

Calvary in Touch

Greetings

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Our bonds with people who have had a strong influence in our lives don't just diminish in death. However lengthy or brief, our connections echo in our hearts for a lifetime. As you move through your grief, ask yourself if there are ways you still feel connected to the person who died. Bonds continue in many ways – through memories, the voice of our loved one, experiences we shared together and legacies left behind.

We all have our own intuitive ways of maintaining our closeness to our loved ones who have died. I am reminded of a mother I worked with who bought sneakers or workout clothes for herself every year on her

son's birthday because he always encouraged her to exercise more and stay healthy. A woman in my group whispers to herself "you can do this honey" every time she is facing something challenging at work, the voice of encouragement from her deceased partner.

Continuing bonds remain with us after our loved one's physical death. Encourage yourself to nurture these bonds as you feel them to be appropriate and helpful to you in your life. Death does not end a relationship, it transforms it.

*Maria Georgopoulos, LMHC, FT
Director of Bereavement Services*

Spotlight On: Kenneth R. Cohen, MD

Kenneth R Cohen MD is a psychiatrist in private practice in New York City and Sharon, Connecticut. He completed his residency at New York Presbyterian Hospital-Weill Cornell Medical College, the fellowship in Psycho-oncology at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, and is a graduate of the Columbia University Center for Psychoanalytic Training and Research.

Eleven months ago today, my husband Christopher died at age 58. We were in Houston for a family wedding. Chris awoke on the wedding day at 5am and told me he was having



an "episode"; he collapsed in a seizure, then suffered cardiac arrest.

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He died while I had my arms around him, begging him to wake up. The EMTs shocked his otherwise healthy heart back to life, but Chris' brain had gone too long without oxygen. I spent the next fifteen hours waiting for him to slip away. On Sunday, April 23 at 2:45am, Chris died for the second and final time.

I felt a fundamental part of me crack in half, irreparably. Our perfectly imperfect life, the best any couple could hope for, ended in an excruciating instant, dropping me deep into a well of shock, anguish, and tears. I managed, with the help of my similarly grief-stricken yet strong and supportive mother, to plan a funeral and a Catholic mass in Chris' memory. My sister and nieces arrived from Richmond, cousins flew in from London, Paris, and Los Angeles, and old friends came up from Miami. Family, friends, neighbors, and colleagues packed the funeral chapel, surrounding me with comfort and love. The Rabbi from my synagogue, who came to appreciate Chris' pure dedication to his faith during a recent trip to Israel, sang our favorite songs and delivered a beautiful eulogy.

The following Sunday, there was a mass in Chris' memory at the Church of Saint Mary in Lakeville, Connecticut. Out of respect for our "blended" union, yet completely unsolicited, the priest recited the Mourner's Kaddish, the Jewish prayer for the dead, in Hebrew, in its entirety. He also delivered a eulogy and offered other prayers, despite the fact that funeral masses are not conducted on Sundays. At that moment it became clear that Chris' death was not just a loss to me, our family, and friends; rather, it was an acknowledgment that Chris was dear to all those whose lives he touched, and in the eyes of G-d. The respect for his memory was receiving special treatment by an agent of his faith. Chris may have been quiet, humble, and unassuming in life, but in death he was, as a close friend once described him, "a saint".

During our twelve years together, I tried my best to let Chris know how much I loved and appreciated him. I told him so every single day. The sad wisdom of personal experience is that no matter how much we love and give and try in a marriage,

once that person is gone, it feels far from sufficient.

As I sat there in the church, I wondered how I could honor Chris' memory, a man who deserved ten times what I or anyone else ever gave him. I also felt very close to Chris in his own house of worship, and was not prepared to leave the experience behind. I decided that, instead of reciting Kaddish for the traditional Jewish mourning period of eleven months, I would honor Chris in his own faith and attend Catholic mass every week for the same time period.

Today, I attended my forty-eighth consecutive mass, in eight cities and three countries. The ritual followed me like a shadow through my travels, as I desperately tried to make sense of Chris' tragic death and my broken life. It is the hardest and most important thing I have ever done.

The majority of the masses have been at St. Mary's, where I sat in Chris' usual seat (sixth row, center aisle on the right). My experience of this ritual has mirrored the evolution of my grief; fluctuating feelings of comfort, despondency, hopefulness, loneliness, and ultimately, impatience with the long, dreadful exercise of grieving.

Today, as I complete this pledge to myself and my husband's memory, what matters to me is knowing that Chris received the love, respect, and recognition he deserved. I gave as much of it as I could while he was alive; I hope this posthumous process makes up for some of the shortfall.

I made other commitments to Chris' memory during this mourning period. I have absented myself completely from social media, until today. I have worn my wedding ring, and Chris' ring on a chain around my neck. I am taking both off today. I have not dined at the Woodland, Chris' favorite restaurant and our Friday night ritual, but will go there tonight.

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These commitments served a rich and meaningful purpose over the past eleven months. Recently, however, little signs have whispered to me that it might be time to move on. One day in church I had this intense feeling that Chris has a new boyfriend up in Heaven, and I was so happy for him. Perhaps that means my time to date and love will soon arrive. I started taking tennis lessons several weeks ago, and my wedding ring is impairing my grip on the racquet. Chris' ring has started to feel bulky around my neck. I look forward to returning to the Woodland. I think that Chris' soul, ever selfless and generous of spirit, is nudging me to move ahead.

Storyboard: Devon Taylor, MA

This past weekend, my best friend turned 30 years old. Being that she now believes she is a "woman of a certain age," she requested that I buy her an ultra-nourishing (and ultra-expensive) vegan, gluten free, anti-aging face cream from a specific store in Manhattan. Despite informing her that she had no need for these products at such a young age, she insisted and I eventually obliged- albeit not without verbalizing my annoyance.

I arrived to a store filled with overpriced beauty products and pushy sales people. Frustrated and in a rush, I quickly located the item I needed and headed to the checkout area. As the saleswoman began to wrap the gift, she casually and confidently stated, "You must be getting an early Mother's Day gift. She's really going to love this."

In the moments that followed, I internally explored the ways I could respond to her comment. Should I tell her that every Mother's Day since I was 20 years old has been, in fact, motherless? Or should I just smile and nod, saving her the embarrassment and myself the task of listening to yet another "*oh my gosh, I had no idea*" apology. I decided to go with the latter and end

the conversation. As I turned to walk away, a knot formed in my throat and I barely made it through the door before bursting into tears.

It is painfully unfair when one's love outlives another's life. A neighbor who lost her spouse wrote me the following in her condolence letter: "the key is to make the successful transition from being a prisoner of the memories to becoming the keeper of the memories." I repeat that to myself every day. After eleven long months, it feels as though the funeral might finally be over.

Rest in peace, my beautiful husband Chris. I miss you. And yes, G-d only knows what I'd be without you.

Although almost seven years have passed, Mother's Days are just as difficult now as they were at the start of my grief journey. I know that I am not alone. For many others, Mother's and Father's Days are not events filled with celebrations and joy but rather, reminders of a painful loss.

I wish I could offer five easy steps that completely take the pain out of the holiday. As anyone who has experienced parent loss knows, there will always be some level of sadness surrounding these days.

However, I *can* offer five steps that may help you get through the day and manage the emotions that could arise.

1. **Surround yourself with loved ones:** Sharing stories with your loved ones about your mother and/or father who has died is a great way to spend the holiday.

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Storyboard: Devon Taylor, MA

You can gain comfort from the ones you trust while reminiscing on all the aspects of your parent(s) that you love the most.

2. **Treat yourself:** Do you have a cheat meal you've been waiting to eat or a special outfit you've been waiting to buy? Now may be the time to do it. Within moderation and taking finances into consideration, indulge in something that will momentarily take your mind off the situation at hand.
3. **Give yourself space to feel:** If and when tough emotions begin to arise, allow yourself to experience them. Journal what you are feeling or talk to someone that you trust. Give yourself permission to cry, to laugh, to be angry- grief is complex and your feelings surrounding the loss will be also.
4. **Skip it:** Although it may seem taboo, there is nothing wrong with skipping the holiday altogether. Plan to go into work or take a trip that falls on Mother's or Father's Day. If you are not ready to face the emotions that these days will bring, make other plans- there is always next year.
5. **Donate time or money in remembrance of your loved one:** Volunteer your time or donate money to a cause that was important to your loved one.

For those who grieve the loss of a parent, nothing can fully remove the pain associated with Mother's and Father's Day.

Nevertheless, it is my hope that the tips covered here aid you in moving through your grief

and making new meaning of the Mother's and Father's Days to come.



Event: Workshop

As we know, Mother's Day and Father's Day are fast approaching. For many people, however, these days may be associated with feelings of sadness and loss. We would like to offer a safe space to acknowledge and process these emotions amongst a community of other individuals who can relate.

Please join us during our annual "Remembering our Parents" workshop as we celebrate the lives of the parents who are no longer with us. This workshop will be held on Friday, June 1st from 5:30pm to 7:30pm at Calvary Hospital, Bronx location. We hope to see you there and look forward to honoring the legacy left by your mothers and fathers. Please RSVP to Devon Taylor at **(718) 518-2370 or (917) 708-0133.**

We look forward to hearing from you.

Monthly Calendar

BRONX GROUPS

Adult Death of a Child
Wednesday: Joanne
1:00 pm - 2:30 pm
Every other Thursday: Sherry
12:30 pm - 2:00 pm

Adult Death of a Parent
Wednesday: Stephanie
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm
Thursday: Joanne
5:00 pm - 6:30 pm

Death of a Sibling
Tuesday: Joanne
5:30 pm - 7:00 pm

Death of a Spouse/Partner
Tuesday: Joanne
1:00 pm - 2:30 pm
Tuesday: Andrew
5:30 pm - 7:00 pm
Thursday: Amy
7:00 pm - 8:30 pm

Death of a Young Spouse/Partner
Wednesday: Joanne
5:30 pm - 7:00 pm

Spanish Speaking Group
Monday: Yvette
12:30 pm - 2:00 pm

Young Adult Group
Monday: Devon
6:30 pm - 8:00 pm

Precious Moments Ages 6 - 9
4:30 pm - 6:00 pm
In Be-tween Ages 10 - 12
6:15 pm - 7:45 pm
Thursday: Devon

Teen Group Ages 13 - 17
Tuesday: Devon
4:45 pm - 6:15 pm

Death of a Sibling
Tuesday: Joanne
5:30 pm - 7:00 pm

BRONX GROUPS (Cont.)

Men's Discussion Group
Every other Thursday: Sherry
12:30 pm - 2:00 pm

Calvary Hospital
1740 Eastchester Road
Bronx, NY 10461

BROOKLYN GROUPS

Precious Moments Ages 6 - 9
Tuesday: Rashida
Thursday: Abby
Both days: 4:00 p.m. - 5:30 pm

In Be-tween Group Ages 10 - 12
Thursday: Lily
4:00 pm - 5:30 pm

Death of a Spouse/Partner
Thursday: Rashida
5:00 pm - 6:30 pm

Death of a Young Spouse/Partner
Thursday: Abby
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Adult Death of a Parent
Tuesday: Rashida
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Death of a Child
Monday: Rashida
5:30 pm - 7:00 pm
Thursday: Lily
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Teen Group Ages 13 - 17
Tuesday: Abby
Wednesday: Rashida
Both days: 4:00 pm - 5:30 pm

Young Adult Group
Tuesday: Abby
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

BROOKLYN GROUPS (Cont.)

St. Joseph High School
80 Willoughby Street
Brooklyn, NY 11201

MANHATTAN GROUPS

Precious Moments
for Children 6-11
Tuesday: Brittany
4:00 pm - 5:30 pm

Adult Death of a Parent
Wednesday: Brittany
5:30 pm - 6:45 pm

Death of a Spouse/Partner
Wednesday: Brittany
7:00 pm - 8:15 pm
Thursday: Brittany
6:00 pm - 7:30 pm

Teen Group Ages 12-17
Thursday: Brittany
4:00 pm - 5:30 pm

St. Jean Baptiste High School
173 East 75th Street
New York, NY 10021

MEMORIAL SERVICES

Bronx Christian
May 12
June 9

Bronx Jewish
May 5
July 15

Brooklyn Christian
July 15

Brooklyn Jewish
July 1

All groups are free & open to the community. Please call to schedule an appointment

Contacts

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Tree of Life



Calvary Hospital complies with applicable Federal civil rights laws and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, or sex.

Through the Tree of Life, we can recognize your significant naming gift in a permanent and meaningful manner. Your loved one's name will exist in perpetuity with the lifetime of the Hospital.

This a loving way of memorializing someone special to you or saying thank you, because your gift of love helps patients and families today and for many years to come.

For more information on the Tree of Life, contact Sandrina Fernandez at **718-518-2039**.

Calvary In Touch has been made possible by a generous bequest from Michael Camara