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## E-Haven Email from griefHaven

Where Hope Resides™

### E-HAVEN EMAIL™ January 2008

#### Seasons of Grief

By Sandy Goodman



*In this January 2008 E-Haven, guest writer Sandy Goodman shares with us her beautifully written experience of grief, "Seasons of Grief," which is found in the anthology, "Mourning Has Broken." The anthology is offered on our website and was reviewed in our recent December 2007 newsletter.*

**I**t is winter today. There is no sun, not even a flash of light to focus on. The air has become murky as if it has solidified, losing its clarity. Ice covers everything, smothering any life that might have been.

Staring out my window, my pondering carries me back in time to my son's death. Jason was 18 years old and at the threshold of adulthood when he made a fatal error and grabbed a high-voltage line, dying three hours later of

electrocution.

**T**he death of a child is a catastrophic event. When Jason's life ended on that warm summer morning, so did mine. Like a beautiful rose battered by a sudden hailstorm, I abruptly lost all semblance to what I was before. It is not unusual for me to be sitting here at this window, six years later, re-

**"Can I speak about the metamorphosis of grief . . . ?"**

flecting on what once was . . . and what is now . . . and what may become. I compare the bite of winter to my grief: the coldness, the shadows, and my reluctance to breathe in any more discomfort. Grief, like winter, appears uninvited and unwelcome. We abhor the pain and wonder why we must endure the distress, while all along we feel its imminent arrival.

Winter compels the earth to rest. All forms of life stop struggling and performing, and they sleep. All that was living before now appears lifeless. The leaves disappear from the trees, flowers no longer grace our gardens, and the grass is entombed by snow. But what transpires beneath that which we can see? Are the flowers really gone, or are they only changing, renewing, transforming?



**I**wonder how much further I dare pursue this idea. Is grief, like winter, a gift? Can I speak about the metamorphosis of grief and contemplate gratitude in its presence? I do not know the answers, but that is where my thoughts are leading me.

My grief necessitates a sabbatical from living. I stop struggling and performing, and I become frozen. My compulsion to "do" dissolves, and simply "being" is all that remains. My life as I once knew it disappears. My dreams are shattered, and my heart is crushed in the blink of an eye. I am lost in my grief. But what is transpiring in my heart? Is everything gone, or is it only changing, renewing, transforming?

Grief is harsher than winter. The tasks of daily living are amplified, and what was once soft and blurred becomes sharp and ragged. The challenges of winter invariably end and spring arrives. Grief makes no such promise. I must wait without assurance.

There are moments when winter is beautiful: a blanket of fresh snow on Christmas morning or the surprise of a warm breeze in February. There are nights when winter is hard and ugly, when temperatures plummet, and the howl of the wind threatens our sanity. Grief is the same. A special memory comes into my heart, and grief becomes bittersweet . . . beautiful. Then, a letter addressed to my son arrives in the mail, and I return to the harsh reality that he is gone.



**M**y grief transformed me. It tore out everything within me and said: "There! It is GONE! What are you going to do? You have NOTHING LEFT TO HANG ON TO! You must begin again. You must change."

As winter alters the earth, my grief changed me. It gave me a period of time to step back from living and to just be. It was a time for reflection, re-prioritizing, and searching. Without this phase, I would have remained as empty as a garden that never rests.

My grief, like winter, freezes my world. Both appear painful, horrifying, and devastating, but it is our perception, anticipation, and reaction that create our discomfort. If we deny that death is possible for those we love, we are stunned and terrified by its occurrence. If we react to

the first blizzard of winter with panic and fear, we are too afraid to honor its power. If we perceive a fatal ice storm as an act of God, we will shake our fist and spend more time than we have asking why. And if we

**"As winter alters the earth,  
my grief changed me."**

distinguish death as the end of a loved one's existence, we are eternally saddened by their absence. The path to spring, to the end of winter, requires only our patience and perseverance.

**T**he path to healing requires that and more; it demands that we learn to think differently. If we alter our beliefs, we can then change our perception, anticipation and reaction to death. If we come to know that death is a change in form rather than the end, we do not eliminate the winters of our grieving, we lessen our suffering.

**"The path of healing . . . demands  
that we learn to think differently."**

My journey has been both desolate and inspiring. There have been moments when I thought the cold and darkness would never end, and moments when tears of joy washed away the pain and light permeated my being.

I invite you to walk the path of grief a little differently: to nurture winter's bleakness and look deep into its purpose. And just as we must think differently to see winter's grace, we must think differently to see the gift of grief. It is there; buried beneath a frozen crust that protects and restores while the winter of our soul . . . ensues.

*Sandy Goodman is the mother of three sons, including Jeremy and twins, Jason and Josh. Jason's death started Sandy on a path of spiritual exploration through her grief. Sandy is now the founder, chapter leader, and newsletter editor of the Wind River Chapter of Compassionate Friends where she and her husband of 31 years live in central Wyoming. Sandy, author of [Love Never Dies: A Mother's Journey from Loss to Love](#) (Jodere Group, 2002), has presented at national conferences for the Compassionate Friends, Bereaved Parents of the USA, and the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors.*

## Support Group Meetings Are Almost Here!



**D**ou have been asking, and we have responded. On February 20, 2008, *griefHaven* will begin parent support group meetings every-other-week.

The meetings will run from 7:00 to 8:30 P.M., and our first group will be for parents who have lost an adult child (a child 18 or older). Space is limited. This first group will close once we have 10 parents.

We are excited about beginning these amazing and healing groups for you. Kehillat Israel Synagogue on Sunset Boulevard in Pacific Palisades, California, has donated one of its beautiful, warm, and nurturing meeting rooms. Parking is free and easily accessible.

We plan to start groups for adolescent and young child losses once this first group gets going. Additional groups can be started once we have the necessary number of parents.

If you are interested in being a part of this first group or being added to a list for future groups, please contact Susan Whitmore at 310-459-1789, or at [swhitmore@griefHaven.org](mailto:swhitmore@griefHaven.org). Details regarding the meetings will be given to you at that time.

## DONATIONS:


**S**ometimes we hold back because we feel uncomfortable asking. Yet to run a nonprofit organization, the **only** way we can be successful and fulfill a need is to ask for help. It is through contributions that we have been able to do all we have done to date.



To those who have sent us a donation, we are so grateful and thank you for giving us the means to continue providing hope and support to parents and families everywhere. To those who have not yet done so, here are a few considerations . . .

**D**id you know that we were able to send over 1,000 free “Packets of Hope” in 2007? And over 650 free grief pins? Or that we were able to print and mail thousands of free *griefHaven Newsletters*? And that, in 2007, we consistently added new support tools to the website, which continued to regularly receive over 50,000 visits a month? Then there were those amazing and beautiful memory pages that we provided at no charge to any parent who requested one. Were you aware that all of the office work at *griefHaven* is done on a volunteer basis—that no salary or compensation is given to anyone? And, finally, did you know that it was because of you that we were able to do all of that and much, much more?

In the December 2007 *griefHaven Newsletter*, we included a donation envelope that made it easy for anyone to send a contribution so we may continue to support the thousands of parents throughout the world. With the 1,500 newsletters we mailed in December, if each person sent only \$10, that would have provided *griefHaven* \$15,000. Think how many people could be helped with \$15,000!

Yet, to date, we have received less than \$2,000 from those newsletter envelopes. We admit we are sad, and we were thinking that perhaps many of you believe *griefHaven* is a “cash rich” foundation, and that we don’t really need your donation. Or, perhaps you felt that because you could only send a small amount, you wouldn’t send anything at all. Well, you can see how many of you giving just \$10 really does add up. Just know that we do need your donation to keep giving hope and providing support. Your donations are what sustain us and allow us to continue helping everyone in need. 

As we have always said, this organization belongs to all of us. Many of us who work at *griefHaven* are also parents whose children have died, and we are dedicated to supporting you in every way conceivable . . . even if it means feeling uncomfortable and asking . . .

**So please send  
your donation today—  
and thank you so much for allowing us  
the privilege of serving you.**

### Donate by:

- ♥ mailing a check in the envelope included with the December 2007 newsletter
- ♥ mailing a check in your own envelope
- ♥ using a credit card (call the office)
- ♥ donating through PayPal at [griefHaven.org](http://griefHaven.org)

New Year, 2008—  
Your Year of Possibility?  
by Susan Whitmore, Erika's Mom

**F**or many, another new year stands as a symbol of possibility. However, for many parents, siblings, and others impacted by the death of a child, the new year looms ahead as another long year to be endured. Perhaps we can change that if we try. Just perhaps . . .

I encourage you to take the 2008 challenge: envision the year before us as the “Year of Possibility” instead of a year to endure. See if you can **embrace** those moments that do include joy, laughter, and happiness, **accept** the times of tears, sadness, hopelessness, or pain, and **flow** with the changes as they come and go, no longer fighting the natural current. Challenge yourself to accept the journey however it may manifest in your life in 2008, no matter how impossible it may seem at the time. I try to do this. It isn't easy, but it is possible—and it does make a difference. When the pain comes and seems overwhelming, relax into it. Imagine that it's a huge, comfortable, armchair, and let yourself sink down into it. Tell yourself, “Okay, it's here again, and it won't kill me, so I'm going to relax and allow the feelings.” Then, when the grief lifts, get back up. The pain always goes away.

Life is but moments strung together to make a minute, an hour, a day, a year. Perhaps what we truly need, then, is simply to embrace each moment, not looking for that monumental event that will “make it all better.” Your *moments*, when all strung together, *is* the monumental event: your new life already begun. You are rebuilding your life, and you need to be as patient and accepting as possible with the process.

Look for and appreciate how far you have come in rebuilding your life. **You truly are a most courageous person, deserving of a great badge of courage!**

Happy “New Year of Possibility” to you.

Until next time . . . from all of us at *griefHaven*, we remain dedicated to you and your journey.

May you have greater  
**Peace of Heart™** in  
this New Year



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GoodSearch will give *The Erika Whitmore Godwin Foundation* money every single time you search for anything using *GoodSearch* as your search engine in place of *Google*, etc.

Please go to *GoodSearch.com*, make it your main search engine, and designate *The Erika Whitmore Godwin Foundation* and *griefHaven* as your nonprofit of choice. (You need make this choice only the first time you use *GoodSearch*.)

Check out how the page looks below. You can see that our foundation name shows up in the *Who Do You GoodSearch For?* toolbar, with the space above for your actual search. (Please see the December 2007 *griefHaven Newsletter* for more details on using *GoodSearch*.)

**AND IF THAT WERE NOT COOL ENOUGH**, you can also purchase online at one of *GoodSearch*'s many great affiliated stores—such as The Gap, Best Buy, or Target—name our foundation, and we get a percentage of that too!

The screenshot shows the GoodSearch homepage. At the top, it says "GoodSearch YOU SEARCH WE GIVE" and "Give to charity just by searching the Internet" with an abcNEWS logo. Below this is a search bar with tabs for "Web", "Images", "Video", and "Shopping". A "Search" button is to the right. Below the search bar, it says "powered by YAHOO! SEARCH". A dropdown menu is open, showing "WHO DO YOU GOODSEARCH FOR?" with "Erika Whitmore Godwin Foundation and griefHaven (Pacific Palisades, CA)" selected. There are "Clear Selection" and "Amount Raised" buttons. Below the dropdown, it says "Search now and money will go to your designated cause." There are also links to "Add GoodSearch to your IE, Firefox, or Mac toolbar" and "Make GoodSearch your homepage". On the left side, there are sections for "CHARITY OF THE DAY" (Phi Sigma Sigma Foundation), "WHO'S DOING GOOD?" (Jessica Biel and the Much Love Animal Rescue), and "SUCCESS STORIES" (The ASPCA has earned \$11,100!). At the bottom, there are links for "In the News" (The New York Times), "Add a New Charity or School", "Help Spread the Word", and "Join Our Newsletter".