHaven* began seven years ago, we have had the honor and privilege of meeting, counseling, and emailing thousands of parents whose children have died. What I have discovered is that al-

“There is only one question that really matters: why do bad things happen to good people? Virtually every meaningful conversation I have ever had . . . on the subject of God and religion has either started with this question, or gotten around to it before long.”
— Rabbi Harold Kushner

most every parent, at some point in time, brings up questions about God and the role God played in the death of their child. (For clarification purposes, when I say “God,” I mean whatever “God” is to you.) Parents try to rectify the questions about God’s role in their child’s death, such as how God could have let that happen to their child or if God had a purpose for their child’s death or why God didn’t answer their prayers

“Why would God need to cause you grief in order to create another angel? Could He have not just created another angel if He needed one more? The God I know is not so limited. He did not cause your child’s death in order to have that child near him; He can be near you and your child every day you are on this earth.” — Dr. Norman Hagley

or whether God exists at all. In other words, parents will eventually need and want to talk about God and ask the question, “. . . and what about God?”

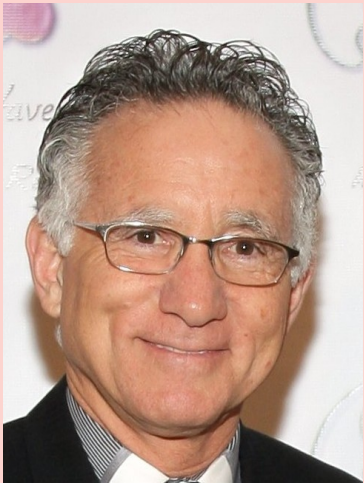
Often, parents ponder these questions in silence, as they are afraid to admit to anyone that they have such questions. Not only that, but they often feel guilty and afraid for having any doubts, which leads to even more suffering and isolation. This is especially true for those who had “no doubt” about

God and the role God played in their lives prior to their child's death.

These questions about God circle around again and again in support groups we facilitate, emails we receive, writings people send to us, and in my grief counseling. In an attempt to make sense of their child's death, parents will often invoke the notion that, if God is so powerful and loving, how is it that God al-

“We may not ever understand why we suffer or be able to control the forces that cause our suffering, but we can have a lot to say about what the suffering does to us, and what sort of people we become because of it.”

lowed 9/11 or the holocaust or wars or any other tragedy you can imagine? Mostly, though, parents struggle with a more personal question: “Why didn't God protect my child?” or “If there is a God, why didn't that God answer my prayers? After all, I prayed for my son's recovery just like my neighbor did, yet my son died and her son lived.” In the case of a child who is missing and then found, the parents will often publicly thank God for answering their prayers and for bringing their child safely home. Where does that, then, leave the parents whose children were never found or who were found dead? Those parents cry out, “What about my child? Does that mean God answered your prayers about finding your child alive and left mine there to die?” Or there are the parents whose child died in a car accident where all of those in the accident lived except for their child. The parents of the children who survived thank God for sparing their children, also leaving the grieving parents to wonder, “Did God come along and pick and choose, ‘You live, you don't?’”



Rabbi Steven Carr Reuben

Recently, I spoke with Rabbi Steven Carr

Reuben, Sr. Rabbi at Kehillat Israel Synagogue in Pacific Palisades, California, author of several books (including *Children of Character: Leading Your Children to Ethical Choices In Everyday Life, But How Will You Raise the Children?*, *Making Interfaith Marriage Work*, and *There's An Easter Egg On Your Seder Plate: Surviving Your Child's Interfaith Marriage*). As a member of our Board of Directors, Rabbi Reuben and I discussed the questions and struggles so many par-

ents have regarding God, and I asked him for his thoughts.

Rabbi Reuben shared, “For me, God is not a divine being who ordains who shall live and who shall die, for death is the inevitable end for every one of us. Instead, I discover God in the resilience of the human spirit that wrestles with the darkness of despair, the brokenness of our hearts, and the questions that can never be adequately answered, and still finds the strength to go on. I don't believe in God—I experience God in the everyday miracles of life itself and the ability of the human spirit to triumph over sorrow and loss, to love in spite of our grief, and to open our hearts to others with compassion and empathy in spite of, and often because of, the brokenness of our own lives. If I believed that God were a capricious being who allowed innocent children to suffer and die and human monsters to torture and abuse the weak and helpless, I would curse the very idea of God itself. What I do believe is that human beings have an infinite capacity to love and heal



and that God is that power of healing, forgiveness, and faith in the triumph of the human spirit that inspires us to take the next step, one day at a time, until each of us has discovered our own sense of meaning and purpose in life again.”

Bad things happen all of the time. None of us are immune from bad things. Many ask, “Why do bad

“God doesn't send us the problem; He gives us the strength to cope with the problem.”

things happen to good people?” For many, it's easier for them to accept it when bad things happen to bad people. God has created in us an internal sense of justice, and we don't struggle as much when a violent drug dealer dies in a police shoot-out. But what about when tragedies involve nice, good people? Or apparently innocent people or children?

These are fair, logical, and painful questions, especially when one always believed that God was the one thing in their lives they could count on to keep them and their families safe from harm. It is very difficult and painful for parents to deal with the questions of God's role in the deaths of their children, especially for those who always gave God credit for the “good” things that happened in their lives and believed that God had a reason for the “bad” things—a

reason they believed that only God understood.

After a child dies, parents find themselves struggling with these profound and deep questions. In their struggle to try and make sense of their child's death, they once again turn to God for answers. "Why? Why my child, God?" Parents often express that, before their child died, it was easy to give God credit for the good things, but the question they now ask is *how could a loving God let my child die?* This throws parents into deep consternation. Some even begin to lose all faith in God at a time when they want to have that faith more than ever before. And in the midst of all of this "figuring it all out," they want to at least believe that there is *something* that exists "out there," since that means they may possibly see their child again one day, and often that is the hope that



keeps parents going: *Maybe I will see my child again one day when I die.* So questioning God and God's relationship to the death of their child is a confusing and complex issue added upon the grief they are already experiencing.

And that is why we are going from avoiding any discussion of God to opening the door and the dialogue, for we listen to your needs and wants and recognize that this is an area in which you also need support, hope, and love.

The articles we share with you regarding this sensitive subject are not endorsing any particular religion; rather, our goal is to provide you with some "what ifs" so you can take it all in and decide for yourself what does and does not fit. We are here to bring information, love, hope, and support so you can then make your own decisions. The articles we share will present different possibilities from different perspectives and will, hopefully, help you feel less alone as you slowly find your way and your own answers to your questions.

Here is the first of those articles written by Michael Josephson who found himself grappling with many of these same questions for reasons that become apparent in his article. Michael Josephson is the founder of the *Josephson Institute Center for Eth-*

ics, the largest character education program in the nation. He is a daily commentator on KNX Radio, AM 1070, with his *Character Counts* commentaries, and is a sought-after keynote speaker all over the nation. A renowned expert in education and developing ethics in children, the workplace, sports, and families, he is the recipient of untold awards and is a member of the *griefHaven* Advisory Board. Here are Michael's thoughts and perspectives. Michael's article includes the many insights of Rabbi Harold Kushner who wrote the well-known book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, after his son died. Following Michael's article are Rev. Susan Wallace Moriarty's thoughts regarding these same issues.

Please feel free, as usual, to forward and share this and any of our newsletters with others, and remember to spread the word that *griefHaven* is here for parents and siblings in need of hope. We truly are the place "Where Hope Resides."

By Michael Josephson,
Founder,
Josephson Institute for Ethics,
Radio Commentator, *Character Counts*,
KNX Radio, 1070

Recently, two dear friends were inflicted with the soul-searing, heart-rending pain of death. One



lost her lifelong companion and soul mate, a gentle good man who lived a good life of seventy years. The other had to say good-bye to her totally innocent newborn son, the victim of a neurological anomaly.

I've tried to process these personal tragedies in the context of notorious homicides, including the killing of Ed Thomas, a beloved teacher-coach in Iowa shot by a mentally ill former player, and the conscienceless murder of Byrd and Melanie Billings, a Florida couple rightly revered for caring for and loving nineteen children, including a dozen with special needs.

How can we explain the deaths of the good and the innocent?

When Bad Things Happen to Good People

THE INSPIRATIONAL #1 BESTSELLER
OVER 4 MILLION COPIES SOLD

HAROLD S.
KUSHNER

In *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, Rabbi Harold Kushner, whose 14-year-old son, Aaron, died of a rare disease called Progeria (rapid aging), shares his struggle to understand undeserved suffering and keep his faith. He found no comfortable answers, thoughtfully discussing and ultimately rejecting classic answers given by religionists, including the idea that God has a hidden purpose that we cannot and need not understand, that suffering is a test or a lesson,

and that death leads our loved ones to a better place.

Rabbi Kushner says he found peace of mind when he gave up the idea that everything that happens to us is caused or purposefully allowed by God, or that everything happens for a reason. He believes that it is futile and foolish to expect the consequences of natural forces and human nature to conform to our notions of fairness. "God," he says "doesn't send us the problem; He gives us the strength to cope with the problem." "For me," he adds, "the earthquake is not an 'act of God.' The act of God is the courage of people to rebuild their lives after the earthquake, and the rush of others to help them in whatever way they can."

So, perhaps, if we want to find continuing meaning in our lives after the senseless deaths of those who leave too soon, and we want to find a way to a more peaceful life when questioning God's role in all of this, we should ultimately ask, "What am I going to do with the life I have now?"

I hope you will read the book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. I found it full of profound insights and thought-provoking assertions.

Here's just a few nuggets from Rabbi Harold Kushner:

"There were not many books, as there were not many people, to help us when Aaron was living and dying. Friends tried, and were helpful, but how much could they really do? And the books I turned to were more concerned about defending God's honor, with logical proof that bad is really good and that evil is necessary to make this a good world, than they were with curing the bewilderment and the anguish of the parent of a dying child. They had answers to all of their own questions, but no answer for mine."

"All the [classical] responses to tragedy assume that

God is the cause of our suffering, and they try to understand why God would want us to suffer. There may be another approach. Maybe God does not cause our suffering. Maybe it happens for some reason other than the will of God."

"Nature is morally blind, without values. It churns along, following its own laws, not caring who or what gets in the way. But God is not morally blind. I could not worship Him if I thought He was. God stands for justice, for fairness, for compassion. For me, the earthquake is not an 'act of God.' The act of God is the courage of people to rebuild their lives after the earthquake, and the rush of others to help them in whatever way they can."

"Laws of nature do not make exceptions for nice people. A bullet has no conscience; neither does a ma-

“ If we want to find continuing meaning in our lives after the senseless deaths of those who leave too soon . . . we should ultimately ask, 'What am I going to do with the life I have now?'" — Michael Josephson

lignant tumor or an automobile gone out of control. That is why good people get sick and get hurt as much as anyone."

"Pain is the price we pay for being alive. . . . When we understand that, our question will change from, 'Why do we have to be in pain?' to 'What do we do with our pain so that it becomes meaningful and is not just pointless empty suffering? How can we turn all the painful experiences of our lives into birth pangs or into growing pains?' We may not ever understand why we suffer or be able to control the forces that cause our suffering, but we can have a lot to say about what the suffering does to us, and what sort of people we become because of it. Pain makes some people bitter and envious. It makes others sensitive and compassionate. It is the result, not the cause, of pain that makes some experiences of pain meaningful and others empty and destructive."

"Why, then, do bad things happen to good people? One reason is that our being human leaves us free to hurt each other, and God can't stop us without taking away the freedom that makes us human. Human beings can cheat each other, rob each other, hurt each other, and God can only look down in pity and compassion at how little we have learned over the ages about how human beings should behave."

"When people ask 'Where was God in Auschwitz?

How could he have allowed the Nazis to kill so many innocent men, women, and children?' my response is that it was not God who caused it. It was caused by human beings choosing to be cruel to their fellow man."

"I have to believe that the Holocaust was at least as much of an offense to God's moral order as it is to mine, or how can I respect God as a source of moral guidance? . . . I have to believe that the tears and prayers of the victims aroused God's compassion, but having given Man freedom to choose, including the freedom to choose to hurt his neighbor, there was nothing God could do to prevent it."

Please visit Michael's amazing website at www.charactercounts.org and read more about his amazing work, sign up for his newsletter, and be a proud member of building greater character in your own community.

By Reverend Susan Wallace Moriarty

* * * * *

PCUSA Pastor, Hospice Spiritual
Counselor for Companion Hospice
Care in the Los Angeles Area



Ecclesiastes 3 says that there is a time and a purpose for everything—a time to be born and a time to die. But it is every parent's nightmare to think that they would ever have to bury a child.

My brother died at 46 of a massive heart attack. When I arrived home, my Dad's first words to me were, "It's not supposed to happen like this. I am supposed to go first." That, I believe, is the sentiment

of every parent who has lost a child. It is out of the natural order of life for a child to die and doesn't make logical sense. From all of my work as a hospice spiritual counselor, I have seen that the loss of a child is the most painful of all losses.

As a pastor, I cringe when I hear people say things to bereaved parents, such as, "God needed another little angel in heaven. That is why he took little Johnny." I don't think they realize how painful and frustrating the underlying message is in those words. And God does not need to make people suffer in order to increase his number of angels. God would never pick a child and pull him away from his parents and family, not allowing him to have a full life. But God would provide the ability to find the strength to go on, and He would send loving people to help comfort and support those who are suffering.

The one thing that we all know for certain is that we are born and that we will someday die. When we die or how we die is not something any of us can predict or choose. One of the worst things I hear parents say is that they fear that their child's death was somehow a punishment from some sin that they may have committed. I completely reject that notion. So rather than believing that God somehow for some reason caused a child's death, please understand and know that God is a God of comfort, compassion, and a "peace that surpasses all understanding."

The Psalms are filled with examples of laments; people crying out to God in pain and anger about various circumstances in their lives. These laments begin with complaints and end with some kind of declaration of hope or affirmation that God has heard their prayers and stands with them.

Elie Wiesel, Holocaust survivor, tells a story of one specific day in his concentration camp where a child was hanging on the gallows but would not give up because he was determined to survive. A man from the crowd yelled, "Where is God now?" That is the question we all ask when we are suffering. *Where is God?* But then Elie Wiesel goes on to say that, when the child did die, that same man yelled again, "Where is God now?" and this time a person yelled out from the crowd, "He's on the gallows." The message rang out loud and clear—God was on the gallows and was with them all along, even in their suffering. God promises never to leave us or forsake us, and that includes suffering with us.

We don't know why some are spared or some die. There is a lot about life and faith that are mysteries, yet I know that God doesn't pick and choose who lives and who dies at any given moment. That would make God a cruel God who "causes" the suffering of people, and that is the opposite of what God is actually doing.

And I live with the hope and strong belief that we *will* see our loved ones again one day.

A Hole In My Heart Ministry
Founder, Autumn Ater and Mother
to Robert Scott Ater
"Turning Moments Into Memories
After the Loss of a Child"



Third Annual Butterfly Memorial Release

Mothers gathered together in the serene atmosphere of Chandler Gardens, Weatherford, Texas, Thursday evening to remember their lost children and honor their passing during the annual Butterfly Memorial Release organized by *A Hole In My Heart Ministry*.

As the mothers walked forward to take a butterfly, some gave details of their child's death, including cause and when. Others could only manage to say their lost child's name before walking away with tears welled up in their eyes.

Ater's son, Robert, a special needs child, passed away three years ago. She started the ministry about a year after his passing. The group meets monthly to provide support for bereaved mothers and hosts two family events each year ~ the butterfly release and a memorial candle lighting ceremony in December.

"A butterfly symbolizes new life" Ater said. "When you think of the caterpillar going into the cocoon, we think of it as dying, and all of a sudden, God blows a breath and it transforms into this beautiful thing called a butterfly. We believe the metamorphosis can also be seen in our children who have left their earthly bodies behind and are now the beautiful spiritual beings God created them to be."



Mothers in all stages of grief gathered at the event from those who lost their children very recently, sometime just weeks or months ago, to those who came to remember the child who passed 20 years ago. "Grief is a process." Ater said. "It's not something that you can go into a 12-step program to get better. You have to walk it every day, but know that God walks it with you."

"If I can use the pain of my own loss to reach another mother who is at home lying in her tears crying and needs that support, I want her to know that there is somebody that understands," she said. "We may have different situations and circumstances, but we all share the loss of a child or children."

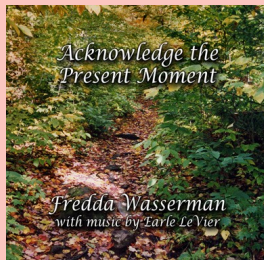
Butterflies have a special meaning to many of the mothers. "I love the release", commented bereaved mother Veronica Lowery who lost two of her children. "It's being in touch with my son and daughter, and it's doing something in their memory." The event was a huge success, and the moms cannot wait until the next year's release.



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Acknowledge the Present Moment

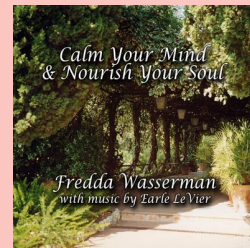
Before you initiate change, take an inventory of where you are in your life today.



This CD is devoted to an exploration of your health, your career, and your relationships. Take an inventory of where you are in your life today—physically, emotionally, and spiritually. As you become more aware, you may gain new perspectives on who you are and how you choose to live your life on a daily basis.

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Designed to help you relax, fall asleep, promote healing and create inner peace.

This CD is devoted to creating an optimal environment for healing within. You will be gently led through a body relaxation meditation followed by a guided journey into a personal place of serenity, peace, and beauty.



Transition and Transformation

Designed to help you adapt to the new circumstances in your life with confidence, clarity, and a sense of empowerment.



Life is filled with change. As you go through any major life transition, it is important to first take time to honor what was. This Inner Journey will guide you through a ritual ~ a rite of passage. Like the mythical Phoenix, you will have the opportunity to release and transform those aspects of your life that do not fit with your current circumstances and see what arises from the ashes.

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griefHaven Needs You Want to be of service and help others as



they walk this journey?

Here are some ways . . .

griefHaven is in need of the following.
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hope@griefHaven.org.

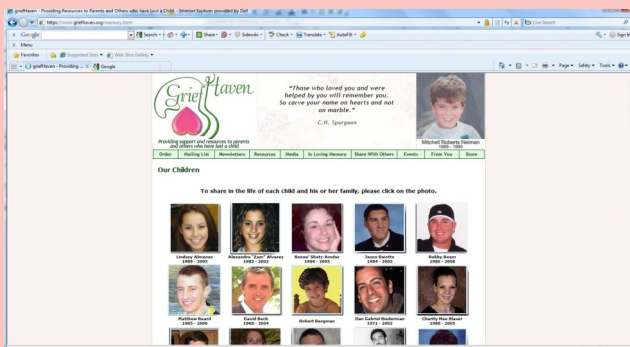
griefHaven Call List

griefHaven regularly receives phone calls from mothers and fathers all over the world who would like to talk with other parents who have also lost a child. These parents either live in places where they are isolated and alone or they simply don't have anyone to talk to who understands what they are going through.



Would you like to be on our "call" list?
If so, please call or write to us at
(310) 459-1789 * hope@griefHaven.org.

Free Memory Page



Remember that *griefHaven* provides a free memory page for your child, and you can create it any way you want. To see what others have done, go to www.griefHaven.org, click on "In Loving Memory," and "Our Children."

Just email your photos, poetry, mp3 files, etc. to hope@griefHaven.org, and we will put your page up for all of the world to see.

Newsletter Dedicated to Sibling Loss

"The Forgotten Ones"



We are excited to be doing a special newsletter in 2011 dedicated solely to our beloved siblings and their journeys after the death of a brother or sister.

We often refer to siblings who have lost a brother or sister as *the forgotten ones*, as people often do not realize that siblings suffer a depth of grief that is difficult and stays with them throughout their lifetime. It is often hard for siblings to understand the feelings they are experiencing and for society in general to understand that they, too, are grieving.

So we are going to be dedicating one of our future newsletters in 2011 **entirely** to the subject of siblings and what life is like for them after the death of a brother or sister. This will be a beautiful newsletter, as contributions in the newsletter will come directly from siblings of any age.

To that end, we need articles, poetry, journal entries, thoughts, drawings, and anything else that siblings would like to contribute in honor of their brothers or sisters to this newsletter. The age of the sibling does not matter—all ages are welcome to participate.

For older siblings: Please write what it has been like for you since your sibling died, including, but not limited to, how your friends have or have not been supportive, what it was like going back to school, how it has been with other family members (including mom and dad, relatives, etc.), how society has handled the fact that you lost a sibling, what you have done to handle your grief, suggestions you have for those in society who want to know how to support siblings, what you have learned about life since your sibling's death, and what you have done that has or has not helped you on your journey so far. We encourage you to write or share whatever you want. Your words will be seen by thousands and thousands and will help so many.

For younger siblings: If your child is very young, you can coach them to write whatever they would like to share, send a picture they have drawn, write down something for them as they dictate it to you, ask them questions and send in the question/answer dialogue, or any other ideas you have. Just be creative and remember that we want to help educate others about the loss of a sibling, no matter the age.

Deadline for Articles: December 15, 2010.
Send to: swhitmore@griefHaven.org