

Victim Services News

The Newsletter for MADD Victim Advocates • May 2010

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MADD VS Toll-Free HELPLINE
1.877.MADDHELP or
1.877.623.3435(7)

Please check your messages to be sure the numbers you refer to are correct!

VSN Submissions

Please submit articles, ideas and comments regarding the VSN to John Evans at john.evans@madd.org.



We help survivors survive.



Advocates Recognize the Hardships Accompanying Mother's Day and Father's Day

■ By Debbie Weir, Chief Operating Officer; Vice President Victim Services, MADD National

When you think of Springtime, you think of warmer weather, flowers blooming and things coming to life. Spring is also the season for holidays that honor mothers and fathers. For many victims/survivors of impaired driving crashes, these holidays are extremely painful. There are victims/survivors who are coping with the death or injury of a mother and/or father and there are bereaved mothers and fathers. Many of the victims/survivors we serve are bereaved parents.

Here are some helpful coping tips for bereaved parents and bereaved children:

Take care of yourself! Surround yourself with people who make you feel comfortable in your grief.

Acknowledge feelings of grief, ambivalence, sadness, and doubt. Give yourself permission to have and accept these feelings.

Embrace memories, even if bittersweet.

Prepare for the likeliness that the 'day' will be difficult. However, also remember that many bereaved people say the days before the actual holiday are much worse than the holiday itself.

Routines can be changed! If you typically spend Mother's or Father's Day with a large family group; however, this year, it seems awkward without your child or parent; excuse yourself from the routine and establish new traditions and rituals that are more accommodating to your grief.

Light a candle at a specified time each year on this special day and share a favorite memory.

Seek out ways to honor your child or parent: Browse through *The Healing Way* victim/survivor workbook for creative project ideas.

Sit down and write a Mother's Day or Father's Day letter.

Plant a tree or flowers to honor your loved one. Reach out to others on any special day. This truly

honors the memory of your loved one.

Helpful tips for victim advocates:

Recognize that they are a parent: Send a simple card to let them know you remember that they are a parent even though their child is not with them physically.

Acknowledge that they have had a loss: Express the message, "I know this might be a difficult day for you. I want you to know that I am thinking about you today."

Use their family member's name in conversation: Saying the name of a child who has died is important to a grieving parent and visa versa.

Encourage Self Care: Self care is an important aspect in your efforts for healing the mind and spirit.

Please reach out to the bereaved parents and children you serve during this painful time. Your support and encouragement truly makes a difference. You could be the one person who remembers them during this season of honor.

If you are a mom or dad, enjoy time with your family. Take time for you and give a little pat on your back for all you do for your family and the families you serve.

Together we care,

Debbie Weir

The Healing Way workbook is available through Workflow, item 40002006



CalendarCalendarCalendar

May 25, 2010 *Monthly Victim Advocate Teleconference Call at 2 PM CDT and 7 PM CDT.*

This month, join us as we facilitate a discussion to address those "unusual" calls we all receive on a daily basis. To access the call, dial 1.866.368.3302. You will be prompted to enter a code: 4694204560. Once entered, press the # key and you will be placed on the call.

June 22, 2010 *MADD Victim Services Quarterly Victim Advocate Webinar at 2 PM and 7 PM CDT.*

The June Webinar will cover Crash Reconstruction. Instructions for participation will be available on [MADD Insider](#) and by email from amy.stewart@madd.org prior to the webinar.

TBD Late July/Early August, 2010 *National Beginning Victim Assistance Training Institute (VATI) in Irving, TX*

Registration forms and information may be found on MADD Insider or by contacting Amy Stewart at amy.stewart@madd.org or 1-800-438-6233, ext. 4561.

September 23—25, 2010 *MADD National Conference at the Crystal Gateway Marriott, Washington, D.C.*

MADD at 30: Saving lives, Serving People – Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow. For more information visit www.madd.org.

MADD's Victim/Survivor Support Forums and Chats

Live Chat is offered every Monday night at 7pm CT and every Thursday night at 8:30pm CDT. To access the Support Forums and Chat, go to: www.madd.org/Victim-Services.aspx and click on CHAT next to



From the Field



Survivor sibling Krista and her mom, Lynn Nilsen

Research Participants Needed!

My name is Krista Nilsen and I am a surviving sibling. My sister, Kari, and my father, Ken Nilsen, were killed in an alcohol-related car crash when I was a 20-year-old college student. Now, 10 years later, I am a graduate student with a goal of helping others who share the experience of losing a sibling while attending college.

I am currently working on my thesis which explores the communication among, and the experiences of, college-aged surviving siblings who have lost their sibling to an alcohol-related car crash.



Kari, 15, and Ken, 47 prior to the crash in May, 2000. Both died from their injuries. Lynn survived the crash.

I am interested in speaking with other surviving siblings who are – or were – in college at the time of their loss, and who lost their sibling to a crash that involved an impaired driver, whether your sibling was struck by the impaired driver, rode with the impaired

driver, or was the impaired driver. I absolutely guarantee the anonymity of anyone willing to speak with me, and I

am happy to answer any questions prior to engaging in this conversation.

I can be reached via email at KristaKari@gmail.com or by phone at 831-325-8178. Our correspondence will remain confidential whether or not surviving siblings choose to speak with me about their experience. I greatly appreciate your consideration and am confident that this work, partnered with your participation, will help others who face this experience in their lives.

Depending on your location, I can either meet with you in person or on the phone. I am located in San Jose, California and am a graduate student in the Department of Communication Studies at San Jose State University.



Taking Care of YOU

Keep Love in Your Heart

■ By Amy Stewart, National Director of Victim Services

Nineteenth century poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote "How do love thee? Let me count the ways..." The magic month of February and its connection with Valentine's Day bring poetry to our tongues as the language of love.

But, what exactly is love? Most of us would, with some difficulty, be able to describe the attributes we each associate with the word, and yet the very definition is ambiguous at best. Is love a feeling? An attitude? A certain set of behaviors? Chances are we would all have a different answer based upon our own thoughts, feelings and experiences.

Because it is so difficult to define, psychologists and other researchers used to avoid the subject as a research topic. But, over the past 30 years, the body of literature and study of love has grown substantially. Why is that important to us as advocates? Well, understanding love can help us understand grief. Love is, after all, at the very heart of the matter.

Dr. John Bowlby was a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst who focused his life's work on what is coined as *Attachment Theory*. Bowlby declared that early experiences in childhood have an important influence on development and behavior later in life; the characteristics and qualities of these early experiences may help to explain the intense emotions we feel when someone we love dies.

Death is accepted as an inevitabil-

ity of life. Most of us understand that with the death of a loved one comes pain and suffering. However, in order to fully appreciate and understand the impact of death on the living, Bowlby's insights suggest that we consider the significance of human relationships and our attachments to one another.

It is understandable that victims

and victim advocates would work toward protecting themselves from the pain of grief, given what they have experienced and witnesses. But it is also love that keeps us connected to humanity. Another nineteenth century poet, Lord Alfred Tennyson, wrote "Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all." Indeed. Keep love in your heart.

Affectional [attachment] bonds and subjective states of strong emotion tend to go together, as every novelist and playwright knows. Thus, many of the most intense of all human emotions arise during the formation, the maintenance, the disruption and the renewal of affectional bonds-which, for that reason, are sometimes called emotional bonds. In terms of subjective experience, the formation of a bond is described as falling in love, maintaining a bond as loving someone, and losing a partner as grieving over someone. Similarly, the threat of loss arouses anxiety and actual loss causes sorrow; whilst both situations are likely to arouse anger. Finally, the unchallenged maintenance of a bond is experienced as a source of security, and the renewal of a bond as a source of joy. (Bowlby, 1979)



Kathy Harpe began writing letters to her son Benjamin shortly following his death at the hands of a younger, impaired driver on May 5, 2005.

Taking a Walk in My Shoes presents a wonderful compilation of these letters which Kathy is willing to share with us, divulging the amazing, therapeutic benefits of journaling.

Her letters are presented in chronological order, guiding us along her inspiring path of transition from bereaved crime victim to survivor.

Available from amazon.com and other book retailers.

Reflections from a MADD HELpline Advocate



By Dorene Englert, Manager of Internal and Executive Communications

During college, my father was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Slowly a fog crept into his horizon, taking away his memories, his stories, his essence. The role of caregiver did not come easily.

Almost daily my father would ask to go visit my grandparents. And daily my mother and I would remind him that his parents had died. For him, it was like finding out for the first time, and all the grief and emotions tied to the original event came flooding back. It was like Bill Murray's classic movie *Groundhog Day* ... except no one was laughing.

About a year after his diagnosis, I attended a presentation by the Alzheimer's Association of Greater Indianapolis. Afterwards, I spoke to the presenter whose husband suffered from the disease and explained my family's challenges. She listened intently, nodding in understanding, and then offered the three most comforting words I

have ever heard in my life: "That is normal."

Normal. It is a small word with huge implications. But in the midst of a crisis, normalcy is perhaps the most comforting feeling of all.

Four years later, I joined MADD as a member of the Communications Department at the National Office. When the opportunity to volunteer for the MADD Victim/Survivor Helpline presented itself, I hesitantly offered to explore the concept further. I wanted to help, but I also felt ill-equipped to provide victims the assistance they needed. After all, I've never lost a loved one to drunk driving, and I'm not a licensed mental health counselor.

During a training, Amy Stewart, national director of victim services for MADD, talked about normalcy. She said, "Often times, victims call the helpline and just want to hear that what

they are feeling is normal." I suddenly remembered the comfort behind those words and was determined to give that gift to someone else.

A few weeks after I started on the helpline, I received my first true crisis call. The woman's home had been destroyed by a drunk driver. Distraught, she couldn't sleep and randomly cried throughout the day.

I offered her the only thing I had to give – those three magic words – "That is normal." Immediately, the caller took a deep breath and said, "Thank you."

In February of last year, a little over one year ago, my father passed away. His fight ended as did my days as his caregiver. These days, instead of searching for normalcy, I try to give normalcy to others and I have to say, it feels good.

The 2010 MADD President's Awards Nominations Deadline Approaching!

The Deadline for 2010 MADD President's Awards Nominations has been extended to May 31st to give everyone an opportunity to submit nominations. There's still time to recognize the best and brightest among MADD volunteers, staff and partners. This year, thanks to the generosity of Toyota, the MADD President's Awards will be announced by Laura Dean-Mooney at an awards dinner on the last night of MADD's 30th Anniversary Celebration and National Conference in Washington, DC. To submit a nomination, go to <http://support.madd.org/MADDAWARDS>.

For more information, contact Tanesia Henderson at tanesia.henderson@madd.org.



Laura Dean-Mooney